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The *Revue de recherches sur le renseignement*, founded in 2022 by the Équipe Sécurité & Défense, Renseignement, Criminologie, Cybermenaces, Crises (ESDR3C) of the Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers (CNAM, founded in 1794), publishes reference articles in all areas of intelligence studies, not only in history or political science, but in all academic disciplines. It covers all aspects of European and global intelligence.

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E-mail: [par\\_rrr@lecnam.net](mailto:par_rrr@lecnam.net)



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## A REVIEW OF INTELLIGENCE RESEARCH

Prof. Alain Bauer and Prof. Philippe Baumard  
Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers, ESDR3C

For many years, there has been a great deal of discussion in France about "*Intelligence Studies*". Here and there, isolated attempts were made, but these were met with either secrecy or indifference.

Between 1988 and 1991, Michel Rocard, then Prime Minister, was trying to revitalize French intelligence by highlighting its strategic importance, particularly in terms of threat anticipation in a world that was beginning to emerge from the Cold War. Imagining that it was reaping the dividends of peace, without knowing that a temporary parenthesis was opening up towards other competitions, other confrontations, and soon a multitude of conflicts, including in Europe.

Twenty years later, in 2008, the great reform finally began, with the invention of the National Intelligence Coordinator, the creation of the Parliamentary Intelligence Delegation, and internal reorganizations (DCRI) that shook up the old models. It would be another seven years before the attacks of 2015 and 2016, with new legislation, completing the movement that had begun. Among the innovations, the creation of the *Académie du Renseignement* (Intelligence Academy) underlined the importance given to initial and ongoing training within the services. In addition to espionage techniques, we were at last beginning to learn about intelligence, and in so doing, we were finding a way into research, particularly academic research.

In 2015, the community had already found an active partner in the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers for initial training. Agreements were then reached with ACADRE for ongoing training. The CNAM's *pôle Sécurité Défense Renseignement Criminologie Cybermenaces Crises* (Security, Defense, Intelligence, Criminology, Cyberthreats and Crisis Pole) (PSDR3C) piloted the courses.

The CNAM team of the same name had yet to set up a permanent research structure. The next step was to publish an international journal.

You have the first issue in your hands.

We hope that you will not only find quality articles on this subject, which is still "emerging" in France, but that you will also be able to contribute where appropriate.





# Editorial

## A NEW JOURNAL FOR AN EMERGING SCIENTIFIC FIELD

Gérald Arboit  
 Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers, ESDR3

In the early 2000s, Peter Jackson and David Khan enthused about the birth of a "French School of Intelligence"<sup>1</sup>. It's true that, since the mid-1990s, it was tempting to see this sudden interest in intelligence studies, clearly visible in the wave of publications, seminars, and training sessions on the subject. But the *Census of doctoral theses on intelligence*, carried out by the Intelligence Academy in July 2021, shows that this proliferation has not yet managed to institutionalize the craze generated by a favorable environment stemming from the information revolution and the September 2001 attacks. To date, there are no courses in history, political science, or law; a chair dedicated to the teaching of intelligence in all these fields is due to be created at the start of the next academic year.

Only management and information/communication sciences have created posts dedicated to teaching business intelligence, taking advantage of the various public reports devoted to this public policy. That said, all these scattered initiatives have had a major influence on the integration of intelligence-related themes into university curricula, while improved links between academia and the publishing world have led to an improved popularization of "intelligence à la française", differing from the journalistic treatment of the 1980s-1990s and resulting in the publication of numerous scientific works.

Divided into thirty-six themes, based on the model of the *Dictionnaire du renseignement*<sup>2</sup> (Intelligence Dictionary), combining the effects of both fashion (cf. economic intelligence, whistle-blowers, governance, hybrid conflictualities) and current events (cf. counterterrorism, insurrection, information manipulation, conspiracy theory) around more operational issues (cf. secrecy, human, technical and military intelligence), the diversity of academic work on intelligence is effective.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Jackson, "Intelligence and the State: An Emerging 'French School' of Intelligence Studies", *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 21. No. 6, December 2006, pp. 1061-1065; David Khan, "Intelligence Studies on the Continent", *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 23/2, April 2008, pp. 249-275.

<sup>2</sup> Hugues Moutouh, Jérôme Poirot (sd), Paris, Perrin, 2018.

Only law and history seem to meet the expectations of a "French School of Intelligence" capable of rising to the level of international studies, when it comes to studies on the core activity of the intelligence function, around issues concerning espionage in all its forms and the stages of the intelligence cycle. These findings by the *Académie du renseignement* (Intelligence Academy) merely distinguish what was established by the more systematic literature reviews conducted by historian Gérald Arboit<sup>3</sup> and political scientist Olivier Chopin<sup>4</sup> in 2009 and 2011 respectively, namely a real multidisciplinary questioning despite a lack of interdisciplinary commitment, while noting the emancipation of a field with a desire for disciplinary autonomy, Business Intelligence.

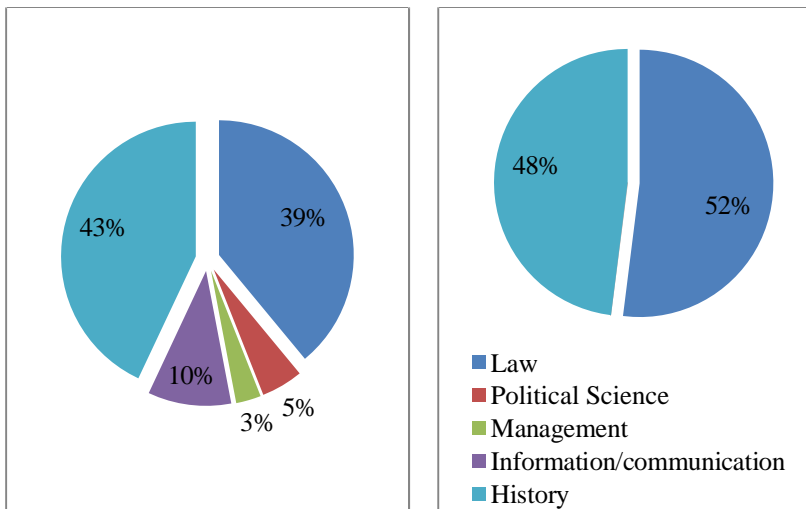


Fig. 1 - The different disciplinary apprehensions of intelligence, according to the *Census of doctoral theses on intelligence* (left, theses; right, HDRs)

This apparent anomaly can certainly be explained by the impossibility of reducing intelligence to a single discipline, unlike what has been achieved with Business Intelligence. On the contrary, interdisciplinarity guarantees a real plurality of knowledge. However, the lack of reflection of this production also stems from the lack of dissemination of *Intelligence Studies* in French universities and the apparent hegemony of the United States and the United Kingdom in terms of the journals publishing most of the articles on intelligence.

<sup>3</sup> Gérald Arboit, Eric Denecé, *Intelligence Studies in France*, 2009, <https://cf2r.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/tr8-etudes-sur-le-renseignement-en-france.pdf>; Éric Denecé, Gérald Arboit, "Intelligence Studies in France", *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, Vol. 23, No. 4, Fall 2010, pp. 725-747.

<sup>4</sup> Olivier Chopin (dir), *Étudier le renseignement. État de l'art et perspectives de recherches*, IRSEM Studies, n° 9, 2011.

And if we disregard it in terms of geographic tropism, English seems to be the language of choice, as underlined by the fate of the Spanish journal *Inteligencia y seguridad. Revista de análisis y prospectiva* (2006), which has Europeanized by adopting English and broadening its scope under the title *International Journal of Intelligence, Security, and Public Affairs* (2016).

<i>International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence</i>	United States	1986
<i>Intelligence and National Security</i>	Great Britain	1986
<i>Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security</i>	Germany	2007
<i>Romanian Intelligence Studies Review</i> , very Romano-centric.	Romania	2009
<i>Cahiers inlichtingenstudies/Cahiers des études of renseignement/Journal of intelligence studies.</i>	Belgium	2012
<i>Journal of European and American Intelligence Studies.</i>	Greece	2013

Fig. 2 - The main intelligence magazines

Current events show us how normal it can seem in the humanities and social sciences to adopt theories and concepts of the Anglo-Saxon world without really questioning them. Even when they reflect a purely North American reality that is difficult to transpose to a European environment.

This is why we are pleased to present the *Revue de recherches sur le renseignement* (The Intelligence Research Review), published by the *Équipe Sécurité Défense Renseignement Criminologie, Cybermenaces, Crises* (Security, Defense, Intelligence, Criminology, Cyberthreats and Crisis Team), a laboratory of the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers, in conjunction with its "*Études du renseignement*" (Intelligence Studies) research program. Its aim is to contribute to national and European debates in the French language, while following the resolutely interdisciplinary British model.

As a new interdisciplinary academic journal, the *Journal of Intelligence Research* aims to open up to global intelligence research and practice. It will serve as an intellectual bridge linking intelligence researchers and practitioners, providing a venue for interdisciplinary research articles, from junior and senior researchers as well as practitioners, announcements of scientific events and book publications, giving its living voice to French-speaking researchers and practitioners worldwide. In this way, the *Intelligence Research Review* will facilitate interaction and mutual understanding between academics and practitioners. In doing so, we will draw most of our ideas and energy from our editorial board members, who are the assurance of our greatest diversity.

In this first issue of the *Revue de recherches sur le renseignement*, we publish articles by different authors based in France and Belgium. All generations of researchers are represented, from the young doctoral student to the most confirmed PhDs, as well as secondary and higher education teachers, and even an archivist and a journalist.

We look forward to publishing high-quality academic manuscripts from our readers and intelligence experts in future issues. We also thank them for their suggestions for special issues, symposium announcements and book reviews. This is our readers' publication, and it's up to you to send us excellent research and ideas for future issues of the *Intelligence Research Review*.

# A Dutchwoman between Paris and The Hague... Intelligence at the court of Louis XVI and during the Revolution

Gérald Arboit  
Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, ESDR3

## ABSTRACT

The involvement of women in intelligence activities of states, although little documented, already existed at the time of the *Ancien Régime* (Old Regime). In an 18th century marked by a furious competition between European powers and the political turmoil that led to the French Revolution, the intelligence activities of the Dutchwoman Etta Palm at the court of Louis XVI made her one of the emblematic spies of the period. From her birthplace in Groningen to Versailles via Brussels, the trajectory of Etta Palm, as described in this article, was that of a spy whose intelligence activities formed the bridge between two revolutions - Dutch and French - at the end of the 18th century.

**Key words:** Etta Palm - Intelligence - French Revolution - Dutch Revolution - United Provinces - Ancien Régime - Foreign Affairs - *Raadpensionaris*

"The myth of the female spy has been more successful in history than in fiction. If Mata Hari was the best illustration of mata-harism, a romantic imposture based on a dramatized conjunction of the exotic and the erotic, she didn't invent it. That honor belongs to one of her compatriots, scarcely less unlucky, Madame Etta Palm, calling herself Baroness of Aelders, and whose feminist activity Michelet twice points out<sup>1</sup>."

This journalistic entry raises more questions than it answers for these two women, who were distinguished by everything: their careers, their times, and their entry into "espionage".

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<sup>1</sup> F. Lacassin, "Mata Hari ou la romance interrompue", *Magazine littéraire*, August 1970, no. 43.

Studies on the first invalidate many of the beliefs held since the end of the First World War<sup>2</sup>. It is therefore essential to review the knowledge acquired about the second since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Like Mata Hari, Etta Palm built her own legend at the time of her arrest<sup>3</sup>. Her two biographers took it up again<sup>4</sup>, aided by the first editor of part of her correspondence, preserved in The Hague and La Courneuve<sup>5</sup>; following this first edition, French historians examined Etta Palm's activities during the Revolution<sup>6</sup>. Her feminist activities have been widely studied<sup>7</sup>. But it wasn't until a 2008 article that the only attempt to establish her intelligence activity was made<sup>8</sup>. The aim of this study is to take another look at her activity, and to offer some hypotheses on the least-known activity of this Dutch intelligence agent in Versailles, i.e., during the Ancien Régime.

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<sup>2</sup> G. Arboit, "Mata Hari, un escroc du renseignement", in C. Vuillemier (ed.), *Le renseignement dans les pays neutres*, Geneva, Slatkine, 2021, pp. 86-105.

<sup>3</sup> *Decreeten Van de Provisioneele Repraesentanten Van Het Volk Van Holland*, 4, January 1796-30 January 1796, The Hague, 'sLands Drukkerij van Holland, 1799, pp. 680-689.

<sup>4</sup> W. J. Koppius, *Etta Palm. Nederlands's eerste feministe tijdens de Fransche revolutie te Parijs*, Zeist, Ploegsma, 1929; H. T. Hardenberg, *Etta Palm. Een Hollandse Parisienne 1743- 1799*, Assen, Gorcum, 1962, reprinted in France by L. Hastier, *Vieilles histoires. Étranges énigmes*, 7, Paris, Fayard, 1965, pp. 263-315.

<sup>5</sup> H. T. Colenbrander, *Nederland en de Revolutie, 1789-1795*, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1905 ; W. Schenkeveld, "'Abandoned of everything except my courage." Enkele ongepubliceerde brieven van Etta Palm (1743-1799)", *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman*, 34-1, 2011, pp. 33-46.

<sup>6</sup> A. Mathiez, *La Révolution et les Étrangers. Cosmopolitisme et défense nationale*, Paris, La Renaissance du livre, 1918, pp. 94-98, "Recherches sur la famille et sur la vie privée du conventionnel Basire (suite & fin)", *Annales révolutionnaires*, 13/3, May-June 1921, pp. 183-206, republished in *Autour de Danton*, Paris, Payot, 1926, pp. 42-48; L. Lacour, *Les Origines du féminisme contemporain. Trois femmes de la Révolution : Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt, Rose Lacombe*, Paris, Plon, 1900.

<sup>7</sup> M. de Villiers, *Histoire des Club des Femmes et des Légions d'Amazones*, Paris, 1910, pp. 14-41 and the work of J.A. Vega, "Feminist Republicanism. Etta Palm-Aelders on justice, virtue and men", in R.M. Dekker, J.A. Vega (eds.), *History of European Ideas*, 1989, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 333-351; "Luxury, necessity, or the morality of men. The republican discourse of Etta Palm-Aelders", in M.-F. Brive (dir), *Les femmes et la Révolution française*, 1, Toulouse, Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1989, pp. 363-370; "Etta Palm, une Hollandaise à Paris", in W. Frijhoff, R. Dekker (dirs.), *Le voyage révolutionnaire. Actes du colloque franco-néerlandais du Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française*, Hilversum, Verloren, 1991, pp. 49-57. See also the work of E. Palm, *Appel aux Françaises sur la régénération des moeurs et nécessité de l'influence des femmes dans un gouvernement libre*, [Paris], impr. du Cercle Social, 1791. Cf. also the facsimile published in *Les femmes dans la révolution Française*, 2, Paris, Edhis, 1982, text no. 33; *Discours de Mme Palme d'Aelders, Hollandaise, lu à la Confédération des amis de la vérité, par un de MM. les secrétaires*, Caen, Chalopin, [s.d.]; "Sur l'injustice des Loix en faveur des Hommes, au dépens de Femmes", in L. Hunt (ed.), *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, Boston/New York, Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996, pp. 122-123. Cf. also O. Blanc, *Les libertines, plaisir et liberté au temps des Lumières*, Paris, Perrin, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> G. Arboit, "Souvent femme varie", une espionne hollandaise à Paris", [www.cf2r.org](http://www.cf2r.org), *Historical notes*, March 2008.

Until the First World War, Etta Palm belonged to a world of diplomacy governed by a unified economy of secrecy, in which the official actions of diplomats were not specifically distinguished from those of semi-official agents<sup>9</sup>. The notions of "service", "agent" and secret "emissaries" were not unknown during the Ancien Régime. The term "secret service" was used to refer to all information provided by individuals on a clandestine, confidential basis, in return for payment. They fell into two categories. The first were called "secret agents" because they were sent to an allied government or a friendly foreign minister, without the knowledge of other members of the diplomatic corps accredited there. The others were "emissaries", as they were also called in the armies, i.e., agents infiltrated into a country where a diplomatic representation was established, but without the knowledge of the government with which it was maintained. The former was intelligence, the latter espionage<sup>10</sup>. Etta Palm was thus one of the first diplomatic information officers without a negotiating mandate, or a secret agent on a confidential mission for some unofficial survey. Indeed, her activities became known at the Court of Versailles, where she was accredited as a "secret agent", while outside witnesses saw her alternately, depending on the news of the day, as "one of Prussia's secret agents"<sup>11</sup>, "of the Stathouder's party"<sup>12</sup>, "sold out to the Princess of Orange and Prussia"<sup>13</sup> or "suspected of correspondence with Anglo-Prussian agents"<sup>14</sup>. She herself did not hesitate to sign her letters "De la cit. Baroness d'Aelders, Dutch, doing business for the House of Orange..."<sup>15</sup>, thus putting into practice the opinion of Torcy, for whom "the best way to deceive the courts is to always speak the truth"<sup>16</sup>. To these were added all manner of qualifiers, revealing more about the quality of those who uttered them. In turn, she was referred to as a "matchmaker"<sup>17</sup>, "scheming, (...) adventurous"<sup>18</sup>, "pretending to be a baroness"<sup>19</sup>, and of course a taste for money and men.

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<sup>9</sup> L. Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris, Fayard, 1990. Cf. A. Dewerpe, *Espion. Une anthropologie historique du secret d'État contemporain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. de Martens, *Manuel diplomatique ou Précis des droits et des fonctions des agents diplomatiques; suivi d'un recueil d'actes et d'offices pour servir de guide aux personnes qui se destinent à la carrière politique*, Paris, Trenttel et Würtz, 1822, p. 15-16.

<sup>11</sup> P. R. Choudieu, *Mémoires et Notes du représentant du Peuple à l'Assemblée législative, à la Convention et aux armées (1761-1838)*. Published from the author's papers, with a preface and remarks by V. Barrucand, Paris, Plon, 1897, p. 476.

<sup>12</sup> K. A. Oelsner, *Bruchstücke aus den Papieren eines Augenzeugen und unparteiischen Beobachters der Französischen Revolution*, 1794, pp. 222-223.

<sup>13</sup> Montmorin to Mirabaud, March 9, 1791, in *Correspondance entre le Comte de Mirabeau et le Comte de la Marck pendant les Années 1789, 1790 et 1791*, III, Bruxelles, Pagny, 1851, p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> National Archief (NA), The Hague, 2.21.051, inv. 110, Berkenrode fils to Valckenaer, January 5, 1793.

<sup>15</sup> Archives nationales (AN), F<sup>7</sup> 4590, Bazire, pl. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted by A. Dewerpe, *op. cit.* p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> K.-A. Oelsner, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> *La Gazette universelle*, July 25, 1791; cf. Montmorin to Mirabeau, March 9, 1791, *op. cit.* and Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères (AMAE), 584, Lebrun to Clavière, November 25, 1792.



It's true that everyone agreed that she was remarkably beautiful, and implied that she had a light thigh. A miniature from 1786 depicts her as a blonde, with a slender waist and features devoid of finesse, sluggishly fending off the impulses of an enterprising lover seeking to bed her on a sofa...

Although it was produced in Paris, the representation of her femininity remained imprecise. But the main point lies elsewhere. A light-hearted, mischievous picture of her short-lived marriage and motherhood appeared, in which her husband seemed to show her the greatest affection, while the child proved their love, the blooming rose recalling the typical compositions of French classicism. At the age of 19, with her hair up and a scarf prefiguring Maria Antoinette's fichu, there was nothing in her appearance to betray an eventful life<sup>20</sup>.

In fact, Etta Palm was every inch the courtesan of the Ancien Régime, finding in her "traffic the real or supposed influence of her high political connections". Catherine Grand or Michèle Guesnon de Bonneuil<sup>21</sup>.



Etta Lubina Johanna Aelders was Dutch. Born probably towards the end of April 1743, she was baptized on May 3 in Groningen<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> NA, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Groningen, Familie de Sitter, 1704-1990, 694.2, 65, Miniatuur met afbeelding van Etta Palm. The tricolor print is an enlargement of a miniature in the possession of J.H. de Sitter in Meppel, 5.5 c.M. in the middle, painted in watercolor on white satin, and excellently preserved under glass [Koppius, *op. cit.*, p. 5-6].

<sup>21</sup> O. Blanc, *Les espions de la révolution et de l'Empire*, Paris, Perrin, 1995, p. 104; cf. *Ibid.*, *Madame de Bonneuil, femme galante et agent secret (1748-1829)*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1987.

<sup>22</sup> Groninger Archieven, DTB Dopen, Kerkelijke gemeente Groningen 1733-1754, archief 124, inv. 150, May 3, 1743.

She was born into a "powerful family"<sup>23</sup>. Her father, Jacobus, was a goldsmith, holder of a table at Groningen's *bank van Leening, or* pawnshop, and co-owner of the city's paper mill. Originally from the Groningen hamlet of Nieuwenhuys, he had married Agata Petronella de Sitter three years earlier, whose family had been present in the northeastern capital of the Dutch Republic since 1704<sup>24</sup>. Etta's maternal uncle, Wolter Reinolt, was one of the regents of Groningen, and was responsible for her guardianship after Jacobus's death in 1746<sup>25</sup>. Especially after Agata de Sitter had driven her husband's business into bankruptcy, forcing him to part with the mill<sup>26</sup> in 1754, two years later<sup>27</sup>. It was finally dispossessed by the merchant Jannes van Giffen, who did not hesitate to pursue Etta to her Amsterdam refuge ten years later<sup>28</sup>. Etta's childhood was marked by a lively spirit and a keen intelligence. Moreover, her bourgeois ancestry meant that she spoke French and German from an early age, in addition to the Dutch vernacular.

Etta Aelders was known above all for her great beauty. She soon became aware of the advantage that nature had endowed her with and played it to her heart's content. This was not without creating a stir in the university town, opening her bed to students and bourgeois alike. In fact, it was through one of her last lovers, Assurus Johann Veldtman, postmaster in Groningen, that the scandal reached<sup>29</sup>. When Etta was nineteen, Wolter Reinolt decided to marry her off to the son of a Harleem solicitor, Christiaan Ferdinand Lodewijk Palm<sup>30</sup> on condition that the couple move in with the groom's parents-in-law, and that the groom complete his studies in literature at another university. Etta, however, continued her escapades, pursued for a time by Veldtman, so that Palm fled in February 1763, leaving his young wife a month pregnant. Did he suspect that he was not the father? Neither did his fate, nor that of little Henrietta.

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<sup>23</sup> E. Palm, *Appel aux Françaises*, *op. cit.* p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Groninger Archieven, DTB Trouwen, Kerkelijke gemeente Groningen 1739-1747, archief 124, inv. 179, May 1, 1740.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, DTB Begraven, Kerkelijke gemeente Groningen 1729-1794, archief 124, inv. 194, June 21, 1749.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. E. Schut, *De Joodse Gemeenschap in de Stad Groningen 1689-1796*, Assen, Van gurgum, 1995, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Groninger Archieven, Boedelbeschrijving Inventarissen van boedels bij de Weeskamer overgegeven 1758, archief 1462, inv. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Notariële archieven, 1768, Amsterdam, archief 5075, inv. 12380, March 1, 1768.

<sup>29</sup> W. J. Koppius, *op. cit.* p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Groninger Archieven, Huwelijkscontracten Groningen 1762 juni-dec, archief 1534, inv. 3637, August 18, 1762; *Ibid*, Proklamationboek, September 3, 1762; Gelders Archief, Arnhem, DTB Trouwen, archief 176, inv. 140/026, August 18, 1762.

Christina, baptized on October 7, 1763, in Groningen<sup>31</sup>, have not been established. Did he join the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, although his name does not appear on any enlistment roll, or did he seek his fortune in the East Indies? Did he commit suicide<sup>32</sup>? Did his daughter die in infancy?

This may explain why Etta Palm, née Aelders, moved to Amsterdam around 1767. She met up again with Jan Munniks, a former student from Groningen who had become a young lawyer in Amsterdam. Did she break up the marriage? Did she run away with him to escape Jannes van Giffen when, on April 13, 1768, her lover was appointed by the *Staten-Generaal van de Nederlanden* (States-General of the Netherlands) as consul in Messina? In any case, their relationship must have caused quite a stir, to the point of reappearing around 1776 in the form of an anonymous "vicious pamphlet against the lawyer M.J. Munnik in Amsterdam"; Etta was mentioned as "the main reef on which [he] sank the ship of his marriage and "his uncontrolled life the reason why the majority of students could call each other brother-in-law"<sup>33</sup>.

At the relais de Bréda, Etta Palm found an opportunity to keep both the gossips and her Amsterdam lover company under the guise of a dashing fifty-year-old lieutenant-general, Jonkheer Douwe Sirtema van Grovestins. This former *Opperstalmeester* (grand squire) of Ann van Hannover (who died in 1759, but retained his position until 1763), gentle, polite, and easy-going, except when it came to money<sup>34</sup>, had solid connections in the entourage of Willem V, the young *stadhouder* (governor-general) who came to full power in 1766, and whose relationship with the late sovereign<sup>35</sup> made Grovestins more than just his educator. At the time, he was commander of the fortress of Furnes, on the borders of the Austrian Netherlands, but spent most of his time in Brussels, where he took the pretty Etta Palm. The young woman thus took her first steps into the upper middle class of the capital of the Austrian Netherlands. But Grovestins, who secretly visited The Hague<sup>36</sup>, certainly introduced Etta to the clandestine activities of a "secret agent". Yet the young woman in her thirties dreamed of nothing but Paris, dazzled by the encyclopedists Diderot and d'Alembert's visits to Brussels. So much so that, in 1773, she left her handsome protector for France.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, DTB Dopen, Kerkelijke gemeente Groningen 1755-1778, archief 124, inv. 151, 7 oktober 1763.

<sup>32</sup> Tradition has it that the couple divorced, something impossible in Holland before 1796, when the first divorce took place.

<sup>33</sup> *Mercurius Klugtige Zoomer-Togt. Na, in, en door Amsteldam*, p. 14-15.

<sup>34</sup> M. Bruggeman, *Nassau en de macht van Oranje. De strijd van de Friese Nassaus voor hun rechten, 1702-1747*, Hilversum, Uitgeverij Verloren, 2006, p. 39; F.J.L. Kraemer (ed.), *G.J. van Hardenbroek: gedenkschriften, 1747-1788*, 1, Amsterdam, 1901, pp. 68, 259.

<sup>35</sup> W. R. D. van Oostrum, *Juliana Cornelia de Lannoy (1738-1782). Ambitieux, vrijmoedig en gevat*, Hilversum, Verloren, 1999, p. 287; V. P. M. Baker-Smith, *A Life of Anne of Hanover, Princess Royal*, Leiden, Brill, 1995, p. 139-141.

<sup>36</sup> F.J.L. Kraemer (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 304.

### *Moving to Paris*

This connection with Diderot was decisive in Etta Palm's entry into the entourage of the Baroness de Nieukerk, in fact the Dutchwoman Sophie Gertrude Adélaïde Dorotheé Catherine Albertine Frédérique Élisabeth de Neukirchen de Nyvenheim. She had been sailing between Paris and Versailles since July 1763. Ten years older than Etta, and accompanied by her younger sister Catherine Frédérique Wilhelmine, she was protected by the Countess de La Marck, who enjoyed "a most extraordinary friendship" with her<sup>37</sup>. The Countess thus opened the doors to the dauphine Marie-Antoinette. This social network enabled Etta Palm to look forward to an immeasurably extraordinary destiny, given her social origins. The Countess de La Marck wasted no time in securing her a pension of ten thousand pounds, pledged against the *régie des poudres et salpêtres* (powder and saltpeter board)<sup>38</sup>. Taking the name Baroness d'Aelders, to which she sometimes associated her mother's name, de Sitter<sup>39</sup>, Etta Palm was thus able to settle in the vicinity of the Palais-Royal, where the gallant girl, the fashion merchant, the robin, the musketeer, the financier, the duke, and the courtesan met without mixing or confusing. She took a small apartment in the building at 30 rue Villedo. In early 1781, she moved to a mezzanine at 1 rue Favart, overlooking the Comédie Italienne, which had been restored by François-Joseph Bélanger, first architect to the Comte d'Artois, brother of Louis XVI. It would appear that this new home was a life endowment, concluded under private seal on January 20, 1780, between her and General Count Yves Marie Desmarts de Maillebois<sup>40</sup>.

This social environment was in stark contrast to Etta Palm's image, which many saw as nothing more than a whore. It's clear that this reputation stemmed both from her youthful behavior, which led her to leave Groningen and ruining her marriage, without shocking anyone during her stay in Brussels; it's also hard to find such behavior in Paris, given her later feminist activities during the Revolution. This reputation also came from the archives consulted. The Amstelloden salutation of 1776 was an indictment of her in the eyes of men and history alike. Likewise, the June 25, 1794, search of her apartment on the rue Favart provided a view of the salon, where, beneath the portrait of an officer, stood a vast, six-foot-long divan, and of the bedroom, with its four mirrors, including one lining the ceiling, "which imputed to the virtuous president [of a disbanded feminist committee] futile concerns"<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Mercy to Marie-Thérèse, July 18, 1772, in A. d'Arneth, A. Geffroy (eds.), *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse et le cte de Mercy-Argenteau (...)*, I, Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1874.

<sup>38</sup> W. J. Koppius, *op. cit.* p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> AN, T 364.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* and T 1601, Procès-verbal de perquisitions et inventaires des papiers saisis chez l'émigrée femme Dailbert, June 25, 1794.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, T 1601; T. G., "Féminisme", *Le Temps*, May 11, 1910.

Analysis of his papers, from July 1778 onwards, also provided a litany of invoices from the merchant mirror-maker Lebastié, furniture makers, gilders...for a total ranging from 3,286 pounds for the former to 916 pounds for the latter. The bulk of the expenses concerned the apartment on rue Favart<sup>42</sup>.

From such apparent frivolity to gallantry, the shortcut was easy. The Marquise Marie du Deffand blithely took this step on December 11, 1773, when, speaking of Etta Palm, she reported that "there has been talk of a certain Dutch lady; if they were right, you know it; I have not looked into the matter". The septuagenarian and almost blind gossip was discussing with her friend Horace Walpole the Parisian stay of the latter's nephews, the 24-year-old Earl George Cholmondeley and the 30-year-old Duke William Henry of Gloucester. The description of their program was interesting for understanding Etta Palm's position in Paris: "They saw no one, they were content with all the spectacles, to see the court without being seen, to go to the Invalides and to some of the countryside around Paris"<sup>43</sup>. Having been in the French capital for only a short time, she was already admitted to the court, but she had no authority to introduce foreigners to the sovereign. However, the Countess de La Marck's interpersonal skills had opened enough doors for her in curial society, since the said campaigns were nothing other than estates of nobles presented to Etta Palm.

She soon met three military men. The first was Count Jean-Baptiste Lefebvre de Plinval, captain in the Vermandois regiment and lord of La Salle, des Bergères and Biffontaines. Was this handsome party, seven years Etta's junior, the "brilliant fortune to share with what was dearest to me in the world"<sup>44</sup> that she claimed to have abandoned? In any case, she borrowed ten thousand pounds from him, which she returned on May 20, 1780, through a sale of his furniture, taking the precaution of retaining the usufruct at the rate of a thousand pounds a year until her planned departure from Paris<sup>45</sup>. Plinval did not marry until 1796.

A second soldier was Count Yves Marie Desmarets de Maillebois, Lieutenant-General of the King's Armies, whose star had just turned after a thirteen-year disgrace following his strange urge to accuse his superior of incompetence<sup>46</sup>. This misfortune ruined him, so much so that he had to part with his real estate to ensure his Parisian lifestyle.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, T 364/1 and 2.

<sup>43</sup> Marie de Vichy Chamrond Du Deffand, *Correspondance complète (...), et éclairée de notes*, II, Paris, Plon, 1865, p. 373.

<sup>44</sup> Koninklijk Huisarchief (KH), The Hague, A 31, inv. 986, Palm to Willem V, March 24, 1794.

<sup>45</sup> AN, MC/ET/LXVII/758 and T 364/2.

<sup>46</sup> A. Roussel, "L'affaire d'Hastenbeck. La relation de bataille en tant qu'instrument de diffamation", E. Cronier, B. Deruelle, *Argumenter en guerre. Discours de guerre, sur la guerre et dans la guerre de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Lille, Presses Univ. Septentrion, 2019, p. 360-364.

Enjoying Holland, where he took refuge briefly (1757-1758), he maintained an ambivalent relationship with Etta Palm. In January 1780, he granted her a life annuity on one of his estates, but on August 2, 1785, he described her as a "nasty baroness [...] (alleged) [...]. Although I must despise her, I do not accuse her"<sup>47</sup>. This remark was all the more incomprehensible given that Etta gave her fifteen thousand pounds on December 30, which she did not see again until five years later, on January 20, 1790<sup>48</sup>. Not to mention the 750 pounds she signed to his order on the following May 8<sup>49</sup>. In the meantime, on April 15, she thought she could say she had "the acquisition of a friend"<sup>50</sup>! Yet Maillebois's comments five years earlier clearly showed that the two had known each other very well for a long time. He may well have been the officer depicted in a painting in the Rue Favart salon. The "old general"<sup>51</sup> (he was born in 1715!) knew nothing of the young forty-something's arranged identity. His bile could only be explained by her refusal to follow him to Holland. Hence his second choice, which was the almost fifty-year-old Marquise Angélique-Dorothee de Cassini, wife of General Dominique-Joseph de Cassini<sup>52</sup>. Unless it was a scene from Etta Palm, who didn't take kindly to the officer's choice of this thirty-something.

The last military man she met was a subordinate of Maillebois, Colonel Jean-Louis Thomas Heurtault de Lammerville. Familiar with Versailles<sup>53</sup>, he only appeared in Etta Palm's life because of the funds advanced to her by the general in 1785, to which the baroness contributed in part. Even if Etta Palm's relationships are difficult to establish, it's clear that she didn't only associate with military men, and Normans at that. We can certainly add the members of the legation of the United Provinces, first Matthijs Lestevenon van Berkenrode, ambassador to the court of Versailles since 1750, then Gerard Brantsen, who came to assist him between 1782 and 1787. Etta Palm met the former as soon as she arrived in Paris and remained his friend until his death (1797), if not for "twenty-two years", being welcomed even into the friendship of her couple with the dancer Françoise Suzanne Foulquier, widow of Bertinazzi<sup>54</sup>. With Brantsen, there was a "bitter enmity" between the two<sup>55</sup>. The reason for this was simple: their ideological choices separated them, one having chosen the "patriot" camp, the other having sided with the *Stadhouder*.

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<sup>47</sup> Archives diplomatiques (AD), La Courneuve, Correspondance diplomatique (CP) Hollande, 562, Maillebois à Vergennes.

<sup>48</sup> AN, MC/ET/XLIV/616.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, T 364/3.

<sup>50</sup> NA, The Hague, 3.01.26, inv. 50, Palm to Van de Spiegel.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* inv. 56, Van de Spiegel to Palm, January 26, 1793.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 22330, Cassini à Harcourt, n.d., f. 341. L. Pingaud, *Correspondance intime du Comte de Vaudreuil et du Comte d'Artois pendant l'émigration, 1789-1815*, I, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1889, p. 182n2.

<sup>53</sup> P. Jamme, *Un village manchois: Lammerville*, Luneray, Bertout, 1991, p. 32.

<sup>54</sup> AD, CP Hollande, 584, Palm to Lebrun, November 27, 1792.

<sup>55</sup> H. T. Colenbrander, *op. cit.* p. 147-148.

### *Serving Holland*

Etta Palm's entry into the intelligence service of the Republic of the United Provinces remains a mystery. Firstly, because

"she claims (...) she was sent to Amsterdam in 1778 by Maurepas, and that she stayed there for a few weeks to learn the Dutch way of thinking about the war between England and America."56.

This statement, taken from her indictment of the Dutch revolutionaries, those "patriots" whom she regarded as her adversaries, was obviously intended to mollify her judges, but it led her biographers into error. Indeed, there is no evidence of a meeting between Louis XVI's Minister of State and Etta Palm. Secondly, neither the French *chargé d'affaires* in The Hague, Charles Raymond Ismidon de Bérenger, nor the files of the Versailles Ministry of Foreign Affairs contain any mention of a possible mission by the Dutchwoman.

However, as every lie has a basis in truth, it's easy to reconstruct the reasons for his stay in Amsterdam. The United Provinces were facing the danger of a serious crisis between their two tutelary powers, England and France, over America. In fact, it was important for them to be well-informed about the progress of French affairs, especially as France supported the "patriots", the opponents of the *Stadhouder*. This was because the ambassador in Paris was sixty-three years old and "could no longer be called a politician"<sup>57</sup>. Wilhelm V or his *Raadpensionaris* (Grand Pensionnaire), Pieter van Bleiswijk, had certainly been informed of Etta Palm's abilities by Lieutenant-General Grovestins, who had returned to favor since being appointed governor of the fortress-barrier of Yvres in 1774. A late letter, dated April 16, 1787, between a secret envoy of the *stadhouder*, Apollonius Jan Cornelis Lampsins, and the *geheimsecretaris* (private secretary) Wilhelm Van Citters, implied that Etta Palm, under the name of "Madame d'Aelder (sic)", had long been known to the *stadhouder's* secretaries, since she had ""present[ed] his compliments", this ironic formula may have appeared at the beginning of her reports, but it had the advantage of attesting to a long-standing relationship. In addition, the note she had left enabled Lampsins to specify that "she had not forgotten" her "secret service", which meant that Etta Palm had not resumed her correspondence for some time. As he noted that he had "not yet seen" or "found" her<sup>58</sup>, Lampsins implied that he knew her too. Perhaps he was looking for her, as he had been dealing with the Baroness d'Aelders since 1778, since he was a member of the Amsterdam council when she visited the city?

<sup>56</sup> *Decreeten van de Provisioneele repräsentanten* (...), *op. cit.* p. 681.

<sup>57</sup> H. T. Colenbrander, *op. cit.* p. 147.

<sup>58</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 42; G. W. Vreede, *Mr. Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel en zijne Tijdgenooten (1737 - 1800)*..., III, (November 1786-December 1791), Middelbourg, Altorffer, 1876, p. 315.

Two days later, a letter from *geheimsecretaris* Isaac Thomas de Larrey suggested as much; in code, he noted that "717 [Etta Palm] out of 120 [Lampsins] has been added and I hope it will bear fruit"<sup>59</sup>. Contacts between Dutch agents were only made through a dead letter box, which could have been the legation.

Finally, Etta Palm used this 1778 date in two letters to Willem V in May 1793 and winter 1794-1795. However, on June 30, 1794, she specified that she "employed all her *moral* and *physical* means since 1784 up until 1788 *without only making herself known* for the preservation of the constitution of this Republic". In her undated letter from the winter of 1794-1795, she even claimed to have entered service "before" 1778<sup>60</sup>. Once again, this was the stylistic effect of a woman at the end of her tether, condemned to beg for alms from her former employer, who had been in power since 1766. She knew that this seniority would be difficult to control, was aware of the disorder reigning in the archives of the House of Orange and counted on the state of war with France, which had declared war on her (February 1, 1793), so that her dispatches were destroyed. It should also be remembered that Etta Palm's Parisian accounting began in July 1778, i.e., after her return from Amsterdam.

This choice of Baroness d'Aelders was by no means ill-considered. Indeed, Berkenrode had alerted Bleiswijk to the intrigues of the Baroness de Nieuwerkerk, which were anything but a watertight secret. As early as 1790, the editor of *Les Dames françoises* painted an uncompromising portrait of her:

"Unable to arrange victory on the side of the Dutch Patriots, she procured France for their asylum, that is, she directed upon them the prodigality of those who then governed that Kingdom. They had deceived her resentment, armed against the Statouderesse [sic]; but she was fair enough to see the party she had aroused a thousandth example of the danger of taking in hand the cause of the Kings, those illustrious ingrates. This woman, who is out of the line in many respects, has fulfilled her career as a half-wit success"<sup>61</sup>.

Among those who took part in the Dutch Revolution, the brothers of Albertine Elisabeth de Neukirchen de Nyvenheim were active lieutenants of Robert Jan van der Capellen van de Marsch, one of the leaders of the movement against the Stathouder. In particular, Evert-Jan and Berend Nijvenheim made frequent trips to Paris on party business<sup>62</sup>.

The reason for the half-success of Baroness de Nieuwerkerk was obviously Baroness d'Aelders. An intelligence agent for the *Stadhouder*, she had been chosen precisely because of her affair with her Dutch colleague, now Marquise de Champcenetz (1779). The target was all the more interesting that her younger sister, Catherine Frédérique Wilhelmine, who had become Duchesse de Brancas (1772), and was married to an almost septuagenarian husband who left her plenty of time to devote to the cause.

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<sup>59</sup> *In Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>60</sup> KH, *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup> [Jean-Pierre-Louis de Luchet], *La galerie des dames françoises*, London, 1790, p. 58.

<sup>62</sup> J. Mathorez, *Les étrangers en France sous l'Ancien régime*, II, *Les Allemands, les Hollandais, les Scandinaves*, Paris, Librairie Champion, 1919, p. 330.



She was particularly close to the Minister of the King's Household (1783-1788), Louis Auguste Le Tonnelier Breteuil; before taking up this portfolio, the baron had been ambassador to The Hague and correspondent of the "King's Secret" from September 1768 to November 1769<sup>63</sup>. This camarilla both inspired and served the plots of the "patriots", active since 1780.

The first time Baroness d'Aelders was able to thwart the Marquise de Champcenetz was in the late spring of 1785. Although the chronology is not certain, since Etta Palm repeated the official version in her book on the subject published three years later<sup>64</sup>, she intervened in a "patriotic" operation to destabilize the *stadhouder*, taking advantage of the Franco-Austrian crisis surrounding the possession of Maastricht since the previous summer; the "patriots" intended to prove a criminal agreement between the Duke of Brunswyk, advisor to Wilhelm V during his minority (1751-1766), and the Roman-German Emperor Joseph II<sup>65</sup>. The operation had been planned since the winter of 1784, and the first stage, in the form of a press campaign, took place from February 15 to March 11, 1785<sup>66</sup>. The second, in the form of a commando operation aimed at "obtaining the Duke of Brunswyk's papers, whether by force or cunning", began the following June.

Etta Palm heard about this game from the Marquise de Champcenetz, who was surprised by the arrival of a conspirator in Paris in the early days of July. Pretending to share the same convictions when she heard the "patriotic" news, she encouraged her friend to tell her more, understanding that the safety of the Republic was at stake. Then, realizing the urgency of notifying The Hague without respecting the classical voice, she certainly contacted Colonel Jean-Louis Thomas Heurtault de Lammerville, who provided her with a messenger, "Sr Verrie"<sup>67</sup>, the former captain of the King's bodyguards, Louis Célestin Sapinaud de Boishuguet, known as the seigneur de la Verie. The latter embarked on a four-day journey to Maastricht, where he was to deliver the Baroness d'Aelders' information to a close friend of the *stadhouder*, General Volkier Rudolph Bentinck van Schoonheeten en Yrst, Quartermaster General of the Armies of the United Provinces<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> P. Coquelle, *op. cit.* p. 192-241.

<sup>64</sup> *Réflexions sur l'ouvrage intitulé Aux Bataves sur le Stadhouderat, par le Comte de Mirabeau*, Paris, Les marchands de nouveautés, 1788, p. 27; AN, T 364/7 and *Aanmerkingen op een werk betydt: Aan de Batavieren over het stadhouderschap, van den heere graave de Mirabeau, door den schryfter vertaald*, s.l.n.d [Paris, 1790], pp. 39-40.

<sup>65</sup> AD, *op. cit.* 562, Joseph II to Marie-Antoinette and Vergennes to Joseph II, March 2 and 3, 1785; H.T. Colenbrander, *De patriottentijd. Hoofdzakelijk naar buitenlandse bescheiden*, I, 1784-1786, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1897, p. 6; Martinus Nijhoff, 1898, pp. 27, 32-37; P. Coquelle, *L'Alliance franco-hollandaise contre l'Angleterre, 1735-1788*, Paris, Plon, 1902, p. 306.

<sup>66</sup> A. L. von Schlözer, *Louis Erneste duc de Brunsvic et Lunebourg. Rapport authentique de la conduite qu'on a tenue à l'égard de ce Seigneur de feld-Maréchal*, II, Gotha, Charles-Guillaume Ettinger, 1788, pp. 161-184.

<sup>67</sup> KH, *op. cit.*, Palm to Willem V, June 30, 1794.

<sup>68</sup> W.M.C. Regt, "Bentinck, Volkier Rudolph baron", P.C. Molhuysen, P.J. Blok (ed.), *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, II, Leiden 1912, p. 125.

Unfortunately, Verie arrived well after the double denunciation of the plot and the arrest of the conspirators, between June 22 and the evening of July 27<sup>69</sup>. That's why there was no correspondence about either the plot or Etta Palm's action. Moreover, when one of the plotters visited Willem V on June 22, as Princess van Oranje later reported to her uncle King Friedrich II...,

"The Prince assured M. d'Arros that as far as his Correspondance was concerned, he was at ease, since none had existed since the Duke's departure. We gave little credence to this warning; the author having insinuated his need for money"<sup>70</sup>.

While Orangemen and diplomats in The Hague had nothing to say about Baroness d'Aelders' actions, the "patriots" were suspicious. Even Maillebois, who had chosen to keep his distance from both parties, was sensitive to the propaganda of the *Stadhouder's* enemies. His letter to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Charles Gravier de Vergennes, dated August 2, 1785, attested to this. A newcomer to the Dutch scene, the Parisian Etta Palm's friend saw her only as an ally of Brantsen and "the spy of M. de Mercy (...); of whom Madame de Champcenetz" had already spoken to the minister. He gave his address as "rue Favart" in order to put his interlocutor "on the right track"<sup>71</sup>.

The sweet nothings his friend and target whispered to Vergennes could have been more serious. But, as Etta Palm was performing a "secret service" in France, the Secretary of State could not object to her action. She was legally authorized to do so and approved by his offices to do so. So, Vergennes did nothing, much to the chagrin of the "patriots" in Versailles. As it happened, they still had a card to play, that of the Minister of the King's Household, the

"infamous Breteuil (...) who used every means to [kill her] in the Bastille, after he had tried in vain to [corrupt her], and [she had] resisted with all [her] strength his infamous designs"<sup>72</sup>.

According to Etta Palm, although she may have got the date wrong, the sealed letter was dated 1786<sup>73</sup>.

If we are to believe Lampsins on April 16, 1787<sup>74</sup>, Baroness d'Aelders kept a low profile after this initial scare. Was she arrested? Did she not say that she managed to "prevent in part [the] execution" of the sealed letter<sup>75</sup>? Or was she baffled by the activities of the "patriots" in The Hague, who had led to the *Stadhouder's* flight to Guelders and rallied the *Raadpensionaris* van Bleiswijk to their cause?

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Mémoires du Procureur-Fiscal Palatin*, sl [The Hague], 1786, *passim*.

<sup>70</sup> Wilhelmina to Friedrich II, August 8, 1785, in H.T. Colenbrander, *op. cit.* p. 97.

<sup>71</sup> AD, CP Holland, 562.

<sup>72</sup> Palm to Willem V, January 9, 1793, in *Ibid.* p. 682; cf. Palm to Van de Spiegel, April 5, 1793, in *Ibid.* p. 684.

<sup>73</sup> AD, *op. cit.* 584, Palm to Lebrun, January 9, 1793.

<sup>74</sup> NA, *op. cit.*; G. W. Vreede, *op. cit.*

<sup>75</sup> KH, *op. cit.*, Palm to Willem V, May 29, 1793.

The arrival in Paris that spring of this Amsterdam city council member, secretly commissioned by Willem V, reinforced the idea that Lampsins was Etta Palm's agent. In any case, she was the first, not the only, person contacted by the "Paris traveler", as he was known in Guelders<sup>76</sup>. When he arrived, Willem V was preparing an offensive against Utrecht, and the Lampsins mission, Baroness d'Aelders and three other Dutch agents were to "show for whom the voice of the people pleads"; "a few days [were] necessary for this", he was told<sup>77</sup>. In all likelihood, the aim was to mobilize corruptible or sympathetic publicists to defend the Stadhouderian position at the court of Versailles, in the face of the "Americans", led by the Marquis Gilbert du Motier de La Fayette and Anne César de La Luzerne, experienced in both diplomatic and clandestine action. The affair proved to be a delicate one, however, due to the "mutual stubbornness" of Lampsins and their chosen partners<sup>78</sup>.

Willem V's dithering over military operations led to the *sine die* postponement of Lampsins' mission, and a new situation was created by the exploitation by the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm II, of the offense against his sister, Friederike Sophie Wilhelmina von Preußen, Princess van Oranje. On June 28, she was stopped by a barrage of patriots.

In the meantime, the "patriots" were trying to return to the province of Holland. A diplomatic machinery was immediately set in motion between the ministers of France, Prussia, and England, on the one hand, and the various Dutch (*stadhouder* and "patriotic") and French governments, on the other. In Versailles, Prussian, and British representatives Count Bernhard Wilhelm von der Goltz and Chargé d'Affaires William Eden laid siege to Minister Armand Marc de Montmorin-Saint-Hérem, Vergennes' successor since February 14, 1787. The ambassadors of the *Staten-Generaal* (States-General), Berkenrode and Brantsen, one certainly because of his age, the other because of his adherence to the "patriots", played no role, as if paralyzed by their own divisions, rather than by any possible paralysis of communications between the United Provinces and Versailles. On the other hand, Lampsins and Baroness d'Aelders intervened on Willem V's behalf. Baroness d'Aelders, who generally spoke of her mission in Paris, but of course focused on this operation, to which she returned in numerous letters, said she had used "all her *moral* and *physical* means"<sup>79</sup>. As she herself emphasized these two words, it is important to question them.

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<sup>76</sup> Van Citters to Van de Spiegel, April 18, 1787, in G.W. Vreede, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

<sup>77</sup> From Larrey to Van de Spiegel, April 18, 1787, in *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Wilhelmina to Van de Spiegel, April 28, 1787, in *Ibid.* p. 340.

<sup>79</sup> KH, *op. cit.*, Palm to Willem V, June 30, 1794.

The last word used obviously meant that she spared no energy in defending her cause. On the other hand, why add the moral criterion, except to mean that she used her body if the need arose? And with Étienne-Charles de Loménie de Brienne, principal minister since May 1, as renowned for his taste for intrigue as for spending his ministerial mornings writing bills to various ladies<sup>80</sup>, Etta Palm had an easy score to play. Both she and Lampsis knew "the indecisive minister confessor"<sup>81</sup> sensitive to feminine charm. And didn't she confess to having spent "3 days in a *certain cabinet* in Versailles"<sup>82</sup>?

The question that agitated the *stadhouder's* supporters, both in the Netherlands and at Versailles, was whether French troops would come to the aid of the revolting Dutch "patriots". Baroness d'Aelders therefore had to convince "the first [sic] minister of injustice to march the Givet camp"<sup>83</sup>. In other words, she had to ensure that no troops were sent to Mont d'Hairs, that vast plateau dominating the right bank of the Meuse. In the early days of July, Etta Palm had already come to know that a corps of twelve thousand men would be deployed there "before August". She couldn't have got this information from anyone other than Loménie de Brienne, unless Lampsins already had some intelligence with War Ministry personnel. In any case, Princess Wilhelmina van Oranje considered this "authentic news"<sup>84</sup>. The offices of the Secretary of State for War, Marquis Philippe Henri de Ségur, estimated the movement at fourteen million pounds. These were funds that the senior minister had known, since Calonne had asserted the previous January, were not on hand<sup>85</sup>. Montmorin raised the issue on August 3 with the French ambassador in The Hague, Marquis Charles-Olivier de Saint-Georges de Vérac<sup>86</sup>. But to Ségur's great astonishment, it failed to make it to the Government Council. It is important to place this issue in the context of French diplomacy on the Dutch question in August 1787. Until August 11, Montmorin called on Berlin to halt the march of Prussian troops towards Wesel, which had already begun on June 20, eight days before the incident with Friedrich Wilhelm II.'s sister, in the form of an "exercise camp"<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. J.-C. Petitfils, *Louis XVI*, Paris, Perrin, 2015, p. 559-582; Thuau-Grandville, "Introduction" [1796], in J. Mavidal, E. Laurent (eds.), *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, I, Paris, Libr. adm Paul Dupont, 1879, p. 154.

<sup>81</sup> KH, *op. cit.*, Palm to Willem V, 1794 [between October 1794 and January 1795].

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, May 29, 1793. Palm's emphasis.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Wilhelmina to Friedrich Wilhelm II, July 13, 1787, in H.T. Colenbrander, *op. cit.*, III, 1786-1787, 1899, p. 173.

<sup>85</sup> H. de Peyster, *Les troubles de Hollande à la veille de la révolution française (1780-1795)*, Paris, Libr. Alph. Picard, 1905, p. 209.

<sup>86</sup> AD, *op. cit.*, 573.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 574, Montmorin to Vérac, August 3, 1787; P. Coquelle, *op. cit.* p. 365; H. de Peyster, *op. cit.* p. 210.

For his part, after having begun financing the establishment of corps francs as early as the month of the previous May, Ségur undertook to send artillerymen and engineers who would infiltrate the Netherlands, unarmed, in civilian clothes and under false identity; however, for security reasons, their mission would appear in full on their passport, signed by the commandant of Valenciennes<sup>88</sup>.

Everything changed thereafter. Deemed too subservient to the "Patriots", Vêrac was recalled on August 19; he did not leave The Hague until September 9, and his replacement never left Antwerp<sup>89</sup>. This move alone spelled the end of French support for the Dutch. Ségur was then prevented from presenting his intervention plan, i.e., setting up the camp at Givet, during four sessions of the Conseil d'État on August 11, 12, 18 and 19. At each of these, the Secretary of State for War submitted his request. And each time, Loménie de Brienne called on a colleague who liked to launch into long logorrhea full of memories, "with which his rich memory [was] furnished", and whom Louis XVI liked to listen to. Finally, the de Ségur affair was postponed to the next council meeting, due to lack of time<sup>90</sup>. Following the resignation of his Navy colleague on August 24, Ségur asked to hand over his portfolio five days later. By this time, the question of sending troops to Holland had lost all interest. Fifteen days later, the Prussians intervened, and Willem V was able to return to The Hague on September 20, with the capitulation of Amsterdam on the following October 10.

This maneuver was the work of Baroness d'Aelders. All she had to do was to engage the corruptible Loménie de Brienne for three days. This operation, coordinated with Minister von der Goltz, had to take place between August 3 and 6 i.e., before the Conseil d'État on August 8, as the Conseil d'État on August 5 was devoted solely to the Lit de Justice on the following day. What's more, Lampsins left Paris shortly afterwards, arriving in The Hague on August 10<sup>91</sup>, on the way to Nijmegen. Since the information was important, the matter had to be discussed with the prime minister. It remained for Etta Palm to overcome yet another unforeseen trap. Just as the Givet camp project, desired by Ségur, seemed definitively buried, a "secret agent" from La Luzerne, in liaison with the "patriots" since December, arrived in Versailles around August 20<sup>92</sup>. He was a former officer of Maillebois, Jean Ternant<sup>93</sup>, and Baroness d'Aelders may have met her during a previous stay at court, in the early summer of 1787 on a clandestine mission<sup>94</sup>. On July 29, 1789, he had sent a pessimistic secret memoir to Montmorin<sup>95</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, Vêrac to Montmorin, August 17, 1787.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, Montmorin to Vêrac (official and private letters) and Saint-Priest, August 20, September 21 and 29, 1787.

<sup>90</sup> L.-P. de Ségur, *Œuvres complètes de M. le Comte de Ségur (...) Mémoires ou souvenirs et anecdotes*, III, Paris, Eymery, 1826, pp. 287-288.

<sup>91</sup> The National Archives (TNA), London, FO 37/17, Harris to Carmarthen, August 10, 1787.

<sup>92</sup> AD, *op. cit.* 574, La Coste to Bourgoing, August 15, 1787.

<sup>93</sup> CF. Frank Whitney, *Jean Ternant and the Age of Revolutions. A Soldier and Diplomat (1751-1833) in the American, French, Dutch and Belgian Uprisings*, Jefferson, McFarland, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, FO 37/11, Harris to Carmarthen, June 2, 1786.

<sup>95</sup> AD, *op. cit.*; see also Ternant to Montmorin, July 15, 1787.

His new visit, just as clandestine as two years earlier, followed on from this report. He asked for two things, namely funds for the "patriots"<sup>96</sup>. He was also received by the Marquise de Champcenetz and the Duchesse de Brancas, his sister, and it was certainly in this company that the Baroness d'Aelders opposed "the solicitations of M. de Ternant"<sup>97</sup>. He returned to Holland at the beginning of September, not knowing whether French troops would come to his aid and whether he would "not be abandoned"<sup>98</sup>.

These successes and Etta Palm's proximity to Goltz had two consequences for Montmorin. The first was that he came to see her only as a "Dutchwoman (...) sold out to the Princess of Orange and Prussia"<sup>99</sup>, even though she remained a "secret agent" of Willem V. As Rudolf Hentzy, an emissary of the *Raadpensionaris* in Paris, noted in October 1789, the other, stemming from this misjudgment of the minister, led him to operate "all the locks of the cabinet of ministers and [know] perfectly well what is going on"<sup>100</sup>. In other words, not only was the "patriot" current abandoned - V rac was reduced to making personal apologies to the men he had financed<sup>101</sup> - but French diplomacy towards the United Provinces was under control until Montmorin's departure on November 20, 1791. However, the Champcenetz-Brancas-Breteuil clan did not admit defeat, as Etta Palm was once again threatened with a sealed letter<sup>102</sup>. She also lost contact with Brantsen, who was recalled due to Willem V's restoration to The Hague<sup>103</sup>.

#### *Faced with the other revolution, that of France*

In The Hague, normalization led the *Staten-Generaal* to elect a *Raadpensionaris*, more committed to Willem V than Pieter van Bleiswijk, but also more representative of the United Provinces' new alliance with England. Sir James Harris. The British minister feared a French plot to overthrow the House of Orange and had decided to become a "chef de parti" (in French) and support the pro-Stadhouderian "association"<sup>104</sup>. Since May 26, 1786, he even had a trump card in his game, Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel, *Pensionaris* of Zeeland<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Alfred Cobban, *Ambassadors and Secret Agents. The Diplomacy of the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Malmesbury at the Hague*, London, Cape, 1954, p. 160.

<sup>97</sup> KH, *op. cit.*, Palm to Willem V, 1794 [between October 1794 and January 1795].

<sup>98</sup> AD, *op. cit.*, Ternant to Caillard, September 23, 1787.

<sup>99</sup> Montmorin to Mirabaud, March 9, 1791, *in op. cit.*

<sup>100</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *Nederland...*, *op. cit.* p. 156n1.

<sup>101</sup> AD, *op. cit.*, V rac to the "patriots", September 8, 1787.

<sup>102</sup> KH, *op. cit.*, Palm to Willem V, May 29, 1793.

<sup>103</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *De patriottentijd*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 361; II, p. 49-50.

<sup>104</sup> TNA, FO 37/13, Harris to Carmarthen, January 3 and 23, 1787; *Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury, II*, London, Bentley, 1844, pp. 266 and 272-273. Cf. A. Cobban, *op. cit.* pp. 80-116. This initiative strongly influenced William Wickam when, in August 1793, he was commissioned to set up a counter-revolutionary espionage structure [cf. E. Sparrow, *Secret Service. British Agents in France 1792-1815*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1999].

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, FO 37/11.

The latter had even been in contact with the English diplomat since July 1786, even though [Harris's] "cooperation with M. Van de Spiegel [had] to be carefully concealed from Prince" Willem V<sup>106</sup>. During the crisis, the two men exchanged only on matters relating to Zeeland<sup>107</sup>. Then, when Duke Charles of Brunswick, who had led the Prussian armies to victory against the "patriots", proposed to the diplomat that the Zealander become the new *Raadpensionaris*<sup>108</sup>, Harris was convinced that this choice would be favorable for England as much as for Holland. He esteemed Van de Spiegel, whom he saw as

"the only man who has a head made for the conception of great ideas, and whose energy and courage increase with the pressure and difficulties of the moment, however ample they may be<sup>109</sup>."

He became somewhat disillusioned after Van de Spiegel's election on December 3, 1787, when the unity of views on rebuilding the Stadhoudarian state fractured slightly<sup>110</sup>. The new *Raadpensionaris* initially proved to be in the service of Willem V.

This enterprise kept him busy, as did the takeover of his bailiwick of Vlissingen, to which he was virtually appointed in April 1787<sup>111</sup>, while in Paris, keeping Lampsins away from Baroness d'Aelders. Baroness d'Aelders recontacted him in late spring 1788, following the publication of a work that was merely a "an odious cabal (...), a hodgepodge of odious calumnies"<sup>112</sup>. She was obviously referring to Mirabeau's pamphlet *Aux Bataves sur le Stathouderat*, published on April 1<sup>st</sup>. A collective undertaking, since Mirabeau was helped in particular by Marie Antoine Cerisier, a Dutch "patriot" and refugee, but French by birth, who had returned to France the previous September<sup>113</sup>, this pamphlet praised the Batavians for having attempted to unify Dutch lands, reviewed the reprehensible acts of the various *stadhouders* since 1572, and exhorted them to courage in adversity<sup>114</sup>. Revolted by this web of insults to Willem V, did Etta Palm remember the previous year's abortive mission to form a group of publicists to defend the republic of the United Provinces? Or did Lampsins encourage her in an exchange of letters, of which no trace remains?

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, Harris to Carmarthen, July 28, 1786.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, FO 37/15 and 17.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, FO 31/18; *Diaries and Correspondence...*, pp. 401-402.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, FO 31/16, Harris to Carmarthen, July 25, 1786; *Ibid*, p. 213.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, FO 31/20, Harris to Carmarthen, December 18, 1787; *Ibid*, p. 409.

<sup>111</sup> Van Citters to Van de Spiegel (postscript), April 22, 1787, in G.W. Vreede, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>112</sup> KH, *op. cit.* inv. 746, Etta Palm to Willem V, October 3, 1788.

<sup>113</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, "From Dutch Republican to French Monarchist: Antoine-Marie Cerisier and the Age of Revolution", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, no. 102, 1989, pp. 534-544.

<sup>114</sup> Honoré-Gabriel de Riquetti de Mirabeau, *Aux Bataves sur le stathouderat*, s.l., 1788.

Or was she waiting for the publication of responses to Mirabeau, such as *Madette paid to the patriarchy*, dedicated to Princess van Oranje, or *A monsieur de Mirabeau*<sup>116</sup>, to propose her own and send it to Lampsins, who enjoined her to forward it to the *stadhouder*? In any case, she published her opus in the form of *Réflexions*<sup>117</sup>, like *Madette...*, while borrowing the poor knowledge of the French language, without apologizing for it like the author of *A monsieur de Mirabeau*. Unlike her models, Etta Palm's opusculum was intended as a contemporary response, i.e., to the events of the Willem V regime alone, to which she had contributed. That's why it included the affair of the Duke of Brunswick's papers, and why it was essentially a critique of the "patriots", portrayed as lazy, shameless aristocrats pensioned by a foreign government, in this case France. Although anonymous like her two models, the enterprise was not without risk. So, Etta Palm sought to make it widely known. She placed her pamphlet with Parisian novelty dealers, as she would any publication of immediate topicality. Lampsins, to whom she passed a copy, advised her to send one directly to the *stadhouder*. This she did on October 3 and November 23, 1788, the second being addressed to the *Raadpensionaris*<sup>118</sup>. In all likelihood, she sent her "printed reflections" in French on each occasion. Her correspondents found,

"The defense of so good a cause could not be entrusted to better hands than yours, Madame, and I dare you to continue to devote your talents (sic) and your truly patriotic zeal to it."<sup>119</sup>

In other words, both Willem V and Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel were pleased with Etta Palm's operation. They also imagined that the French edition could be translated into Dutch, so as to resonate with the population and become an instrument of combat against the silent "patriots"<sup>120</sup>.

On January 30, 1789, the *Raadpensionaris* entrusted her with her first mission. She was asked to meet with Montmorin, to discuss with him the question of "those people who [weighed] so much on his mind", i.e., the "patriots" taking refuge in France<sup>121</sup>. In 1788, these included 1,924 individuals, men, women, and children, pensioned by the Foreign Affairs Department at a cost of 829,448 pounds<sup>122</sup>. Van de Spiegel considered that these emigrants could "freely return to their homes unmolested and untroubled by anyone, as long as they conformed to the constitution of the country".

<sup>115</sup> *Ma dette payée à la patrie, ou Réflexions superficielles sur l'Avis aux Bataves*, s.n.s.l., 1788.

<sup>116</sup> *À monsieur de Mirabeau. Première lettre*, s.n.s.l., 1788.

<sup>117</sup> *Réflexions sur l'ouvrage intitulé Aux Bataves sur le Stadhouderat, par le Comte de Mirabeau*, Paris, Les marchands de nouveautés, 1788.

<sup>118</sup> KH, *op. cit.* and NA, 3.01.26, inv. 49, Van de Spiegel to Palm, December 5, 1788.

<sup>119</sup> NA, 3.01.26, inv. 49, *op. cit.*

<sup>120</sup> AN, T 364/7 et *Aanmerkingen op een werk betyelt: Aan de Batavieren over het stadhouderschap, van den heere graave de Mirabeau, door den schryfster vertaald*, slnd [Paris, 1790].

<sup>121</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, January 30, 1790.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.21.057, inv. 13.



In his mind, only in the case of "a very small number of people", "the leaders and perpetrators, as would be done in every policed country in the known world" would be justifiable. He therefore advised his "secret agent" to "boldly" address "this certain Lord". All the more so, it seemed to him.

It is "very singular that in France we are reproached for being hard, severe, even unjust towards these people; that there we come to their aid with pensions or other ways of subsisting, while these same people publicly mock our gentleness towards them, whom they call weak [sic] in songs and pamphlets sent from St Omer"<sup>123</sup>.

This letter dated Baroness d'Aelders' idea, as she explained in a letter to Van de Spiegel on March 29, 1790, "to make friends and defenders of [Holland] of those who are its frondeurs and antagonists"<sup>124</sup>. To do this, he had to manipulate agents in the world of journalists, unknown at the time in Versailles, but who populated the Paris of the Revolution.

First, he had to find a way to get their attention. A book would immediately be a way to appeal to these supporters of the "patriots". The translation of Etta Palm's reply to Mirabeau obviously fit the bill. It is difficult to trace the chronology of this first stage of his "plan", which led him to believe that a second book would be published<sup>125</sup>. Thirteen months separated Van de Spiegel's first letter and his first mention of a "work", on January 18, 1790. A series of letters from Baroness d'Aelders were cited for the year 1789, "four" on January 30, several on July 5 and a "particular letter" on December 22, without their subject being revealed by the *Raadpensionaris*' replies<sup>126</sup>. This silence can be explained by the current political situation in France, from the opening of the Estates-General on May 5, 1789, to the proclamation of a "National Assembly" on June 17, and the Jeu de Paume oath session three days later, before the storming of the Bastille on July 14, the abolition of feudalism on August 4, the proclamation of fundamental freedoms and the days of October 5 and 6, 1789. This situation inevitably occupied the Dutch "secret agent", anxious to keep The Hague well-informed about "the great theater in which [she found herself and which] offered new scenes from day to day"<sup>127</sup>.

All that could be said was that the question of the second work was not raised. Only the emissary Rudolf Hentzy, in a letter dated October 25, 1789, referred to "a work on false Batave patriotism, which will not be equally pleasing to everyone", which she read to him<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>123</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, January 30, 1790.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, May 7, 1790

<sup>125</sup> J.A. Vega, "Feminist Republicanism", *op. cit.* p. 335.

<sup>126</sup> NA, *op. cit.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, July 5, 1789.

<sup>128</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *Nederland...*, *op. cit.* p. 156n1.

Then, at the end of December, Maillebois was nevertheless able to read "several fragments (sic)" when he visited the Baroness<sup>129</sup>. There was also the problem of postal disorganization, both to Vlissingen, where Lampsins was based, and to The Hague. Indeed, this second manuscript only arrived in January 1790, after having "been so long (sic) on the road". Etta Palm's agent then passed it on to Van de Spiegel, who, caught up in his common occupations, preferred to subcontract the reading of the work to "a friend"<sup>130</sup>. This was,

"Of a very capable man who is in a better position than anyone else to judge the merits of this production, because not only does he know the constitution perfectly, and the views of those who set out to overthrow it, but who even, both before and after the revolution, had an active part in affairs"<sup>131</sup> .

This description fitted in perfectly with the Leyden Orangemen scholar Adriaan Kluit<sup>132</sup>. After three months, Baroness d'Aelders' translation had grown by twelve pages and was ready to be sent back to Paris. To avoid a repeat of the original delays, Van de Spiegel entrusted the volume to a Swiss officer, Count Charles Daniel de Meuron, who was joining his mistress, Countess Marie-Victoire Duhamel de Précourt, separated from her husband<sup>133</sup>, in the French capital. By June 7, the book had not gone to press, Etta Palm having placed it "in the hands of one of the constitution's firmest supporters who has a friendship for me"<sup>134</sup>; this could have been Count Charles de Lameth, a member of the Paris municipality's Supervisory Committee. As the work was in Dutch, the aim was not to have him read it, but to keep it safe until it had been typeset and printed.

Baroness d'Aelders had reason to fear, not so much the insecurity in Paris induced by the general French situation, as the enmity of the Dutch "patriots" who had taken refuge there in large numbers since September 1787. In the small community of the capital, his role in the failure of the revolution had, if not been revealed, at least guessed at. His first work, *Réflexions...* in response to Mirabeau's pamphlet, had contributed to this revelation, even if distribution was apparently confidential. Perhaps word of a forthcoming Dutch translation had come from The Hague, or perhaps the printer had leaked the book, but the fact remains that the former pastor of the embassy chapel, Paul Henri Marron, who switched to the "patriot" camp in 1789, tried to put a stop to Etta Palm's propaganda operation by denouncing her as a "bad citizen" to a journalist<sup>135</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *Nederland...*, *op. cit.* p. 156n1.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, Palm to Van de Spiegel, April 15, 1790.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, January 18, 1790.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, February 12, 1790.

<sup>132</sup> In 1785, he published *De souvereiniteit der Staten van Holland verdedigd* [Defending the Sovereignty of the States of Holland].

<sup>133</sup> Guy de Meuron, *Le Régiment Meuron, 1781-1816*, Lausanne, Le Forum historique/Éditions d'en bas, 1982, p. 73.

<sup>134</sup> NA, *op. cit.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, May 24, 1790.

However, the Baroness's apparent protections made him back down. Rather than lead the Dutchwoman to moderation, she came up with the idea of developing a pro-Stadhouderian influence, along the same lines as that conceived by Harris; this was not to be seen as coordination, however, since Van de Spiegel, who was linked to Harris, was dubious about the intentions of his "agent".

But this didn't protect her from Mirabeau's associate in the April 1788 venture, Marie Antoine Cerisier. Cerisier had founded *La Gazette Universelle* in December 1789. It was precisely in this way that the "patriotic" journalist intended to bring the Dutch "secret agent" to book. Etta Palm knew where she stood because Cerisier was a target for Van der Speigel. On January 30 replying to his informant who had told him about an "inflammatory libel" that had not yet been mentioned in The Hague, the *Raadpensionaris* ironically referred to "a man who allows himself so many honors"<sup>136</sup>. In fact, he was referring to Cerisier, who had anonymously published "a piece of writing containing the germ of the principal reforms" on which the Revolution was to feed-*Régénération de la France par les États généraux* (Regeneration of France through the Estates General). This work, completed on October 15, 1788, contained two identifying elements in the dual form of a note on the failure of the 1787 revolution and an appendix presenting "the outline of a general reform plan for the United Provinces" which ended with a thunderous: "Bataves, choisissez"<sup>137</sup>. Baroness d'Aelders had identified the author through one of her contacts, the journalist Jean-Louis Carra<sup>138</sup>, who was also a friend of Cerisier. The latter quickly became the object of the Dutchwoman's attention, reacting at least until January 1791<sup>139</sup> in *Le Spectateur national* or *Le Modérateur* or in Carra's *Annales patriotiques et littéraires*, to the "extracts from letters" from Holland, The Hague and Amsterdam that *The Gazette Universelle* published.

Etta Palm was expecting a response from Cerisier<sup>140</sup>, although it seems she didn't realize the extent of it. On July 19, 1791, the journalist announced the Dutchwoman's arrest alongside those of two alleged agents of England and Prussia<sup>141</sup>. He did, however, add some personal elements, seemingly inspired by those contained in the "vicious pamphlet against the lawyer M. J. Munnik in Amsterdam" of 1776. The journalist was then in Utrecht, busy with a *Tableau de l'histoire générale des Provinces Unies* (General history of the United Provinces), which had necessarily brought him into contact with the Amsterdam protestation, and this was reflected in his assertion that the Baroness of Aelders had not "known to other barons than those who had honored her with their visits"<sup>142</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. 49, January 30, 1789.

<sup>137</sup> *Régénérations...*, Lyon, 1788, pp. 32-33 and 75-79; *La Gazette universelle*, July 25, 1791.

<sup>138</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm and Palm to Van de Spiegel, February 12, 1790 and June 20/21, 1790.

<sup>139</sup> *Spectateur national* or *the Moderator*, July 22, 1791.

<sup>140</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, May 24, 1790.

<sup>141</sup> *La Gazette universelle*, July 19, 1791.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, July 25, 1791.

So, as fifteen years earlier, the aim was to sully the woman morally, if not physically. All the more so since the body grab had only taken place a few hours before the day's edition was printed<sup>143</sup>, which led the *Correspondence sheet...* to "confuse (...) Sieur Cerisier". as early as July 23. Freed on the evening of July 20, Baroness d'Aelders was able to inspire this royalist weekly, as she did immediately after her release by writing "to the author of the *Courrier [des LXXXIII départements]*" (July 25<sup>th</sup>). The Dutchwoman's response spread across several newspapers, notably republican ones such as the moderate *Patriote français* and the more violent *Les Annales patriotiques*, between July 22 (mention of the affair) and July 29 (publication of Etta Palm's reply). In addition to this immediate media response, in August she published a *Call to Frenchwomen...* listing all her public interventions since December 30, 1790, most of which had already been published in *La Bouche de fer* (The Iron Mouth), the organ of the *Cercle Sociale* (Social Circle) to which she belonged. The last word went to Cerisier, who anonymously published *Détails exacts du complot formé en plein Paris par des puissances étrangères, avec les noms des conspirateurs* (Exact details of the plot formed in the middle of Paris by foreign powers, with the names of the conspirators)<sup>144</sup>, in which he repeated his arguments.

From The Hague, Van de Spiegel followed this exchange with a sense of "disorientation", Etta Palm and urged moderation<sup>145</sup>. News of her arrest had reached the republic, and on August 2, the weekly *De Ommelander Courant*, from the province of Groningen, echoed the words of the *Gazette Universelle* of July 19. The consequences could only be disastrous for the safety of the *Raadpensionaris*' "secret agent". Indeed, on July 30, 1794, Etta Palm was to say that "in Groningen, [her] neighbors [hated] her as a spy for the *stadhouder*"<sup>146</sup>. At the same time, Van de Spiegel sought to correct a "negligence" from the "Minister of Prussia", Count von der Goltz, who had said he had "seen and received a Madame d'Aelders, as a woman to whom he knew direct relations with the sister of his Sovereign"<sup>147</sup>. From his point of view, it was impossible to implicate Willem V's wife in any cabal whatsoever. He had already reminded Etta Palm of this in the spring of 1790, when revelations of the Maillebois plot began to appear in the French and international press<sup>148</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, July 25, 1791.

<sup>143</sup> AN, F<sup>7</sup> 4659.

<sup>144</sup> Paris, Impr. de Laurent, 1791.

<sup>145</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, September 2, 1791.

<sup>146</sup> *Decreeten van de Provisioneele repræsentanten (...)*, *op. cit.* p. 685.

<sup>147</sup> *Spectateur national ou le Modérateur*, January 21, 1791; *La Gazette universelle*, July 25, 1791.

<sup>148</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, February 12 and April 16, 1790. Cf. *Ibid.*, Palm to Van de Spiegel, April 15, 1790; Barry M. Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris, 1789-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 175-187.

A year later the *Raadpensionaris* asked the former ambassador of the Estates-General in Versailles, Gerard Brantsen, who had returned to Paris with the Revolution; Brantsen had abandoned his "patriotic" views and become a correspondent of Van der Spiegel.

"This woman maintains an extensive correspondence with here the country on the novelties that are going on in Paris: on this basis, I also made her acquaintance through M. Lampsins, and from time to time she supplies me with newspapers, gazettes and loose leaves. Sometimes I still write to her out of courtesy, when I pay her overdraft; but she has not been employed on any commission whatsoever, and if anyone can think otherwise, I beg M[onsieur], on the basis of indisputable information, please, to contradict it"<sup>149</sup>.

The *Raadpensionaris* could not confess in a letter to such a correspondent and under such circumstances that Baroness d'Aelders was a "secret agent". His aim was twofold: not only did he need to exonerate Princess van Oranje of any connection with a situation reminiscent of 1787, but he also needed to clear Etta Palm of any accusation of espionage in the eyes of "patriots" and Parisians alike. To the latter, on September 2, 1791, he sent his solicitude from another capital where he was safe:

"Farewell, Madame; moderate yourself a little for what you call the people's cause; you sometimes make your friends tremble for you"<sup>150</sup>.

In Paris, she knew she could still count on the support of her network. Her mission for the United Provinces had already brought her into contact with the offices on the Quai des Théâtres, where the Hôtel de Lautrec and the Foreign Office were located. On the one hand, she maintained her connections with Montmorin, who remained at the head of the Ministry until November 20, 1791<sup>151</sup>; on the other, she built up a network of contacts with members of the Legislative Assembly's diplomatic committee, set up on July 27, 1790 to monitor and censure the aforementioned minister<sup>152</sup>; with Antoine Barnave and Alexandre de Lameth<sup>153</sup>, the Baroness d'Aelders was not to be believed to have crossed over to the Jacobin camp, but simply to be seen once again opposing Mirabeau, Montmorin's loyal supporter, until his death on April 2, 1791. Shortly before his death, the minister had told Mirabeau of his fear of arrest, blaming Etta Palm<sup>154</sup>. And Mirabeau was a friend of Cerisier's... But he did not count among his network Jacobin leaders of Barnave and Lameth's calibre, who were able to intervene to secure the prompt release of their friend.

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<sup>149</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 181, August 5, 1791.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* inv. 50.

<sup>151</sup> H. T. Colenbrander, *Nederland...*, *op. cit.* p. 161.

<sup>152</sup> Virginie Martin, "Le Comité diplomatique: l'homicide par décret de la diplomatie (1790-1793)?", *The French Revolution* [Online], 3 | 2012, accessed October 7, 2021, <http://journals.openedition.org/lrf/762>

<sup>153</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Palm to Van de Spiegel, June 20/21, 1790.

<sup>154</sup> March 9, 1791, in *Correspondance entre le Comte de Mirabeau*, *op. cit.*

A second network was made up of members of the republican and feminist Ami(e)s de la Vérité circles, which she had founded or joined between April 1790 and June 1791. In addition to the founders of these clubs, in her home on rue Favart,

"But it's not just principled men it's also looking for a solid backbone. The former Capuchin Chabot seems to have lost his voice, some time ago, on the Etta Palm platform<sup>155</sup>."

What's more, "she attracted young and pretty people to her home (...). It was at her house that Chabot met the Prussian woman he married"<sup>156</sup>.

The sentimental wanderings of conventionalist François Chabot are fairly well documented, making it possible to detail between Etta Palm's love affairs and the recruitments she made among members of parliament and journalists. At the heart of these latter operations was at least one actress from the Théâtre-Français; it's worth remembering that when she arrived in Paris a dozen years earlier, she lived in the shadow of the Palais-Royal and rubbed shoulders with these artists. She may well have drawn on the contacts of Ambassador Berkenrode's wife, the dancer Françoise Suzanne Foulquier. In Chabot's case, it was Louise Come Descoings. Not only did she meet him at the Assemblée and introduce herself to him as a former chambermaid to Louise-Marie-Adélaïde d'Orléans, but, more importantly, she took him to dinner on rue Favart and asked him for a favor, which put an end to their relationship. This recruitment attempt took place between November 1791, the day after Chabot's arrival in Paris in October, and the following February. Four months later, although it is not known whether she passed through the Rue Favart, Decoings took up with another deputy, Joseph Delaunay, living in a marital relationship with him until his arrest for prevarication in November 1793. A month earlier, Chabot had not married a Prussian, but an Austrian, who never belonged to Palm's entourage<sup>157</sup>.

Etta Palm's attraction to members of parliament was a means of obtaining data drawn as close as possible to political decisions. Unlike the diplomatic committee, which she saw as a similar means of action to the summer of 1787, her association with deputies enabled her to ensure her mission of informational watch. She supplemented her reading of the revolutionary press, as the legation of the Estates-General of the United Provinces looked after the older, more general newspapers<sup>158</sup>. Indeed, her duties as a "secret agent" meant that she was always on the lookout for issues affecting her country. This was why she got into the habit of replying to articles that displeased her in outlets close to her.

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<sup>155</sup> K. A. Oelsner, *op. cit.* p. 222-223.

<sup>156</sup> P. R. Choudieu, *op. cit.*

<sup>157</sup> J. de Bonald, *François Chabot, membre de la Convention (1756-1794)*, Paris, Émile- Paul, 1908, p. 66; A. Mathiez, *Un procès de corruption sous la terreur. L'affaire de la Compagnie des Indes*, Paris, Alcan, 1920, pp. 82, 114-117, 217, 219, 235, 238, 291-298.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. É. Wauters, "Presse francophone et Révolution : la lecture de l'événement (1789- 1793)", *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, n° 94-95, 2005, p. 197-210.

Such as for example, in July 1791, *Le Spectateur national ou le modérateur*, les *Annales patriotiques et littéraires*<sup>159</sup>, *Le Courier [des LXXXIII départements]* and *Le Patriote français*<sup>160</sup>, as well as *La Chronique de Paris*<sup>161</sup> and *Les Révolutions de Paris*<sup>162</sup>. This proximity to the newspapers of the Revolution had two consequences: firstly, it gave her the idea of formalizing this activity in the form of a veritable pressure group serving the influence of Holland, whose performance Van de Spiegel doubted<sup>163</sup>. While he reimbursed her until October 1794 for "the delivery of French newspapers" as well as their "subscriptions", the *Raadpensionaris* asked her to stop "inundating him with this quantity of several species" of publications, preferring to receive only those of Camille Desmoulins and Jean-Louis Carra, namely *Les Révolutions de France* (November 28, 1789-December 10, 1792) and *Brabant et les Annales*. In 1792, in addition to Brissot's and Carra's sheets, he also received two titles publishing the work of the Assembly, the *Logographe* by the Lameth brothers, who were part of Palm's network, and the *Journal du soir de la rue de Chartres*<sup>164</sup>. Van de Spiegel was also prepared to pay him for the main gazettes of the United Provinces, which Baroness d'Aelders asked for again in the summer of 1792, but the deal fell through<sup>165</sup>.

Nevertheless, Van de Spiegel's regular payments suggested that he found a real interest in this trade in information. Didn't he feel that his reports "bring together the pleasant with the useful and the interesting; you brighten up the subjects, you embellish them by deepening them at the same time"<sup>166</sup>? Didn't he revel in the "great theater in which you find yourself, offering new scenes from day to day"? This "well-educated spectator (...) [rendered] them with all possible naivety and interest"<sup>167</sup>. So, he sent her reports on Holland's internal and external political situation<sup>168</sup>, which she was able to distill for journalists to confound the "talkative and incendiary" Dutch patriots and their thurifers. Drawing on the best unpublished sources, combined with the reputation of Baroness d'Aelders, her activity was well received by the journalists in her network. As confirmed by a young recruit, Élysée Loustalot, editor of *Révolutions de Paris*:

"The name patriot had imposed itself on me, and what you tell me about it, you who seem to me a good republican, commits me to learning from purer sources"<sup>169</sup>.

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<sup>159</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, June 12, 1790; Palm to Van de Spiegel, June 20/21, 1790.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, Palm to Van de Spiegel, June 20/21, 1790.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, May 24, 1790

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, June 7, 1790.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, May 7, 1790.

<sup>164</sup> G.W. Vreede, *op. cit.*, ( 1788-1795 ), 1877, p. 455; NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, November 4, 1790; *Decreeten van de Provisioneele repräsentanten (...)*, *op. cit.*, p. 684 (1792).

<sup>165</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, September 8, 1792.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* inv. 49, Van de Spiegel to Palm, January 30, 1789.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, July 5, 1789

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* inv. 50, Palm to Van de Spiegel, January 18, 1790.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, Loustalot to Palm, June 3, 1790.

From his correspondence with Van de Spiegel, it's easy to identify three issues between January 1790 and July 1792: the question of Brabant, the traditional military buffer zone; the establishment of a Batavellian legion, which the *Raadpensionaris* knew "through another voice", certainly Brantsen or Maximilien Yvot in Brussels; and the inevitable resumption of revolution in the United Provinces<sup>170</sup>. The Brabant question provoked a misunderstanding on the part of Van de Spiegel, who asked his agent in Paris to verify the promotion of *Rheinegraf* de Salm to the rank of brigadier with pension<sup>171</sup>. He was obviously thinking of the double renegade of 1787, who had abandoned in turn the *Stadhouder* and the "patriots", i.e., the French marshal de camp Johann Friedrich von Salm-Grumbach<sup>172</sup>, while the press of late 1790 spoke of Prince Friedrich III. zu Salm-Kyrburg, close to La Fayette and commissioned by Robespierre to destabilize Austrian Brabant. As the former was in possession of letters that could shake the Republic, Van de Spiegel asked Etta Palm to check the facts. The *Raadpensionaris*' panic echoed that of his agent, who had announced the arrival of a "man" charged with destabilizing the United Provinces, without further indication. Asserting that "it will not be difficult to observe his steps"<sup>173</sup>, Van de Spiegel implicitly admitted that a *hoge politie* (high police force) already existed at that time in The Hague.

The Chabot-Descoings-Delaunay trio concealed an "economic intelligence" affair, which began when Van de Spiegel sent Count Charles Daniel de Meuron to the Baroness of Aelders in July 1790. The aggrieved owner of a Swiss regiment in the service of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (East India Company, VOC), he was to prevent the revival of its French counterpart, scuttled by the government the previous April. This was in response to a desire by the *Raadpensionaris* to attract funds to the Amsterdam market that were benefiting from the good conditions on the Paris market, supported by the *Compagnie des Indes*' good returns. The liberalization of French trade in the Indian Ocean, by decree on April 3, had led to the Company's monopoly being called into question, and it decided to continue its trade. Such an eventuality would ruin Van de Spiegel's plans, unless it instilled dissension among the shareholders. This was Meuron's mission, as Palm was content to open up its network of contacts to him, notably the financier Étienne Clavière and the printer Jean-Pierre Brissot. Since 1785, they had been manipulating stock market prices by publishing pamphlets intended to influence the market for overvalued shares in a downward direction. At the time, the company was already targeted<sup>174</sup>.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, January 18, 1790; July 14, 1792; February 12, March 11 and November 29, 1790.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, January 28, 1791.

<sup>172</sup> SHD/DAT, 4 Yd 3151.

<sup>173</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, March 11, 1790.

<sup>174</sup> R. Whatmore, J. Livesey, "Étienne Clavière, Jacques-Pierre Brissot et les fondations intellectuelles de la politique des Girondins", *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 321, 2000, pp. 1-26; R. Darnton, *Trends in radical Propaganda on the Eve of the French Revolution (1782-1788)*, unpublished doctorate, Oxford, 1964, p. 54; *Ibid.*, "The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature", *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1982, pp. 1-40.



And indeed, five years later, a few pages of publications appeared in Paris, certainly around the time of the general meeting of August 6, 1790. Meuron had been in Paris for a month, and Palm had already been frequenting Clavière and Brissot for several months, the latter having his printing works on rue Favart. Meuron's operation led to legal action by three administrators dissatisfied with the terms of the Compagnie des Indes' extension, on the following October 15. It was at this time that Meuron returned to Switzerland<sup>175</sup>. However, the proceedings became bogged down when the *Raadpensionaris* asked Baroness d'Aelders about his progress<sup>176</sup>. And Chabot, then Delaunay made their entrance, the aim being to denounce to the Chamber the prosperity of particular values while public values were depreciated. Surprisingly, Delaunay's argument on December 13, 1791, borrowed the same logic as Van de Spiegel's... Two years later, Chabot accused his colleague of executing a "dissolution plan", evoked the "intrigues of the Descoings (...) of the same kind as that of the Baroness of Aelders"<sup>177</sup>.

This affair testified to the strength of the social network built up by Palm since her arrival in Paris in 1773. As if to infiltrate Versailles, she chose a pivotal point in revolutionary Paris on which to build her network. This was her neighbor at 3 rue Favard, Jean-Pierre Brissot. Located in the mezzanine two doors down, she couldn't have missed the comings and goings of Brissot's print shop, which also overlooked the Place du Théâtre des Italiens, especially with a view to presenting Van de Spiegel with her plan to set up a media influence group. In her letter of April 29, 1790, she mentioned "two characters", of whom it is difficult not to recognize Brissot and Carra, the latter of whom she had introduced to the *Raadpensionaris* as a "friend"<sup>178</sup>. These two journalists opened the doors of the Jacobin Revolution to her, or at least to the press. No doubt her entryism would have led her to join this society of thought, had she not been a misogynist.

At the end of 1790, however, she preferred to join the *Amis de la Vérité* (Friends of Truth), failing to reach the *Amis de la Constitution* (Friends of the Constitution). Her first speech, on December 30<sup>179</sup>, deserves a closer look.

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<sup>175</sup> Guy de Meuron, *op. cit.* p. 73.

<sup>176</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, January 28, 1791.

<sup>177</sup> A. Mathiez, *Un procès de corruption sous la terreur. L'affaire de la compagnie des Indes*, Paris, Alcan, 1920, p. 185.

<sup>178</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, May 7 and February 12, 1790.

<sup>179</sup> E. Palm, *Appel aux Françaises*, *op. cit.* p. 1-9.

The first act of her "feminist" activism, it must be remembered that Etta Palm was in Paris as a "secret agent" of the United Provinces, and that the end of the Ancien Régime required her to maintain this cover at all costs. Montmorin's tacit protection since 1787 had led him to infiltrate the diplomatic committee. Since this protection could not last, he had to be part of the light of the Revolution. The initial choice of journalists, thanks to Brissot and Carra, was joined by that of "feminism", which led her to join the Cercle Sociale as a result of an untimely intervention on November 26, 1790, when she asked to let the "apologist for ladies"<sup>180</sup> speak. Then she unfolded her program. She knew that what she had to say would stir up the audience. What had happened a month earlier, allowing her to emerge from the shadows, happened again at the end of December, leading the Cercle Sociale leaders to ask her to pursue her "feminism". She thus became a spokeswoman, creating a Société des Amies de la Vérité (March 1791), launching an appeal to the National Assembly (July 1791)<sup>181</sup> before intervening (April 1, 1792)<sup>182</sup>. But she attracted the enmity, to put it mildly, of real "feminists", like Louise Robert<sup>183</sup>.

As for the animosity of Théroigne de Méricourt, née Anne-Joseph Terwagne, it was as much a story of the heart as of mystification. Indeed, if the Baroness d'Aelders took a model to define her feminist cover, it was Méricourt she chose. One from the Austrian Netherlands, the other from the United Provinces, they both attended sessions of the *Assemblée Nationale* (French National Assembly), both in Versailles and Paris, from October 1789 onwards. The two met through Brissot, and navigated the same Montagnard network, notably around Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve<sup>184</sup>. They even shared their enemy, Champcenetz<sup>185</sup>. What is astonishing, however, was the parallelism of their life choices: Terwagne enjoyed the support of Swiss banker Jean-Frédéric Perregaud, Aelders drew closer to Clavière; the former founded a society and spoke at the National Assembly in January 1790, professing a theoretical feminism (equal rights and participation in clubs), which the latter began to imitate from the following autumn. Palm's reputation really took off when Terwagne left Paris in the summer to take refuge in the Liégeois region, where the former introduced her to Maillebois<sup>186</sup>.

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<sup>180</sup> *L'orateur du peuple*, III, no. 46, November 27, 1790.

<sup>181</sup> E. Palm, *op. cit.* p. 37-40.

<sup>182</sup> *Archives parlementaires*, n° 41, 1893, p. 63-64.

<sup>183</sup> E. Palm, *op. cit.* p. 32. Cf. A. Geffroy, "Louise de Keralio-Robert, pionnière du républicanisme sexiste", *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 344/2, 2006, p. 99.

<sup>184</sup> NA, *op. cit.* Palm to Van de Spiegel, May 24, 1790. Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Théroigne de Méricourt, une femme mélancolique sous la Révolution*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1989, 42-43.

<sup>185</sup> "Lettre de M. de Champcenetz aux Rédacteurs des Actes des Apôtres", *Les Actes des Apôtres*, chapter VI (November 1789), pp. 6, 12-14, 16.

<sup>186</sup> Joseph Demarteau, "Théroigne de Méricour lettres inédites prison et bijoux", *La revue générale*, 36, 1882, pp. 585, 865-866.

In addition, from December 1791 until her departure from Paris a year later, Etta Palm seemed to maintain a relationship with a deputy, member of the National Assembly's Supervisory Committee, Claude Basire, whose relationship with Terwagne, just returned to Paris (mid-January 1792) after a long absence, appeared in the *Journal général de France* on February 27, 1792. Basire appeared to have been led to Rue Favart by his friend Chabot<sup>187</sup>. As this meeting took place after the arrest of the Baroness d'Aelders the previous July, it is possible that she gave herself to a protector. This was the only documented relationship. Another can be assumed with Maillebois. In addition to the money matters already mentioned, Palm was still receiving the "old general" in December 1789<sup>188</sup>. Their relationship remained ongoing, since in early April 1790, she received a visit from Jean- Philippe Garran de Coulon, president of the Paris commune's search committee, who was looking for him after his disappearance on March 23; he was wanted in connection with a plot to overthrow the Revolution<sup>189</sup>. She was unable to reply that she had not seen Maillebois since December, even though Van de Spiegel had already sent her news of his presence in Holland<sup>190</sup>.

Although the Baroness d'Aelders' links were not apparent in the proceedings and events surrounding this stillborn plot, Etta Palm's activities did attract the scrutiny of the Garran de Coulon committee. And a spy was sent to observe what was going on. He was a former secretary to the Neapolitan embassy in Paris, *cavaliere* Luigi Pio<sup>191</sup>, who left his service in February 1790 and embraced the Revolution a month later as a "commissaire pour les papiers émigrés" (commissioner for emigrant papers) at the town hall. Having taken up his post in March 1781, perhaps he met Etta Palm even then? In any case, in June 1791, she called him "Brother Pio"<sup>192</sup> and in November 1792 she again used "Citizen Pio's" information on the activities of Maximilien de Robespierre's Dutch friends, to whom the Neapolitan was close<sup>193</sup>. Prior to this, he had infiltrated the Cercle Sociale, of which he was briefly secretary (October 5, 1790 - January 10, 1791); the reason for his dismissal was that he was spying for the Jacobins, as reported by the *Chargé d'Affaires* (Business Manager) in Naples, Abbé Vincenzo Leprini<sup>194</sup>.

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<sup>187</sup> AN, F<sup>7</sup> 4590 and Albert Mathiez, "Recherches sur la famille et sur la vie privée du conventionnel Basire (suite & fin)", *Annales révolutionnaires*, May-June 1921, 13/3, p. 183-189.

<sup>188</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Palm to Van de Spiegel, April 15, 1790.

<sup>189</sup> J.-P. Garran, *Rapport fait au comité de recherches de la municipalité de Paris (...), suivi des pièces justificatives et de l'arrêté du comité tendant à dénoncer MM. Maillebois, Bonne-Savardin et Guignard-Saint-Priest (9 juillet 1790)*, Paris, 1790.

<sup>190</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, March 23, 1790.

<sup>191</sup> A. Mathiez, "Un Italien jacobin: le chevalier Louis Pio", *Nouvelle Revue d'Italie*, January 25, 1921, pp. 1-17; A. Cutolo, "Da diplomatico a giacobino. La vita di Luigi Pio attraverso il suo carteggio inedito", *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 1935, pp. 396-413.

<sup>192</sup> E. Palm, *Appel aux Françaises*, *op. cit.* p. 34.

<sup>193</sup> AD, CP Hollande, 584, Palm to Lebrun, November 23, 1792.

<sup>194</sup> A. Cutolo, *op. cit.* p. 408.

This proximity of Frenchmen who had embraced the Revolution, sometimes to the point of becoming informers, frightened the other social network, the one Baroness d'Aelders had patiently built up since 1773. Although her operation in 1787 had left its mark, she retained the friendship of several members of Ancien Régime society. The first of these was undoubtedly Louise-Marie-Adélaïde d'Orléans, Duchesse de Bourbon. As her closeness to Louise Come Descoings would seem to indicate, their relationship must have been sufficiently long-standing for a simple letter from the baroness, read out in the gallery on June 3, 1791<sup>195</sup>, when the princess had been taking refuge in Normandy for two months, to lead her to agree to join the Amies de la Vérité. It's true that both of them found it a way to dispel doubts about their patriotism. But she was the exception in Etta Palm's network. Her "Jacobin" turn, as she brazenly confessed to Van de Spiegel<sup>196</sup>, shocked those who couldn't understand why "after having been the enemy of the Dutch patriots, she took on the role of an outraged democrat in Paris"<sup>197</sup>. In January 1791, Count Bernhard Wilhelm von der Goltz, the Prussian Minister, put an end to four years of collaboration. Even Jean-Claude Le Vacher de Charnois, a monarchist journalist and friend of Maillebois, distanced himself from her for this reason on a personal level, although he did defend her, albeit weakly, in his daily newspaper, *Le Spectateur national* or *Le Modérateur*, on the occasion of Cerisier's denunciation.

### *Back to Holland*

The death of Maillebois on December 14, 1791, following his arrest in July and Van de Spiegel's warnings in September, marked a turning point in Palm's clandestine activity. Despite her Parisian activity, she seemed to be suffering from that affliction common to agents who remain undercover for too long. Until then, her physical and moral strength had enabled her to withstand the pressures of her mission. But the pain of not being herself<sup>198</sup>, of living in fear and of being alone was palpable, even if she sometimes managed to free herself temporarily (with Maillebois and Basire in particular). France's entry into a revolution, similar to the one she had only followed by proxy between 1778 and 1787, even though she played her part in it, made her think that perhaps it was time to put an end to her mission. Already on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1789, the emissary Rudolf Hentzy warned the *Raadpensionaris* that she was planning to go to The Hague in November<sup>199</sup>. She herself announced this in her "*lettre particulière*" (specific letter) to Van de Spiegel of December 22.

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<sup>195</sup> *La Bouche de Fer*, June 7, 1791.

<sup>196</sup> KH, *op. cit.*, Palm to Van de Spiegel, July 8, 1794.

<sup>197</sup> *Spectateur national or the Moderator*, July 22, 1791.

<sup>198</sup> A. Dewerpe, *Espions. Une anthropologie historique du secret d'État contemporain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, pp. 360-363.

<sup>199</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *Nederland...*, *op. cit.* p. 156n1.

However, on the following January 18, Van De Spiegel suggested avoiding the "expense and fatigue of travel"<sup>200</sup>.

The "secret agent's" decision was perhaps explained by the presence of two new agents in the service of the *Raadpensionaris*, Hentzy and Brantsen, sent the previous September; Etta Palm may not have understood that they could have had a different mission from the one entrusted to her in 1778. Another explanation was put forward by Van de Spiegel on January 18, 1791: his "particular affairs" which would call him "to Holland and [give] him the honor of speaking with" her; it's true that the decision-maker and his agent had never met. Did he know that a legal decision in Groningen, dated January 26, 1790, allowed Etta Palm to claim her rights to her mother's inheritance, which her "dishonorable relatives", notably her uncles in Groningen, the "patriotic" Albert Johan, city councilor (1781-1787), and Willem de Sitter, head of the high chamber of justice (1776-1795), had monopolized in their niece's absence? Etta Palm's legal action, "by the care of M. le conseiller [Hendrik Ludolf] Wichers et avocat [Dieter] Brugma", enabled her to recover an annual pension of 135 florins (499.5 pounds)<sup>201</sup>. He still had to recover the "few sums swindled"<sup>202</sup> during proceedings in Amsterdam in 1768, and not any inheritance from America as suspected<sup>203</sup>. This case took longer to resolve, despite the support of Van de Spiegel<sup>204</sup>, since Etta Palm decided to return to Amsterdam to confront her spoliators in June 1793.

The appeal of his private interests therefore seemed stronger than his adherence to the ideals of the Revolution in motivating his attitude in the summer of 1792. All he had to do was rely on his social network, primarily his neighbor Brissot, to create a mission for himself. In March, a change in the Minister of Foreign Affairs brought a journalist of his acquaintance and friend of the Rue Favart printer, Pierre H el ene Marie Lebrun-Tondu, to the First Directorate, which covered the Netherlands in particular. Since the latter counted Carra, with whom Palm had become close two years earlier, among his friends, it seems that she and Lebrun met as early as April 1791, when the "patriot" from Li ge had returned to Paris to launch his press career. His new position as first clerk in the Foreign Office offered Palm the chance to return to Holland. All he had to do was wait for an opportunity to present itself. A faux-assignat affair, revealed in Amsterdam and Rotterdam by the French Minister in The Hague, Emmanuel de Maulde, and publicized by Foreign Minister Scipion Chambonas at the National Assembly on July 5, 1792, provided just such an opportunity. The documents, copied by secretary Fr ed eric-S eraphin Latour Dupin de Gouvernet, arrived on Lebrun's desk, and he realized that the counterfeiters' extradition had been blocked<sup>205</sup>.

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<sup>200</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 49.

<sup>201</sup> KH, *op. cit.* Palm to Willem V, June 31, 1794.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, May 29, 1794.

<sup>203</sup> W.J. Koppius, *op. cit.*, p. 18-19; H. T. Hardenberg, *op. cit.* p. 9, 47.

<sup>204</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 56, Van de Spiegel to Palm, January 26, 1793.

<sup>205</sup> AD, *op. cit.* 585, Note sur la dame d'Aelders, August 11, 1793. *Archives parlementaires de 1787   1860 (...)* (1787   1799), 46, Paris, Paul Dupont, 1867, p. 151-153.

Both in his contacts and in the documentation of his office, he thought he had a means of action at his disposal. That means was, of course, Etta Palm. As Holland's "secret agent", she was able to get what France wanted. And as far as Lebrun knew, she was a supporter of the Girondin Revolution. Killing two birds with one stone, he began a recruitment process. Apparently, he did not belong to the Dutchwoman's inner circle, since he went through the intermediary of Clavière, now Minister of Finance. Clavière appears numerous times in correspondence concerning Palm in the autumn of 1792. This was how we learned about the other side of the mission assigned to Van de Spiegel's "secret agent". Lebrun

was "in the hope that, by her insinuations with the Princess of Orange, she could indirectly serve to detach Russia from the alliance of Austria"<sup>206</sup>.

Initially, Palm had to write to Van de Spiegel. After an initial exchange of letters on August 17 and 21, 1792, which followed on from the information sent since July 9 (the Batave Legion, Princess van Oranje's mediation between France and the Dutch Republic)<sup>207</sup>, she became more specific. On August 20, she mentioned the fate of the counterfeiter who were to be extradited to Paris. Four days later, the *Raadpensionaris* responded with a resounding "no". He couldn't see what his agent found strange in the fact that, before any decision was taken, "the State of Holland" asked France for its reasons, which had to be based on authentic documents of legal origin, not copies. This was the explanation that the *Staten-Generaal* (State General) had been opposing Maulde to since the end of July. As he had been able to have the originals copied in the possession of the Dutch judiciary thanks to the corruptibility of an Amsterdam clerk, the diplomat had to accept that the litigants be released<sup>208</sup>. If Etta Palm's exercise had failed, it was only in appearance. Not only did she show Lebrun Van de Spiegel's reply, which he saw as "a private letter not to be shown to the government"<sup>209</sup>, but he also agreed to her going to Holland to carry out the second part of the French operation.

Like Van de Spiegel two years earlier, he wrote to her not to have her. He did not want her to be "engaged, nor excited to make a journey (...) with the aim of [him] being useful". But he no less intended to use the relations she had with the *Raadpensionaris* and Princess van Oranje to convey "assurances of the peaceful dispositions of the Republic of France towards the powers that will maintain neutrality".

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, Lebrun to Clavière, November 25, 1792.

<sup>207</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 50, Van de Spiegel to Palm, August 21 and 24, 1792.

<sup>208</sup> AD, *op. cit.* 583, Lebrun to Maulde and Maulde to Fagel, 11 and 21, June 30, 1792. *Resolutien van de Heeren Staten van Hollandt ende Westvrieslandt*, 201, 1792, pp. 519-529 and 651-659.

<sup>209</sup> NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, August 24, 1792.

This affability was mere window-dressing, since France would not act,

"Never take the offensive against any power unless [it had] the conviction of a well-marked malice or of a formed plan to attack it"<sup>210</sup>.

But Palm's twenty letters to Lebrun were less about Russia and the Austrian alliance than about guns, emigrants, and the Scheldt. As part of a wider French intelligence network, Willem V's former "secret agent" found himself in Holland, keeping an eye on Emmanuel de Maulde and Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. While for the former it was simply a question of monitoring his actions after the recall of diplomatic representations between the two states following the deposition of Louis XVI (August 10, 1792), which had enabled their accreditation<sup>211</sup>, the question of the latter was more delicate. As in the case of the incarcerated forgers, it was necessary to unblock a republican market for Brabant rifles stored in the Zeeland port of Terneuzen<sup>212</sup> that the Middelburg Admiralty had been withholding since the spring of 1791, in the absence of a bond. The actions of this "double" agent, despite having both Dutch and French legitimacy, were highly complex.

Etta Palm raised this issue with Van de Spiegel when they met on November 3, 1792<sup>213</sup>. This first meeting between the "secret agent" and her decision-maker had taken place in the morning, the former having arrived in The Hague the day before. Surprised by the revelation that she had gone over to the service of France, the *Raadpensionaris* reminded her of the official position of the *Staten-Generaal*. Because the deal had been struck in the Austrian Netherlands, the Batavian authorities had based themselves on the note from the Austrian minister, Johann Rudolf von Buol-Schauenstein, dated June 5, to the effect that the sale of the rifles had been concluded on the express condition that they be exported from Europe, which was obviously no longer the case<sup>214</sup>; which had long been known to Lebrun<sup>215</sup>.

It appears that Palm was instructed in Beaumarchais' case by the French minister. She had Van de Spiegel keep an eye on him, rather than observing him herself. Indeed, on November 9, she reported speculation against Beaumarchais' assignat by bankers in The Hague, including Mathieu Labouchère, from the Molière bank, who was her host<sup>216</sup>.

<sup>210</sup> AD, *op. cit.* 584, Lebrun to Palm, November 26, 1792.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* vol. 585, note to Deforgues, June 1793, f. 327. NA, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Palm, August 24, 1792.

<sup>212</sup> *Œuvres complètes de Beaumarchais, preceded by a notice on his life and works by M. Saint-Marc Girardin*, Paris, Firmin Didot frères, 1845, pp. 521-607. J. C. Gatty, *Beaumarchais sous la Révolution. L'affaire des fusils de Hollande d'après des documents inédits*, Leiden, Brill, 1976, pp. 179-183, 187.

<sup>213</sup> AD, *op. cit.*, Palm to Lebrun, November 6, 1792.

<sup>214</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Staatenabteilung Holland 79.

<sup>215</sup> AD, *op. cit.* 583, Fagel to Maulde and Maulde to Lebrun, June 8, 1792.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 584, Palm to Lebrun, November 6 and 9, 1792.

However, she insisted on specifying that they would be, "dit on", with Elias Abbema, in charge of Dutch "patriot" affairs in Paris. In other words, in the same sentence, she included information about France and about the Netherlands. Indeed, as Lebrun noted, "the patriots alone are entitled to our help and support"<sup>217</sup>. Van de Spiegel's *hoge politie* (senior police) lay behind the incisive quotation. This was confirmed in Palm's last letter to Beaumarchais, on the following December 7. By announcing his departure "in the night" and mentioning the National Convention's decree of accusation of the previous November 28, she once again mixed the interests of the two countries and revealed her source. Indeed, the announcement to the *Raadpensionaris* was made by Maulde on December 4, and the night was that of December 1 to 2<sup>218</sup>. The same time lag, induced by the upward flow of information, was notable in the case of the arrival of Charles-François Dubois-Thainville, on December 1, 1792, but only announced to Lebrun ten days later. And when she got her information from Van de Spiegel, as in the case of Dumouriez, it was because he was accused of corruption by local Jacobins<sup>219</sup>.

This proximity to the *Raadpensionaris* showed that Palm was not the French "double" agent she was initially thought to be, nor even that she engaged in any penetration whatsoever; on the contrary, it was the French she played with to get back to Holland. She kept Matthijs Tinne and his brother-in-law Willem Rietmulder<sup>220</sup>, her two letterboxes provided by Van de Spiegel in December 1788<sup>221</sup>, until France's declaration of war on February 1, 1793; then, until the following October for French service and beyond, she used a Monsieur Tak in the *Hofstraat* (rue de la Cour). It should be noted that Tinne was the nephew of Van de Spiegel's secretary, Johann Abraham. This double indicator showed his attachment to the United Provinces and his loyalty to Van de Spiegel and Willem V. They also confirmed the personal reasons for Palm's return. The *Raadpensionaris* summed it up for the *stadhouder* after his meeting on November 3, 1792: she feared that war would break out with France<sup>222</sup>. This concern was reflected in her correspondence with Lebrun: out of twenty-eight reports sent in seven months, she referred nine times<sup>223</sup> to Dutch nervousness about the triumph of French armies in Belgium, warning in particular that the opening up of navigation in the Scheldt would be an obstacle to "peace with Holland and England"<sup>224</sup>.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, Lebrun to Clavière, November 25, 1792.

<sup>218</sup> *Œuvres complètes de Beaumarchais*, *op. cit.* p. 596-597.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, letter of December 10, 1792, f. 307.

<sup>220</sup> W. M. C. Regt, "De familie Tinne", *Maandblad van het genealogisch-heraldiek genootschap de Nederlandsche Leeuw*, 188, 1900, p. 182-183.

<sup>221</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 49, Van de Spiegel to Palm, December 5, 1788.

<sup>222</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 254, Van de Spiegel to Willem V, November 4, 1792.

<sup>223</sup> AD, *op. cit.* 584, Palm to Lebrun, 12, 20, 27, 30 November, 4, 11, 12 December 1792, 4 and January 11, 1793.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, December 11, 1792.



She herself also insisted that "all hope [of] re-establishing peace between [her] two homelands"<sup>225</sup>. This is why she was quick to point out that The Hague forbade French emigrants to stay for more than twenty-four hours without a guarantee from the *Staten-Generaal*, insisting on the presence of her pet peeve, Breteuil<sup>226</sup>.

She made no secret of the fact that she "had been entrusted with a mission by the French government"<sup>227</sup>. This initially "frightened and worried" Van de Spiegel and Willem V<sup>228</sup>. Already after the previous summer's exchange of letters on the subject of counterfeiters, this situation had prompted a discussion between the two decision-makers, leading the *stadhouder* to review all the correspondence of his "secret agent", most certainly to note a change in tone suggesting a possible change in legitimacy. In his letter of September 8 to Palm, the *Raadpensionaris* felt obliged to mention this. However, he misrepresented the facts, mentioning the prince's thanks for "his hard work", but his suspicion was reflected in his annoyance at the money Palm had sent to obtain Dutch gazettes to counterbalance the French<sup>229</sup>. The Dutch decision-maker's incomprehension about the arrival of his "secret agent's" presence in The Hague was such that, on November 3, learning of his presence through his *hoge politie*, he had his secretary Johann Abraham Tinne send him to "find out the purpose of his journey"<sup>230</sup>. The messenger's reply from the "secret agent" began to reassure the decision-maker: Palm's legitimacy had not changed. And Van de Spiegel, in collaboration with Willem V, drafted the reply that their agent was to send to Lebrun<sup>231</sup>. The English minister in The Hague, William Eden Auckland, quickly suspected "some secret correspondence with Clavière and Le Brun [sic]"<sup>232</sup>. This was based on three letters sent by the woman he believed to be his "secret agent" to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs (1 November 6, 9 and 16), and specific missives from the same woman to the Minister of Finance (November 4). These had been reported by the correspondent of the *postkantoor* (post office) in The Hague to the organization headed by Charles Hake and the wife of its founder, Marguerite Wolters<sup>233</sup>.

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<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, February 12, 1793.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, Palm to Lebrun, November 12, 16, December 21, 1792 and January 11, 1793.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, Lebrun to Clavière, November 25, 1792.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, Palm to Lebrun, November 6, 1792.

<sup>229</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 50.

<sup>230</sup> KH, *op. cit.*, Van de Spiegel to Willem V, November 3, 1792.

<sup>231</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 254, Van de Spiegel to Willem V and Willem V to Van de Spiegel, November 4 and 5, 1792. AD, *op. cit.*, Palm to Lebrun, November 6, 1792.

<sup>232</sup> Auckland to Greenville, November 15, 1792, in *The Manuscripts of J. B. Fortescue, Esquire, preserved at Dropmore*, II. 1786-1815, London, 1894, p. 334.

<sup>233</sup> Matthijs Tieleman, "'No Intrigue Is Spared': AngloAmerican Intelligence Networks in the Eighteenth-Century Dutch Republic", *Itinerario*, vol. 45/1, April 2021, pp. 99-123.

This possibility of intercepting letters was well known in The Hague<sup>234</sup>. This was why correspondence with the Baroness d'Aelders used the services of couriers, either from the Parisian embassy or more private individuals (Maillebois, Meuron), while hers went to a live mailbox. The tense situation with the Austrian Netherlands and the United Provinces from January 1792 onwards added further uncertainty. Etta Palm complained repeatedly to Lebrun<sup>235</sup>, without imagining that the minister could not have expected some result from her Dutchwoman's action. So, he informed Palm's protector, his colleague, Minister Clavière:

"This woman is considered, and it seems not without foundation, to be a schemer, and people in whom I should have confidence have more than once warned me to be on my guard with her. Several members of the National Convention have written to me about her, and in terms that are not likely to dispel these suspicions<sup>236</sup>."

Lebrun sided with those Dutch "patriots" who had sounded the death knell against Baroness d'Aelders in July 1791 and their allies in the Chamber. Precisely those whom she denounced in her correspondence now that she was in The Hague<sup>237</sup>!

In return, Etta Palm was also watched over by "patriotic" elements. On January 5, 1793, while she was trying to enlist the help of Lebrun, the former ambassador of the United Provinces in Versailles<sup>238</sup>, the latter's son, Willem Anne Lestevenon van Berkenrode, a "patriot" from Haarlem, gave a detailed report on the spy's network to Johan Valckenaer, president of the Batave revolutionary committee founded in Paris (October 1792) and a friend of Cerisier : in addition to hypothetical secret meetings with Princess van Oranje, she renewed contact with Gérard Brantsen and corresponded with a deputy from Haute-Loire<sup>239</sup>. Nevertheless, this report should be treated with caution. Palm met Willem V in his wife's anteroom<sup>240</sup>, not his wife. Likewise, he is said to have been the deputy Claude-André-Benoît Reynaud de Bonnassous, whose correspondence remains both unpublished and unknown. As for Brantsen, he is the renegade who left the "patriotic" ranks in 1788 to become Van de Spiegel's agent, for whom he moved to Paris after the Revolution, and returned in September 1792; again, his reports remain unpublished to this day, if they still exist.

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<sup>234</sup> NA, *op. cit.* inv. 52, Van de Spiegel to Palm, January 26, 1793.

<sup>235</sup> AD, *op. cit.*, Palm to Lebrun, November 16, 27, 1792, January 22, April 3, June 4, 1793; Note, August 11, 1793; Deforgues to Palm, August 12, 1793.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.* to Clavière, November 25, 1792.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.* Palm to Lebrun, November 23, 1792 (Abbama) and May 21, 1793 (about another "Dutch renegade", Anarchis Cloots).

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.* November 27, 1792.

<sup>239</sup> NA, *op. cit.* 2.21.057, inv. 110, Berkenrode fils to Valckenaer, January 5, 1793. H.T. Colenbrander, *op. cit.* p. xxxi.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.* 3.01.26, inv. 254, Willem V to Van de Spiegel, November 7, 1792; AD, *op. cit.* Palm to Lebrun, November 9, 1792.

Moreover, it was astonishing not to find two essential elements. The first was the impecuniosity in which Etta Palm found herself once she returned to The Hague, further proof that she had fled France in all haste. On November 9, 1792, seven days after her arrival, she was living at home with a widow Kool in Boekhorstraat. She went out "only to see members of the state, including several childhood friends". Discretion dictated that she would rather see them at "tea than at formal meals"<sup>241</sup>. While it wasn't possible to identify these relationships that Berkenrode didn't mention, correspondence with Lebrun revealed one, among others "friends"<sup>242</sup>, that of Johan Cornelis van der Hoop, fiscal procurator at the Amsterdam Admiralty<sup>243</sup>, an important piece of intelligence for the French. Although he had distanced himself from Willem V, due to the *stadhouder's* passivity, it was easy to understand that Palm preferred discretion. The papers seized at her home in The Hague added two more relations, Willem Gustaaf Frederik Bentinck van Rhoon, confidant of Willem V and English agent animating the Orangist party, and military provost Gerardus Philippus Rulach<sup>244</sup>.

But she was already facing financial problems. As early as November 5, she confessed to Clavière that she was living "with the utmost economy on less than 10 florins a day"<sup>245</sup>, or 37 pounds. This was obviously a comedy played by a woman accustomed to living like a baroness. Only on November 26 did Lebrun grant her a monthly salary of 300 pounds, for two reports, and release "by the first ordinary a bill of exchange of 300 pounds" as well. Annually, this was to earn him the equivalent of 972 florins, slightly more than the median income of financiers and rentiers in The Hague<sup>246</sup>. These funds did not arrive until a fortnight later, much to Palm's relief<sup>247</sup>. Two months later, the declaration of war put an end to the payments, but it seems that the month of January 1793 was not honored by Paris, despite the two requested reports (January 11 and 22). In fact, on the following May 21, she requested that "the 5 months [she was] owed" be passed on to her. This request had to await the appointment of a new minister and a review of her information<sup>248</sup>. These were deemed insufficient, and with good reason, but she was offered a new trial, for the same price, but against a single report, in view of the postal issues between the two countries<sup>249</sup>.

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<sup>241</sup> AD, *op. cit.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, Palm to Lebrun, April 3 and June 4, 1793

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, Palm to Lebrun, December 11, 12, 21 and 28, 1792.

<sup>244</sup> *Decreeten van de Provisioneele repräsentanten (...)*, *op. cit.* p. 682.

<sup>245</sup> AD, *op. cit.*, 584.

<sup>246</sup> J. de Vries, A. v.d. Woude, *Nederland 1500-1815. De eerste ronde van moderne economische groei*, Amsterdam, Balans, 2005, p.672-689.

<sup>247</sup> AD, *op. cit.*, Palm to Lebrun, December 14, 1792.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* note on the lady Aelders, August 11, 1793.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.* Desforgues to Palm, August 12, 1793.

After six reports, the mission was cancelled in the face of Palm's "goodwill to no avail"<sup>250</sup>. The latter wrote a reply that probably never reached Paris, but which Van de Spiegel applauded.

After she had "refused to play the shameful role of spy for which [the French Foreign Minister had] solicited her"<sup>251</sup>, the situation of the former Dutch "secret agent" worsened dramatically. She had obviously foreseen this outcome, given Paris's silence and the local presses announcement of Lebrun's downfall in early July. She even anticipated it, planning to divert "several thousand pairs of shoes, clean for the troops" from their French destination. She saw it as a way of "putting herself out of poverty, at least for a while". But Willem V proved to be just as indolent as with Van der Hoop, and she had to turn to Van de Spiegel before the affair foundered<sup>252</sup>. Putting aside the idea of returning to France, she tried just as vainly to obtain a pension for her past missions, and to obtain the estate of a local newspaper publisher, arguing that she had had no "between 1786 and 1792. He even tried to find a job as a governess in Amsterdam, but a first cousin denounced her as a "having played the role of spy for the *stadhouder* in France" and she was thanked. All that remained was for her to take up embroidery, "because it was necessary to live well without harming anyone". She nevertheless proposed to recruit a commissioner for the French army approaching the French Provinces United, even or even silks from Lyon there<sup>253</sup>.



This certainty was only façade. So, at the first proposal, dating back to July 1794, we can deduce its information system.

It was the appointment of the representative on mission Pierre René Choudieu of the *Nouvelles Politiques, nationales et étrangères* (Political news, domestic and foreign) on the 6 February whom she had known as a member of the coterie of Chabot, Delaunay and Basire.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, Desforgues to Palm, October 5, 1793; *Ibid*, sd, in *Decreeten van de Provisioneele repræsentanten (...)*, *op. cit.* p. 688.

<sup>251</sup> Van de Spiegel to Palm, October 1793, in *Decreeten van de Provisioneele repræsentanten (...)*, *op. cit.* p. 688.

<sup>252</sup> KH, *op. cit.* inv. 986, Palm to Willem V, July 5, 9, 22 and 29, 1793.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid*, Palm to Willem V, March 24, June 31 and October 1794; NA, *op. cit.* inv. 52, Palm to Van de Spiegel, July 8, 1794; Palm to Van de Spiegel, February 1793, July 30 and October 1794, in *Decreeten van de Provisioneele repræsentanten (...)*, *op. cit.* pp. 683-687; Gratification, October 25, 1794, in G.W. Vreede, *op. cit.* p. 455.

This information was crossed with the advance of the French troops, although the Parisian royalist sheet received in The Hague no longer mentioned Choudieu. However, the man Palm thought to be in Bruges had not left Lille<sup>254</sup>. In other words, Palm was no longer credible.

The second essential element missing from Berkenrode's report was the return of lawyer Jan Munniks to Etta Palm's life. He was the reason why she had remained in The Hague, after having found herself a "clay house outside Amsterdam" in the spring of 1794, where she planned to "easily transfer [her] furniture, [her] linen, and what [she had] before the fire", i.e., the arrival of the French<sup>255</sup>. This time, she couldn't admit to her protector Van de Spiegel that she wanted to try her luck with the French army and its commissioners, of which one of her friends was a member. Munniks would once again be her white knight. However, the enthusiasm of this "patriot", who offered a pamphlet telling the French that they were at home in the United Provinces, proved counterproductive. Contrary to the version presented in 1795<sup>256</sup>, Munniks' work brought to the French commissioners revealed Palm's presence in The Hague.

In Paris, the Section Le Pelletier committee had seized Baroness d'Aelders' papers from her home on rue Favard on June 25, 1794<sup>257</sup>. Her papers were inventoried on the following April 24<sup>258</sup>. The Dutch translation of her reply to Mirabeau was discovered. It was added to the testimonies of Chabot, but also of his friends Brissot and Carra, guillotined on October 31, 1793, as well as Clavière, who committed suicide on the following December 8, and even Basire and Desmoulins, on April 5, 1794. These were far more serious reasons in the eyes of the Terror and the Thermidorian reaction to pursue the schemer denounced by the unanimous Batavian "patriots", in France and across the United Provinces. The entry of French troops into The Hague in January 1795 led to the arrest of Van de Spiegel on February 4, and Bentinck the following day. It wasn't until May 18 that "the so-called Baroness of Aelders" was accused by Cornelis Felix van Maanen, assistant public prosecutor at the Court of Justice of the *Comité van Algemeene Waakzaamheid* (Vigilance Committee) in The Hague, of plotting against the Dutch Republic.

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<sup>254</sup> Choudieu au comité de Salut public, August 4, 1794, in F.-A. Aulard, *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public, avec la correspondance officielle des représentants en mission et le registre du conseil exécutif provisoire*, XV, Paris, Impr. nationale, 1903, p. 653-654.

<sup>255</sup> Palm to Van de Spiegel, July 30, 1794, *op. cit.*

<sup>256</sup> *Decreeten van de Provisioneele representanten (...)*, *op. cit.* p. 688-689.

<sup>257</sup> AN, T 1601, Procès-verbal de perquisitions et inventaires des papiers saisis chez l'émigrée femme Dailbert, an III.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, T 364, Papers of Elisa Lubina Johanna, Baroness d'Aelders, wife of Chrétien Ferdinand Louis Palin; T 1688, dos. 926, État de titres et pièces remis à la commission municipale (de Paris) chargée de la liquidation des créances de l'émigrée femme Dailbert, An III; Archives de Paris, 1434/2172, 348 rue Favard, État et remise de titres, Ans II et III.

Arrested, she was taken to the Kastelenije<sup>259</sup> where she was interrogated by Abraham Jacques la Pierre, an officer of the General Police and Internal Correspondence of the Dutch Republic. Unaware that the proceedings were both French and Dutch, Etta Palm sought to ward off "patriotic" vindictiveness, claiming to be of French nationality, to have been sent on a mission to Holland, not to be attached to the House of Orange, and to know Munniks only "for his misfortune"... Above all, she revisited her life in a way that the twenty-nine letters exchanged with Van de Spiegel and the twenty-two with Willem V did not reveal, even though they escaped the burning of the Tinne father and son and Van Citters before the arrival of French troops on January 29, 1795. Well concealed, they were not found by the investigators, since only eleven of Palm's mails, eight addressed to the *Raadpensionaris*, two to the *stadhouder* and one from the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, all from 1793-1794, were included in the proceedings before disappearing. Which of them evoked "youth, spirit and lust", and which her attire "of the order of times past"?

The prosecutor investigating her case, Johann Valckenaer, knew her well, not only having resided in Paris since 1787, but having received this report in January 1793 on her activities against the French Republic. On January 27, 1796, La Pierre presented her report to the *Comité van Algemeene Waakzaamheid* (Committee of General Vigilance):

"After deliberation, it was approved and agreed, to qualify the *Comité van Algemeene Waakzaamheid* to have the said E.L.J. Aalders at least at the expense of the Country in a sufficiently safe and suitable place until General Peace, or until his freedom is no longer harmful perhaps to the political situation of this country and the French Republic; with further charge to the *Comité van Algemeene Waakzaamheid* [...] to seek a suitable place, and have him transferred there as soon as possible<sup>260</sup>."

Ironically, his next case was Van de Spiegel's<sup>261</sup>. On February 14, Valckenaer recommended that Palm be placed in solitary confinement, following her former protector to Gavangenpoort, where they met up with Bentinck. All three then headed for Woerden Castle, the two men two days before Palm, who did not arrive until February 14, 1796. During this long incarceration, two notorious events occurred. The first was in the diary of the former *Raadpensionaris* from February 5, 1795, to December 20, 1798, where not a single entry contained a mention of Palm<sup>262</sup>. The second was that she complained of "mistreatment [...] unlike other citizens who are held there"<sup>263</sup>; in other words, her role as a "secret agent" was known to the guards and her fellow inmates, which certainly explains Van de Spiegel's silence.

<sup>259</sup> *Nieuwe Nederlandsche jaarboeken, of Vervolg der merkwaardigste geschiedenissen, die voorgevallen zyn in de Zeven Provinciën* [...], 30, 18 Mai 1795.

<sup>260</sup> *Decreeten van de Provisioneele repræsentanten* (...), *op. cit.* p. 680-689.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 690-702.

<sup>262</sup> L. Wichers, "Journaal van den Raad-Pensionaris Laurens Pieter van de Spiegel, 'Journaal van mijn Detentie in de Casteleny van den Hove'", *Historisch Genootschap, Bijdragen en mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap*, 15, Utrecht, Kemink und zoon, 1894, pp. 1-61.

<sup>263</sup> H. T. Hardenberg, *op. cit.* p. 101 (April 11, 1796). *Decreeten van de Vergadering van het Provinciaal Bestuur van Holland*, The Hague, 'sLands Drukkerij van Holland, 7 juny tot 31 july 1797, pp. 658-659 (June 31, 1797) and 5 sept. tot 7 october 1797, p. 193 (September 7, 1797).

On June 31, 1797, she "asked that she be given her freedom, or at least that she might have someone to help her in her bitter suffering". A year later, she proposed improved living conditions for all prisoners<sup>264</sup>. On May 9, 1798, noting the radical coup d'état in The Hague, and seeking to take advantage of it, she recalled that a bill of exchange for 236 florins (873 pounds) "was mislaid in [her] papers by H[ugo] Gevers", a lawyer at the time of Palm's arrest<sup>265</sup>. She was finally released from prison under the general amnesty of December 20, 1798, along with her former protector and Bentinck.

Her return to freedom was brief. Did she consider returning to France, where she kept her possessions, even though during her incarceration, deprived of her mail, she was unable to postpone the sale in October 1795<sup>266</sup>? Was she so weakened that pneumonia claimed her life. She died on March 28, 1799<sup>267</sup>. Her estate was blocked until September 23, 1800<sup>268</sup>. In the meantime, three heirs of the de Sitter family shared her estate<sup>269</sup>. But they knew nothing of their relative's French possessions. Thirty years later, no one remembered when the *Groninger Courant* of December 31, 1830, published a search for heirs to property in France, through Maître Kersten in Amsterdam. This was the last call for compensation for emigrants' property, as provided for by the law of April 27, 1825. No one showed up...

Etta Aelders, wife Palm, known as Baroness d'Aelders, was a "secret agent" of the Chevalier d'Éon class<sup>270</sup>. Yet her fame remained far below that. Part of the responsibility lay with her since she undertook to disguise her life in her deposition to the Pierre in 1795. She did so in an attempt to soften her fate, but she also provided material that has nourished historical research since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The present transnational perspective, which is not based solely on the traces left by the Dutchwoman, even if it means distorting them to suit the tastes of the moment, allows us to perceive her in her true light. Far from the image of a schemer or adventuress found among the rare witnesses of her time, she now appears as the archetypal "secret agent" of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>264</sup> *Resolutien van het Intermediair administratief bestuur, van het voormalig Hollandsch gewest*, 7, The Hague, 'sLands Drukkerij, 1798, p. 671 (August 31, 1798).

<sup>265</sup> NA, *op. cit.* 2.01.01.01, inv. 508, Palm à Wijbo.

<sup>266</sup> W.J. Koppius, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>267</sup> *Haagsche Courant*, April 10, 1799; H. T. Hardenberg, *op. cit.* p. 116.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, September 15, 1800.

<sup>269</sup> Groninger Archieven, 574 coll. de Sitter-Schönfeld, 1040-1800, inv. 33.

<sup>270</sup> Evelyne and Maurice Lever, *Le Chevalier d'Éon. "Une vie sans queue ni tête"*, Paris, Fayard, 2009.

Etta Palm was sent to France at the time of the latter's entry into the American adventure, then remained there as the United Provinces entered the revolution. After July 14, she sought to return home, but the annexationist plans of the Austrian Netherlands forced her to remain in France. She took advantage of a faux-assignat affair to leave everything behind and return to Holland.

Accredited by the diplomatic authorities of the country to which her government sent her, she always enjoyed the protection of her invisible mission. Under the Ancien Régime, the Foreign Office spared her the effects of a sealed letter, as in 1785 and perhaps two years later. Although the Revolution seems to have lifted this immunity, it kept him underground, even though the first hints appeared, no longer in curial commentaries, but in a press that had just freed itself. Always on the lookout for ways to ensure her country's security, she understood how to manipulate French opinion in favor of the United Provinces by using this new power.

At the same time, to ensure her own safety, she had to find a new cover that would enable her to appear naturally in this new arena of French politics, the Assembly. As a woman, she embraced the only cover that seemed compatible with her mission: that of the feminist. But we can see the limits of her activism, which was quicker to allow her a networking activity rather than female emancipation (she wanted equality), unlike her intimate enemy, Louise Robert (she wanted political rights for women). Viewed in this way, Etta Palm can no longer be seen as "a woman who seems to have passed from the world of gallantry to that of political intrigue", as H. T. Colenbrander saw her. Colenbrander<sup>271</sup>, nor as an intelligent, vain, light-hearted woman with a gift for intrigue, as her second biographer, Herman Hardenberg, presented her. It's just as excessive to see her as a paragon of primitive feminism, as Judith Vega is a little quick to point out. Etta Palm was no more the poor woman her early biographers thought she was. This has yet to be fully demonstrated.

**Gérald Arboit**

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<sup>271</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 148.



# 1870-1918, Towards recognition of the spy's role in France?

Dr. Olivier Lahaie

## ABSTRACT

While the French defeat of 1870 was partly attributed to the dysfunctional nature of the French intelligence services, their restructuring over the following decades allowed for the involvement of a greater number of women, who had traditionally been excluded from such activities. The outbreak of the First World War, by causing an explosion in the demand for intelligence agents, acted as an accelerator in this sense. Although the motivations of female spies involved were not free of political and social demands concerning the emancipation of the 'weaker sex', the sexist prejudices surrounding their involvement and the missions assigned to them at the time prevented full recognition of their contribution to the French victory.

**Key words:** First World War - Female spies - Intelligence - "Patriotic prostitution" - Memory duty - Georges Ladoux - Marthe Richer

Following the defeat of 1870, which was partly due to France's shortcomings in terms of enemy intelligence gathering and counter-espionage, a research body, the *Section de statistiques* (Statistics Section), also known as the *Service de Renseignements* (Intelligence Services – SR) was "attached" to the Army's "2<sup>nd</sup> bureau", known as the "recognition and statistics bureau" (created by decree on March 12, 1874), in order to provide it with sensitive military intelligence. This SR is also responsible for counterespionage (CE). Field stations, known as "SR stations", were set up in Nancy, Remiremont, Epinal and Belfort. Each "*officier-traitant*" (attending officer), a member of the Service de Renseignements, employed agents and wrote intelligence summaries for the central SR in Paris, located on rue de l'Université. When the First World War broke out on August 2, 1914, the SR was placed under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Zopff, a key figure in the French intelligence community.

"It was said that he corresponded with spies, and that nothing that went on behind the scenes of the war was foreign to him. His power extended to a group of people in civilian clothes, [...] the gentlemen of the Sûreté (Générale) [...]. Of these, the most senior was Colonel Zopff's deputy, with the title of technical advisor for the maintenance of order in the armed forces [...]. This person was none other than the excellent M. Sébille. With the rank of general, he was entitled to a uniform embroidered with palms, reminiscent of those worn by intendants and sub-ministers. prefects"<sup>1</sup>.

In foreign countries, the *Service de renseignement extérieur* (Foreign Intelligence Service) (SRE) - an offshoot of the SR, for which it is the "eyes and ears" - employs three types of personnel, supervised by officers in charge: These included "secret agents", based in enemy countries; "listening agents", based in neutral countries; and finally, there were the "informers", who were committed patriots, sympathizers in various capacities, or people in lowly circumstances who sold their information<sup>2</sup>.

During the Great War, a number of French women became involved in the bitter war of intelligence, often creating astonishment around them. We need to examine their deep-rooted motivations, as well as the way they were received by the intelligence services.

#### *Reasons stemming from women's own behavior*

What were the reasons for the women who, from the very start of the First World War, asked to become intelligence agents? Obviously, some were motivated by revenge, wanting to make the *Krauts* pay for the death of a loved one. Still others, who had taken refuge in Paris after the invasion of the northern and eastern departments, wanted to wash away the stain of rape at the hands of *Teutonic soldiers*. But that's not all.

For many years now, women have been in search of social recognition, seeking to break free from the straitjacket of mentalities that would keep them in the role of eternal minors. Less well paid than men on the job market yet performing alienating tasks on industrial production lines or during agricultural work, and denied the right to vote, they are seeking greater consideration in society, and why not - in a future that all agree can only be a long way off - a place equivalent to that of men.

However, the outbreak of the conflict had the primary effect of halting the growth of feminism, in the sense that once the invasion of national soil had taken place, it was no longer time to launch social movements. The Sacred Union condemned women to silence, or at least to a certain form of silence.

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<sup>1</sup> J. de Pierrefeu, *G.Q.G. Secteur 1*, tome 1, Paris, Ed. fr. ill., 1920, pp. 79-80.

<sup>2</sup> SHD/GR 7 N<sup>2</sup> 2431, 7-3: E.M.A.2/Section de Centralisation des Renseignements, dossier n<sup>o</sup> 574, "note descriptive sur l'organisation du S.R", sd; *Ibid*, 7 N 673, "Aide-mémoire de l'officier du 2<sup>e</sup> Bureau dans un Etat-major d'Armée", February 1914.

For them, therefore, it was necessary to find another means of expression, a step made easier by the hostilities themselves, which provoked a sudden turnaround in the situation. Indeed, just like the French, French women feel the need to show what they can do to save the country. Who could blame them in these difficult times? They want to prove that they can do just as well as their husbands, brothers, or sons, who went off to war to bring down German imperialism, and humbly seek out the few positions of responsibility they are given. Some - often bourgeois women and aristocrats - became nurses, or even ambulance drivers; others, from among the common people, joined the war factories "to earn bread" for the family in place of a man who had suddenly become a soldier...or became spies.

In 1914, the army was reluctant to enroll women en masse, and they had to put up with it. It's true that, in the past, there were canteen girls who wore the uniform; but those days are gone, and there's a fine line between handing out weapons to women and engaging them in operations - at least in France at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - and being prepared to cross it. The military administration therefore offered them a number of highly conventional jobs. Thus, the future spy Marthe Richer - born Betenfeld, and later known to the Germans in Spain under the pseudonym Marthe Richard - a renowned civilian aviatrix, was unable to enlist in the military air force at the start of the war, a feat which, had it been achieved, would have set an unthinkable precedent. So, she ended up falling back on a specialty where candidates (and especially female candidates) are not in such a rush, and where recruiters seem to be less rigid-minded than elsewhere: espionage. This profession, insofar as it was deemed indispensable, was so devalued at the time that no one could refuse her request.

Others, more politically committed than Marthe Richer, choose secret warfare because they see it as just another way of continuing the slow (and difficult) fight for gender equality in society, even if, for the time being, it's a society at war. And the myth of the female spy also appeals to the younger generation; in industry and mining, the jobs on offer are so demanding that intelligence warfare - dangerous, of course, but all about subtlety - can seem less dependent on physical strength.

And so, as in other professions, women resolutely enter the world of espionage, trying to gain acceptance in niches previously reserved for men. They do so with the secret hope - riveted to their hearts - that once peace has returned, they will be able to claim a redefinition of their social status more easily. However, this voluntarist attitude was largely echoed by the attitude of certain heads of the intelligence services, who were only too willing to find new recruits to make it easier for them to resist a German SR they imagine to be omnipotent.

*The attitude of spy chiefs to recruiting female spies*

At the start of the war, French intelligence officials are worried about the future, but it's worth pointing out that this concern dates back to 1870. Indeed, during the conflict against the Prussians, very few Frenchmen (and even fewer Frenchwomen) had anything to do with intelligence warfare. A certain

"Mme Antermey was able to enter besieged Metz on September 8, 1870, and left the next day carrying a message from Bazaine to Tachard, the French chargé d'affaires in Brussels. But it was unable to cross the Prussian lines"<sup>3</sup>.

On the opposing side, things seem to have been different, so much so that since the end of the conflict and, above all, the publication of Wilhelm Stieber's memoirs<sup>4</sup>, people in France have come to believe that all the governesses and maids employed by good French families were in fact spies hired by the enemy Military Information Service (*Nachrichtendienst*)<sup>5</sup>. This is undoubtedly an exaggeration, but in the final analysis, this recurring sentiment is merely a reflection of the galloping crisis of espionage that is ravaging the country. Pre-1914 French counterespionage even claims that the German SR employs almost two thousand women as intelligence agents in Europe, and that over 80% of this workforce is at work in France. Even today, we cannot be sure of the veracity of this figure.

But it was the perception of this diffuse threat that led to the opening up of espionage to French women between 1870 and 1914; during these years, a number of female agents were employed by our intelligence services, with varying degrees of success. Marie Forêt, also known as Mme Millecamps - mistress of a French agent named Brücker - kept an eye on German diplomats on behalf of Commandant Henry, head of the SR; but in the end, it was she who was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for espionage in January 1894! The scandal, denounced by *Le Figaro*, naturally provoked a diplomatic outcry.

On September 27, 1894, another female agent was at the root of what quickly became known as the "Dreyfus Affair". A dispatch note was discovered in the garbage can of Count von Schwartzkoppen, the German military attaché in Paris.

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<sup>3</sup> Rémy, *Secrets et réussites de l'espionnage français*, tome 1, Genève, Famot, 1983, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Successively referendary counselor at the Breslau court, police informer from 1845, then head of the Kaiser's secret police. V. Tissot, *La police secrète prussienne*, Paris, Dentu, 1884, p. 1-45.

<sup>5</sup> P. Lanoir, *L'espionnage allemand en France, son organisation, ses dangers, les remèdes nécessaires*, Paris, Cocuaud et Cie, 1888, p. 35.

However, it was a certain Marie Bastian, a cleaning lady at the German embassy (and above all an SR agent), who passed it on to Commandant Henry "by the ordinary route". This "ordinary way" was the handing over of documents collected after the daily search of the wastepaper baskets. This procedure, however basic, enabled the identification of some thirty German agents. This lends credence to Marie Bastian's find. The slip in question accompanied confidential information on the French army addressed to the German attaché (in all, five secret files ready to be sold, including that on the hydraulic brake equipping the 120 mm cannon, as well as a note relating to cover troops). Artillery Captain Alfred Dreyfus - of Jewish faith, whose handwriting resembles that of the bordereau - is indicted by Bertillon, the leading graphology expert of the time. He is arrested on October 15 on the orders of the Minister of War, General Mercier.

"The Affair" ends with the consequences we know about for SR.

Doubtless scalded by this episode, it seems that on the eve of the First World War, the French espionage services did not employ a single woman<sup>6</sup>. It's true that the police did pay a dozen female informers to combat foreign espionage, but this was done on an occasional and unofficial basis, and *they were* only entrusted with secondary surveillance missions.

If, for their part, the military chose not to have female agents among their spies on foreign missions, it must be said that this was because they considered this complicated profession to be unsuitable for women; reflecting the mores of the time, women were seen as creatures so delightfully slight... that they could only have the brains of birds! Another reticence is that spying is also an extremely dangerous activity, which can lead to the death of others. At the time, it was hard to conceive that a normally constituted woman - a being who, according to tradition, was made to bear life - could devote herself (for taste) to a profession as degrading as spying.

However, the cataclysm of the summer of 1914 was to help change mindsets, in the sense that it led SR leaders to admit that a woman could be involved in intelligence warfare without being deprived or asocial. The start of operations showed that, just like men, women were capable of heroic deeds in the face of the German invaders. Acts for which they sometimes paid with their lives: on September 20, for example, in the Aisne region, a woman named Amaury was shot for passing on information about enemy troops.

But preconceived ideas are often the hardest to change, and it must be said that only the unexpected length of hostilities will ultimately encourage an increase in the number of women in the SR, as well as their remuneration using secret funds from the *Sûreté Générale* (General Security) budget.

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<sup>6</sup> Commandant Gusthal, *Les héros sans gloire du 2<sup>e</sup> Bureau*, Paris, Baudinière, 1933, p. 41.

The need for information thus outweighed misogynistic feelings, but these did not disappear altogether, and France adopted the same approach to recruiting female spies as the Germans or the British, albeit a little later. However, the military sometimes proved to be more pragmatic than the police in this area, sometimes attempting to turn over captured enemy spies;

"At the Sûreté, (a woman giving information to Germany) would have been arrested; at the 2<sup>nd</sup> office, she (was) consoled and gently (explained) that, having done wrong, she (must) make amends"<sup>7</sup>.

*The "female spy" in the memories of the protagonists: an unflattering image*

While the war is undeniably making progress in the recruitment of female agents, it seems that mentalities are not really changing within the intelligence services...

Indeed, the memoirs of ex-agents of the secret war are full of misogynistic references to women in the tough profession of espionage. Such is the case, for example, of Captain Tuohy's book-testimony, although the author is quick to point out that the women employed by the French between 1914 and 1918 were - by far - the most intelligent!<sup>8</sup>

The faults that many authors willingly attribute to them are legion: too little patience, indiscreet, more inclined to let their hearts speak than their minds, and so on. The British author R. W. Rowan insists on this point, which is crucial in his eyes: using her charms, the spy-woman inevitably ends up succumbing to love, and *ultimately* betrays her party...<sup>9</sup>.

"Ah, women! Stupid are those who employ them in jobs that require prudence and discretion. For sooner or later, they make a blunder and compromise or lose forever those who use them. That's why the English have never wanted to use them in the secret service"<sup>10</sup>.

"If in France, women were never employed except under duress and with instinctive mistrust, it's because we've always considered that their heart, nerves and senses prevented them from playing the thankless role of spy to the end"<sup>11</sup>.

In reality, the picture is fortunately not quite so bleak, and a

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> F. Tuohy, *Les mystères de l'espionnage pendant la guerre de 1914-1918*, Paris, Éd. fr. ill., 1921.

<sup>9</sup> R.W. Rowan, *L'évolution de l'espionnage moderne*, Paris, éditions de la nouvelle revue critique, 1935, p. 88.

<sup>10</sup> E. Massard, *Les espionnes à Paris*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1922, pp. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Cdt Gusthal, *op. cit.* p. 36.

case-by-case examination shows that we must beware of hasty generalizations. Marthe Richer's story proves that women can be at ease in espionage, even if they sometimes must use their charms to deceive their victims. In espionage and counterespionage,

"women [...] bring finesse, flexibility, wit, dissimulation, to which they add formidable weapons [...] their beauty, their charm, their bewitching looks"<sup>12</sup>.

It's true, spy chiefs frequently wonder why women choose an activity generally reserved for men. It seems to them that women take up espionage out of interest, passion, self-love, curiosity, greed or vanity<sup>13</sup>. Many of them, however, display "an ardent patriotism, more acute, more subtle than that of the stronger sex"<sup>14</sup>. And as for their effectiveness, it's quite real, given that

"women rarely arouse suspicion, and (that) when beauty is added to feminine cunning, they succeed where a man would have proved incapable"<sup>15</sup>.

Nor is women's natural curiosity necessarily a handicap, "and when on top of it they are spies, nothing can moderate their indiscretion"<sup>16</sup>. If it's proverbial that women talk more easily than men

"Disinformation can be used to spread news that is in the enemy's interest. At certain times during the Great War, this stratagem (of disinformation) was used extensively [...] The systematic circulation of false rumors in the hope that they would reach the ears of the enemy, was a means often employed"<sup>17</sup>.

Major Gusthal, a member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> EMA office during the Great War, cites the case of a female agent who transmitted (on orders) erroneous campaign plans from the Army of the East to the Bulgarians<sup>18</sup>.

As with their male counterparts, the question of spies' honesty with their officer-traitor was paramount; as long as they fulfilled this condition, "women served a great deal in espionage [...] whether they were pseudo women of the world, gallant women, or public girls"<sup>19</sup>.

The fact remains, however, that on missions, their methods differ from those of men.

<sup>12</sup> P. Ignatieff, *Ma mission en France*, Paris, Masque, s.d. [1933], p. 211.

<sup>13</sup> J. Violle, *L'espionnage militaire en temps de guerre*, Doctorat, Droit, Paris, Larose, 1903, p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> P. Ignatieff, *op. cit.* p. 211.

<sup>15</sup> J. Violle, *op. cit.* p. 104.

<sup>16</sup> L. Dumur, *Les défaitistes*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1923, p. 189.

<sup>17</sup> E. Massard, *Les espionnes à Paris*, *op. cit.* p. 119 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Cdt Gusthal, *op. cit.* pp. 195 ff.

<sup>19</sup> A. Froment, *L'espionnage militaire et le service de renseignement en France et à l'étranger*, Paris, F. Juven éditeur, 1887, p. 194.

Seduction was the spies' greatest weapon in the minds of their superiors: they attached themselves to enemy officers, if possible one of high rank, in order to deceive them; the case of Emma Stubert, a spy of Viennese origin in the service of France, is a perfect illustration of this<sup>20</sup>. The use of prostitutes was even commonplace to get soldiers to talk on their pillows, an exercise made all the easier by the fact that in the minds of SR leaders - including Captain Georges Ladoux - "in a woman, falseness is one with caprice, coquetry, cunning and seduction"<sup>21</sup>.

### *Captain Ladoux and women*

Captain Georges Ladoux was appointed head of the *Section de centralisation des renseignements* (Centralisation of Intelligence Section) (SCR), created in May 1915 and integrated, in December of the same year, into the 5<sup>th</sup> bureau of the EMA, known as the "information and propaganda bureau". In 1917, he also commanded the *Section de Renseignement* (Intelligence Section) (SR) of the EMA's 2<sup>nd</sup> bureau for a few weeks. In other words, this key figure in France's secret war enlisted and managed spies throughout the war. And yet, he seems to have fulfilled his mission in keeping with his highly misogynistic vision of female espionage.

In his post-war writings, Ladoux admits, without denying it, that he asked his spies to rely solely on seduction. The first mission he entrusted to Marthe Richer was to sleep with German officers at the Hotel *Continental* in San Sebastian; the second was to seduce Major von Krohn, the German naval attaché in Madrid. Two missions of a similar nature, in a strange register, that of the "patriotic prostitution" missions, but they betrayed Ladoux's preconceived notions of female espionage.

Indeed, during the World War, his female spies were literally ordered to "throw themselves into the arms of enemy agents", to spy on their doings and even read their mail when they became intimate with their prey."<sup>22</sup>, he writes. Worse still, in Ladoux's mind, the female spy could only be "perverse", in the sense that she imagines her only chance of success lies in the use of her sensuality (or even unbridled sexuality).

So, when Marthe Richer offers to rob von Krohn's safe, where

"There's a photograph of all the spies in Spain, markers for submarine supply points in both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, places where mines are laid, the code of encrypted telegrams, the names of Germanophile Spaniards working for Germany."

<sup>20</sup> R. Boucard, *Les femmes et l'espionnage*, Paris, éditions de France, 1929, pp. 66-80.

<sup>21</sup> F. Carco, *Confidences du Ltn de Barrère, officier de renseignements; Blümelein 35*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1937, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> G. Ladoux and M. Berger, *Mes souvenirs, contre-espionnage*, Paris, Éd. de France, 1937, p. 178f.



Ladoux barely listens. The spy is surprised and begins to doubt her interlocutor's thoughts.

"There was a certain irony in the captain's smile. I didn't sense the enthusiasm I was hoping for. He didn't seem overly interested in my big coup. Why didn't he tell me?"<sup>23</sup>.

In fact, the notion that a woman must use her charms to win hearts and then engage in espionage seems to have been widely accepted in intelligence circles at the time. Indeed, this is also true of cases involving female spies not working under Ladoux's orders.

Mathilde Lebrun - recruited this time by Lieutenant-Colonel Zopff - admits, after having carried out the same style of mission as Marthe Richer:

"One can be intelligent, a man of the world... One can occupy the position of head of the (German) SR in Metz... and let oneself be deceived by a woman. There are so many men who don't wait until they have so many titles to fall into the same error"<sup>24</sup>.

During the war, female spies weren't shocked by using their bodies to obtain information; some even relished their cunning. Marthe Richer, for example, declares to Krohn after seducing him:

"What will become of you, Hans, if we fight here too? We'll be separated. I'll be very unhappy" (but thinking inwardly) [...] "These words reassure him. His face becomes serene again. Really, he thinks I love him! And yet he's far from stupid, but he's blinded by passion"<sup>25</sup>.

All things considered; the female agents don't seem surprised by the kind of role they're being asked to play... And when, many years later, these women write their memoirs, they're still not bothered.

Another example is Marthe Bouesse, a Parisian prostitute recruited by the German espionage service before the First World War; at the time, her mission was to obtain military intelligence from her clients, if possible, engineering and artillery officers. Spotted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> French office, the latter obtained - by threat - to make her work for them. Thanks to the information she divulged, some fifteen enemy agents were arrested in August 1914. She was then sent to Bordeaux, where she spotted three German spies posing as Spaniards.

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<sup>23</sup> M. Richard, *Mon destin de femme*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1974, p. 253.

<sup>24</sup> M. Lebrun, *Mes treize missions*, Paris, Fayard, 1920, p. 165.

<sup>25</sup> M. Richard, *op. cit.* p. 174.

Unfortunately, she began to pass on false information, proof that the Germans had hired her again; her former lover had indeed convinced her to work for the German SR post in Madrid. This time she was arrested by the French CE, then shot in September 1916<sup>26</sup>.

However, it must be said that the First World War was a real turning point, in the sense that - both in France and abroad - great and noble figures of female espionage appeared; The Frenchwomen Louise de Bettignies and Marie-Léonie Vanhoutte<sup>27</sup>, the Belgian Gabrielle Petit, the Englishwoman Edith Cavell - organizer of an escape and intelligence network bound for England - and her French companion Louise Thuliez<sup>28</sup>, and the British woman Marthe Mc Kenna distinguished themselves like their male counterparts. Unmasked, they were sometimes shot by German firing squads. Each of them helped to show that a female spy doesn't always use her carnal lure to carry out her missions; just like a male spy, a female spy can rely on her intellect to succeed. But R.W. Rowan, a fairly misogynistic British author, persists in thinking that their intelligence, while undeniable, is merely a mixture of cynicism, greed and unscrupulousness (*sic.*) ...<sup>29</sup>

Although the policy of recruiting agents changed in the wake of pressing events, it would seem that few women accepted to serve in the French intelligence services in the end. Perhaps this was because they were afraid of the role they would be expected to play. Ladoux confessed to Marthe Richard in June 1916:

"You are the first woman I have employed in my department [...]; a young woman like you has persuasive and infallible means of waging war"<sup>30</sup>.

Joseph Crozier, an agent specializing in economic intelligence, also confirms the low number of female spies among the French; but he hastens to point out that, for his part, he has employed in Holland "only remarkable subjects", i.e., only women capable of using their heads<sup>31</sup>.

In fact, there seems to be two opposing conceptions in terms of the "selection criteria" for agents of the *weaker sex* depending on whether you're in the 2<sup>nd</sup> office of the *Grand Quartier Général* (Major General Headquarters) (GQG) or the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> offices of the EMA.

<sup>26</sup> Cdt Gusthal, *op. cit.* pp. 44-47.

<sup>27</sup> A. Redier, *La guerre des femmes, histoire de Louise de Bettignies et de ses compagnes*, Paris, éditions de la Vraie France, 1924.

<sup>28</sup> E. Massard, *op. cit.* p. 93; L. Thuliez, "Condamnée à mort par les Allemands; récit d'une compagne de Miss Cavell", *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, p. 648s (April 1919) and J. Crozier, *En mission chez l'ennemi, 1915-1918*, Paris, A. Redier, 1930, p. 146.

<sup>29</sup> R.W. Rowan, *op. cit.* p. 88.

<sup>30</sup> M. Richard, *op. cit.* p. 116.

<sup>31</sup> J. Crozier, *op. cit.* p. 250.

Captain Lacaze, head of an information service in Switzerland reporting to the GQG, admits to having deliberately excluded women, even condemning Ladoux's line of conduct in the matter:

"Women can be of great service in counterespionage, provided they are carefully supervised, but they are of little value in espionage proper. As for me, I had to give up hiring them altogether [...]. The only people we could find among the French women, and even among the Alsatians, were those who had neither education nor training, and who came from a background where disinterestedness was an empty word. Recruiting spies from the world of low gallantry, as some of our internal services did, is a matter of urgency, sometimes more dangerous for the person using them than for the enemy"<sup>32</sup>.

*Ultimately a question of pragmatism on the French side?*

In Paris, the origin and motivations of female recruits seem to be less scrutinized than in the SR posts reporting to the GQG; Ladoux is always very pragmatic when it comes to recruiting his agents, whatever their sex. Why should a female spy perform less well than her male counterpart? The head of the SCR knows that 30% of the Belgian resistance fighters who pass on information on the German army to the *Intelligence Service* are women: why should the French shun these recruits and persist - in a totally irrational way - in being choosy?

Yet, as with every Ladoux decision, he showed no hesitation. Thus, "alongside professional spies, [and] women of the world, artists were [...] recruited"<sup>33</sup>, some of whom, against all expectations, produced highly satisfactory results. Indeed, the artists of the day, especially those in the *music hall*, could more easily become spies; they were "quicker into the limelight and (were) more affordable than (other) women"<sup>34</sup>. This is how the famous Mistinguett found herself employed by the EMA's 2<sup>nd</sup> office between 1914 and 1918, as Malvy revealed during his trial at the High Court<sup>35</sup>. At the end of 1914, she contacted Gamelin, then Joffre's military chief of staff, to offer her services, boasting that she was on good terms with the Prince of Hohenlohe, who insisted on seeing her in Switzerland. She offered to collect information on a pro bono basis, which the French General Staff was keen to accept. She also brought back from her escapade the summary of some surprise conversations in a Swiss hotel. On several subsequent occasions, Mistinguett passed on information brought back from Switzerland, "in the field of questions of people"<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> L. Lacaze, *Aventures d'un agent secret français, 1914-1918*, Paris, Payot, 1934, p. 156.

<sup>33</sup> Cdt Gusthal, *op. cit.* p. 41.

<sup>34</sup> P. Ignatieff, *op. cit.* p. 96.

<sup>35</sup> E. Massard, *op. cit.* p. 179.

Returning to France after a tour, she also exonerated a French journalist suspected of having been bought by the Germans, and then helped confound a banker engaged in espionage. In 1916, she undertook a third mission abroad on behalf of the Section de centralisation des renseignements. She travels to Spain to "find out about the direction of Spanish policy", particularly with regard to Morocco. This was made all the easier by her personal acquaintance with Alfonso XIII<sup>37</sup>. In 1918, thanks to her connections, she succeeded in securing the release of Maurice Chevalier, then a prisoner of war. In June of the same year, she steered the GQG's SR towards the possible axis of a future German offensive: Champagne<sup>38</sup>. Although she was a star performer at the *Casino de Paris*, where she earned 2,000 francs per performance by showing off her legs, it seems to be a fact that Mistinguett distinguished herself by rendering great services to French espionage.

Despite this, it must be admitted that Ladoux took risks when recruiting from the underworld. In his memoirs, Maunoury - former chief of staff to the Paris police prefect - cites the example of an alleged Italian princess, listed in 1913 as "working for a foreign power", however, in 1915, the SCR's chief of staff hired her on the sole grounds that she was already

"in talks with the Intelligence Service [...]. In a triumphant tone, Ladoux announced that he had unearthed a first-rate agent, a woman full of seduction, very intelligent, in short, all the qualities; (but at the mention of her name), I could only laugh out loud and *immediately* give him the *curriculum vitae* of this adventuress whom I knew in detail".

She soon proved to be a nuisance, and - despite knowing a notorious Senator from the Seine and a former French Foreign Minister - the pseudo-princess had to be interned in a camp in Italy.

"As soon as she was released, she went to Switzerland to join the Austrian spy service"<sup>39</sup>.

The testimony of some agents concurs:

"Commandant Ladoux's departments should have been more wary [...] : to recruit auxiliaries from among crooked stockbrokers, underworld businessmen, girls and pimps, in a word to disregard honor, even for the exercise of this generally despised profession, is to expose oneself to serious misfortune [...] (among those who employ double agents), one of the two is inevitably badly served and betrayed: it is the one who pays the least "<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> SHD/GR /Centre de documentation: "*Témoignage du Général Gamelin, à propos du rôle joué par Mistinguett pendant la Première Guerre mondiale*" (January 6, 1956).

<sup>37</sup> E. Massard, *op. cit.* p. 179-187; C. Defrasne, article on the artist, *Historama spécial*, n° 3, 1998, p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> SHD/GR /Centre de documentation, *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> H. Maunoury, *Police de guerre*, Paris, Bib. d'hist. pol. mil. et nav., 1937, p. 67-68.

<sup>40</sup> L. Lacaze, *op. cit.* p. 178.

And yet, like the true spy professional he claims to be, Ladoux - "bearded, jovial, with a cigarette in his mouth, eyes sparkling with mischief, wit and something else that searches and skins you without your permission"<sup>41</sup> - poses as an agent recruitment specialist, yet he's not particular about the candidates' motivations, or even their intellectual level. In so doing, he shows himself to be imprudent, because

"intelligence is all the more valuable when it is given by people who are more intelligent and better educated, (and we) will therefore leave no stone unturned to find spies who can understand everything, guess everything, know everything "<sup>42</sup>.

Ladoux, on the other hand, is a fine psychologist, adapting his recruiting sergeant's speech to the situation at hand.

"Suddenly, the captain (Ladoux) tells me straight out, as a straightforward man, his face transformed by a sinister calm [...]: "I know... a lot of things, that's our job. We don't have to worry about you, but you must help us "<sup>43</sup>.

In *retrospect*, Ladoux was no more imprudent than others; for, as Marthe Richard points out, at the time

"In none of the belligerent countries was there any lengthy investigation of informers. Leaders improvised, taking risks, relying more on their intuition than on studying the background of those they recruited. This improvisation could be fortunate. It could also send innocent people mistaken for traitors to the Caponnière de Vincennes, and that's what happened "<sup>44</sup>.

Ladoux is never short of arguments to convince the most reluctant "to take the first step"; one could even say that the captain wields rhetoric with eloquence; witness this inspired monologue, reported by one of his former agents:

"Do you know what harm enemy intelligence agents can do by going behind the backs of our front-line fighters? We have to fight them at all costs. It's a battle just like at the front, but tougher, more tenacious, more terrible, where all weapons are good, and anything goes. Would you like to be our soldier? Do you want to help us? [...]. Answer me calmly. Do we have to defend our soldiers at the front against the enemy's agents who give their headquarters information on our weak points at the front, on the number of our troops, their movements, their weapons? I hope you can imagine what the enemy's high command can gain from all this precious information. Are you there? What about the factories working for the army, and the bridges they blow up to prevent supplies? What about the defeatist propaganda they spread in the rear

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<sup>41</sup> J. Violan, *Dans l'air et dans la boue ; mes missions de guerre*, Paris, Libr. des Champs-Élysées, 1933, p. 214.

<sup>42</sup> General Bugeaux, in J. Violle, *op. cit.* p. 101.

<sup>43</sup> M. Richard, *op. cit.* p. 120.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133. The Vincennes caponier was used to execute enemy spies captured in the entrenched Paris camp.

to demoralize the civilian population and exasperate the hearts of those fighting at the front? Do we have to defend our brothers at the front so we don't stab them in the back? Yes? Do we? What's up? Backstabbing? The word is inaccurate. You mean snitching. Is that dirty? Or is it the duty of every citizen in the present circumstances? [...] You see the confidence I have in you? If honest people do not accept these missions of trust, and it is under the armful influence of stupid prejudices of misinterpreted honor, that I will have to hire anyone, people without confession, without morality and capable of betraying us? Look at the Germans, look at the English, do they have such ridiculous ideas when it comes to defending their race, their homeland, their lives or their freedom? [...]. Come on, you'll be more than capable! Do we agree? Your hand!"<sup>45</sup>.

But Ladoux had other strings to his bow... When he tried to convince Marthe Richer of the validity of the infamous methods he wanted her to employ, he offered her, out of spite, 25,000 francs for each enemy spy she brought down. "Why did this captain accompany his proposal with barely disguised threats?" she asks herself inwardly<sup>46</sup>.

Indeed, Ladoux also knows how to frighten when he senses that a prey can escape him; this was the case, for example, in August 1917, when he insisted that Marthe Richer return to Spain once again to "sleep in Krohn's bed out of patriotism":

"This time (she recounts) Ladoux is furious. He walks up and down, towards and away from me as if in some kind of incantation: "It's too late to back out. You have come freely to our department... Whether you go about it one way or another, your duty is to succeed, for you have in your hand unhelpful assets [...]. If you stay here after associating with these Germans, I'm obliged to protect the department and lock you up" [...] (and as Marthe Richer doesn't get scared and even shouts louder than her superior, the latter suddenly changes his attitude): "Come on, calm down... If you can't get anything from the Baron, you'll at least be able to unmask the spies he's sending in France"<sup>47</sup>.

And indeed, Marthe Richard (codename *L'Alouette*) was to render proud services to French espionage, albeit without any recognition from her boss. It's worth noting that in 1929, when Ladoux decided to devote a highly novelistic book to the spy, she contacted him and suggested that he give it the title "Marthe Richard"; but "Ladoux overlooked it", she laments in her recollections, preferring the more bombastic "Marthe Richard, spy in the service of France".

Worse still, it seems he didn't always play fair with her. Also in 1929, when former lieutenant Jean Hallaure - assigned to the 5e bureau in December 1915 - was in the presence of Marthe Richard and Commandant Ladoux, he made a careless mistake that could reveal the true personality of his former superior.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215-217.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 107-108.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 135-136.

Happy to see the former spy again, Hallaure blurts out: "Marthe, you've really escaped...". Furious, Ladoux interjects, chastising his former subordinate and adding: "Please, give me your word of honor that you'll never reveal what you had to say", then diverts the conversation<sup>48</sup>.

In fact, throughout his career, Ladoux never hesitated to twist the truth to his own advantage; in his book about the spy, for example, he explains that he helped her fully when she was on mission, whereas in her own memoirs, the spy herself constantly insists that she was completely on her own. More often than not, then, it seems that Ladoux - out of disinterest in the fate of his agents, phallocracy, or simply lack of means - invested no effort in facilitating the execution of the missions he entrusted: he was content to reap the benefits and laurels of the intelligence gathered<sup>49</sup>. Marthe Richard writes:

"The lack of organization in the French services makes me despair [...], and I remember with bitterness Captain Ladoux's words when he hired me: "The D. system is a French invention, you'll always manage "<sup>50</sup>.

Things went even further. When, in the wake of the automobile accident that put an end to Marthe Richard's work in Spain, Léon Daudet wrote an article in his newspaper *L'Action Française* that was terrible for his reputation, entitled "*L'espionnage en auto: Krohn et Mme Richer*" ("Spying in a car: Krohn and Madame Richer"), his superior did nothing. The agent, feeling abandoned, despaired:

"Captain Ladoux's department did not intervene, and the campaign continued. In the East, in the region where I was born, the newspapers are seizing on the scandal and showering me with insults. The name of my husband, Richer, is dragged through the mud [...]; Ladoux has sent an officer to my father to reassure him and tell him not to worry about me, that I'm in Spain on a mission for France. I'm a spy and I have to bear the consequences. The 5<sup>th</sup> office, after our accident, doesn't care at all about us. Is that a rule?"<sup>51</sup>.

What if, indeed, this was a "rule" within the French intelligence services? The same bitterness can be found in Mathilde Lebrun's recollections:

"Those who sent me to Metz didn't bother with vain considerations. They told me: 'You'll tell this...that'; but...this...that... Where had I learned it? 'You're on your own', I was told. It wasn't just our soldiers who had to apply the famous system D..."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 289.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 174.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 239-240, 289.

<sup>52</sup> M. Lebrun, *op. cit.* p. 270.

Although she had already been promised the Legion of Honor after three missions to Metz, the spy still received nothing after the thirteenth, organized for Captain Ladoux's benefit. She protested to him. He simply replied: "We'll have to take steps; "What do you mean?" she asks, surprised. "Of course," he says sarcastically. And when, a little later, she began to despair of ever getting anything done, Ladoux told her: "Your bosses can help you. It's up to them to say what you've done, to emphasize the usefulness of the information you've gathered". The spy is far from fooled:

"The information the agents brought in was anonymous. We gave it to our boss. From then on, they became his information. The chief profited from it, and sometimes took pride in it. And us? We left "<sup>53</sup>.

It is a fact that

"the spy, whether of low or high status, whether acting out of natural perfidy or coercion, is known to his superiors only by the value of his work "<sup>54</sup>;

The latter are then free to reward him or not...In 1920, Mathilde Lebrun had her book of indictments prefaced by Léon Daudet, who was publicly outraged by this situation of injustice and indignity.

In the archives of the Ministry of War, there is no trace of any application for the award of the Military Medal. The award, signed during the war by an intelligence official, was "*for services rendered*" in favor of a female spy. Only one woman (a telephone operator) received this prestigious award during the entire Great War. At most, we come across archived requests for "*letters of congratulation*" for agents, which is - in truth - a very meagre reward, given the risks involved.

It was not until the inter-war years that a handful of female spies, such as Marthe Richard, were officially rewarded for their efforts; in social terms, however, women had to wait until 1945 before gaining the right to vote...

**Olivier Lahaie**

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 273.

<sup>54</sup> R. W. Rowan, *op. cit.* p. 44



# A "women's war"?

## Women's involvement in intelligence networks in occupied Belgium and France

Prof. Emmanuel Debruyne  
Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium)

### ABSTRACT

The recognition of the role of women in the development of intelligence services during the two world wars owes much to the work of the American historian Tammy Proctor, who highlighted the importance of networks partly composed (and sometimes directed) by women (Louise de Bettignies, Gabrielle Petit, Rosa de Fauw, etc.) from the First World War onwards, notably through the study of the Dame Blanche network. This particular network is not, however, representative of the general contribution of women within the intelligence services during the Great War. This article therefore proposes to return to this analysis in order to complete it with an exhaustive study of all the intelligence networks that operated on behalf of the Allies in the territories occupied by Germany during WWI.

**Key words:** Great War - Intelligence networks - Female spies - Sexism - Gender stereotypes - Archives

The figure of the sexy, Mata-Hari-like female spy, working for a professional, male intelligence officer, emerged during the Great War, and has endured throughout the 20th century. American historian Tammy Proctor has shown that, far from this fantasized image, women made a major contribution to the development and professionalization of the secret services during the First World War, both as agents in the field and as employees, and to a lesser extent as managers or case officers<sup>1</sup>. In 2003, Proctor was the first to attempt a real social and cultural history of women in intelligence, whereas up until then, works on the subject had mainly focused on a few individual trajectories<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Tammy Proctor, *Female Intelligence. Women and Espionage in the First World War*, New York-London, New York University Press, 2003, pp. 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pierre Ronvaux, *Gabrielle Petit, la mort en face*, Izezem, Illustra, 1984; or Jean-Marc Binot, *Les Héroïnes de la Grande Guerre*, Paris, Fayard, 2008.

As she points out, these studies may have unwittingly helped to reinforce the image that only a few exceptional women were active in intelligence. We might also add that one of their characteristics was to appear as particularly emancipated figures, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century whose patriarchal character still strongly marked the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>. This trait undoubtedly contributed to the fascination with these figures.

Proctor's transnational study clearly shows that women did not wait until the Second World War to serve in intelligence, particularly in occupied countries. And that both their profile and their methods are far removed from those of the seductive spy incarnated by Mata Hari<sup>3</sup>. Focusing in particular on the networks operating in occupied Belgium, Proctor has studied the case of the women in the Dame Blanche, undoubtedly the best-known network of the Great War<sup>4</sup>. In her view, this conflict offered them the opportunity to actively serve their homeland in an occupied country, by taking part in clandestine activities that we'll refer to as "resistance" during the Second World War<sup>5</sup>. The memory of the latter would have evaporated fairly quickly, however, insofar as it did not coincide with the civilian/military and front/back distinctions that had long dominated representations and that easily fitted into the traditional vision of the gendered division of roles in wartime. The weakness of Tammy Proctor's excellent analysis, however, lies in the fact that it is based essentially on a rather atypical case: the White Lady. This was one of the few networks of the Great War not to have been dismantled, and it was able to draw on the support of a thousand agents, a number far out of proportion to those of its counterparts, who often numbered only a few dozen. The White Lady also stood out for some of its practices, such as imposing an oath on its members, or for its recruitment from circles with a very marked Catholic character. From this point of view, we may well ask whether the place of women and gender relations within the organization can, on their own, sum up the investment of women in intelligence. All the more so as a certain memory of this female commitment has nevertheless survived and, based essentially on a few famous and often tragic female figures such as the Frenchwoman Louise de Bettignies, has fostered the image of an early, essentially female "resistance". In a way, this was a "women's war"<sup>6</sup>, the counterpart in occupied countries to the war waged by men at the front.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Léon Schirmann, *Mata Hari. Autopsie d'une machination*, Paris, Italiques, 2001. For a more recent assessment, cf. Gérald Arboit, "Mata Hari. Un escroc au renseignement", in Christophe Vuilleumier (ed.), *Le renseignement dans les pays neutres*, Genève, Slatkine, 2021 (coll. *Ares*, 5), pp. 86-105.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Decock, *La Dame Blanche. Un réseau de renseignements de la Grande Guerre*, s.l., Lulu, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> On the application of this concept to the First World War, see Emmanuel Debruyne, "Combattre l'occupant en Belgique et dans les départements français occupés. 1914-1918. Une 'résistance avant la lettre'?", in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, n°115, June-September 2012, p.15-30.

<sup>6</sup> To use Antoine Redier's title, *La guerre des femmes. Histoire de Louise de Bettignies et de ses compagnes*, Paris, Éd. Vraie France, 1938.

This article is not intended to tackle the question of women's place in the construction of the "Resistance" memory in the aftermath of the conflict, nor its subsequent evolution<sup>7</sup>. Rather, it aims to take a fresh look at women's involvement in intelligence work on behalf of the Allies in the German-occupied territories behind the Western Front, not by focusing on a few specific figures or networks, but by taking into account all the intelligence organizations that operated there. To do this, we will draw on a database which was set up in 2007, and which lists and characterizes all the people who worked in these intelligence networks in the zone under consideration. This database was compiled mainly from the very rich holdings of the *Commission des Archives des Services patriotiques établis en Territoire occupé au Front l'Ouest* (Archives Commission for Patriotic Services in the Western Front Occupied Territory)<sup>8</sup>. This organization, created in 1919 by former "resistance fighters" and sponsored by the Belgian government, endeavored to gather documentation and testimonies on the clandestine groups that opposed the German occupiers during the Great War, both in Belgium and in France. This documentary collection was systematically searched for intelligence networks, and its information was supplemented by numerous publications and various other Belgian, French, British and German collections.

We will therefore examine this phenomenon from a very broad documentary base. First, we'll look at the size of the female workforce, before differentiating between those who actually led a network, and those who made up the mass of "rank outsiders". In order to better understand the specificities of intelligence as a women's mode of resistance action, we will then briefly evoke gender relations in other forms of clandestine struggle, and finally examine the repression to which these women were exposed.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Alison Fell, Emmanuel Debruyne, "Model martyrs. Remembering First-World-War Resistance Heroines in Belgium and France", in Peter Tame, Dominique Jeannerod, Manuel Bragança (eds.), *Mnemosyne and Mars: Artistic and Cultural Representations of Twentieth-century Europe at war*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 145-165.

<sup>8</sup> This collection is kept in Brussels at the Archives générales du Royaume (AGR) under the name *Archives de la Guerre. Commission des Archives des Services Patriotiques établis en Territoire occupé au Front de l'Ouest* (ASP).

*A minority but omnipresent*

In the 19th century, men occupied the public sphere, while women were relegated to the domestic sphere. Generally speaking, war tends to reinforce gender assignments, but over time it also redistributes the cards, at least temporarily<sup>9</sup>. Intelligence work is perhaps better suited than other wartime activities to enabling women to break away from the tasks traditionally assigned to them, which can be significantly extended in wartime. Indeed, its secretive nature ensures that, in principle, it does not publicly upset gender balances, while at the same time allowing them to be transgressed. This secrecy is relative, however, insofar as the repression offered unexpected publicity to this female involvement, a presence in the public sphere that was to be prolonged by the memory of the war. To understand how women were involved in intelligence work in occupied countries, and the risks they ran in doing so, it is important to understand how allied espionage developed.

The intelligence networks that developed on behalf of the Allies in occupied France and Belgium were numerous but did not form a unified whole<sup>10</sup>. They could operate on behalf of French, Belgian or British intelligence, all of whom had set up offices in the neutral Netherlands<sup>11</sup>, from where they provided links with the occupied regions, as these could not be established across the front line. Despite the establishment of an inter-allied office in Folkestone, where most of the intelligence gathered at the rear of the German front was channeled via the Netherlands, cooperation between Allied secret services remained very limited and was generally confined to the exchange of information. When it came to setting up and managing networks in occupied countries, competition was the order of the day, even between British organizations. At the start of the conflict, the number of networks created by the various players multiplied, but German counterespionage dismantled an increasing number of them from 1915 onwards. This process led to the gradual disinvestment of the Belgian and French services, as well as certain British organizations, with the result that in 1918, the *Secret Service* - or MI1(c) - gained hegemony in the field, benefiting from better funding and can rely on reliable, efficient networks, with the White Lady at the forefront.

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<sup>9</sup> On women in the Great War, cf. Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, London, Routledge, 2002; Françoise Thébaut *Les femmes au temps de la guerre de 14*, Paris, Payot, 2013. Cf. general work *Women in WW1*; or Christa Hämmerle, Birgitta Bader-Zaar and Oswald Überegger (eds.), *Gender and the First World War*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> For an initial overview of these networks, see Laurence van Ypersele and Emmanuel Debruyne, *De la guerre de l'ombre aux ombres de la guerre. L'espionnage en Belgique durant la guerre 1914-1918. Histoire et mémoire*, Brussels, Labor, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Élise Rezsöhazy and Emmanuel Debruyne, "Des territoires occupés aux Pays-Bas neutres: extension du domaine de la lutte clandestin", in Christophe Vuilleumier, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-132.

The space in which these networks operate is neither unified nor open: on the contrary, it is bordered and crisscrossed by dividing lines which, superimposed on natural morphology and political divisions, impose severe constraints on clandestine action. The first of these is the front line: by October 1914, it had become impassable by land. Nevertheless, it was bypassed on several occasions by air, in random and perilous attempts by plane or balloon to make contact with occupied forces and solicit information from them, notably by carrier pigeons. The second of these lines was the Dutch-Belgian border, which in the early months of the conflict was the scene of an unstoppable flow of people, objects and information between the invaded countries and the island of neutrality constituted by the Netherlands, a springboard to the rest of the world and more particularly to the Entente powers. In 1915, in an attempt to stem the flow of dangerous traffic, Germany erected a fence along the Dutch-Belgian border, with a lethal voltage and strict surveillance. Until the end of the conflict, crossing the fence remained one of the main challenges for networks established in occupied countries. Cutting the occupied regions in two, a third line runs between the first two. This is the boundary between the *Operations- und Etappengebiet* (Operation and stage area), a region covering the rear of the frontline for several dozen kilometers, and the *Okkupationsgebiet* (Occupation area). The former was under the direct control of the German armies, and covered almost all of the occupied French departments, western Belgium and the extreme south of its territory<sup>12</sup>. The latter, on the other hand, was under the control of the Government-General, a German occupation regime based in Brussels. This is where the vast majority of intelligence networks in occupied countries operate. Military intelligence was no more crucial there than behind the front line, but the concentration of German troops and the drastic measures taken in the *Operations- und Etappengebiet* made it particularly difficult to set up networks. The Allies strove to develop their networks in this area right up to the end, but it was in the territory of the Government-General that they were ultimately most successful, particularly in monitoring military convoys enabling the redeployment of German divisions along the front or from one front to another. A final dividing line separates the *Operations-und Etappengebiet* from the *Marinegebiet* (Naval Region), which covers the Belgian coastal zone and its hinterland as far as Bruges.

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<sup>12</sup> On the occupation of France and Belgium, see Annette Becker, *Les cicatrices rouges. France et Belgique occupées. 1914-1918*, Paris, Fayard, 2010; Sophie De Schaepdrijver, *Belgium and the First World War*, Brussels, PIE-Peter Lang, 2004; Philippe Nivet, *La France occupée. 1914-1918*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011; James E. Connolly, *The experience of occupation in the Nord, 1914-18. Living with the enemy in First World War France*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2018.

If we consider the four years of occupation and all the occupied territories and clandestine organizations active in intelligence (with at least three registered members), we count 224 networks, often of small size. If we restrict our definition to organizations with at least 10 members, we still count 147, 11 of which are large (i.e., 100 agents or more). What is the role of women in this range of clandestine intelligence organizations? Whatever the size criterion used, it has to be said that women are virtually omnipresent: only 18 of these networks are all-male, and even these are almost exclusively tiny organizations: only four of them have 10 or more agents<sup>13</sup>. All the other networks are mixed, in varying proportions, the only purely female group being the tiny Severyns women's network, made up of 4 women, 3 of them from the same family<sup>14</sup>.

While over 90% of networks are indeed mixed, this does not mean that women are represented in the same proportions as men. In all, we count 1,772 women out of a total of 6,415 agents, or 27.6% of the total workforce of 15 intelligence networks. This proportion varies slightly from region to region, but the differences are not particularly significant. Similarly, while the French departments are more deprived of part of their male population than the Belgian provinces, due to more extensive mobilization for military service, this imbalance is scarcely reflected within the networks, which are no more feminized in France than in Belgium.

While geography has little influence on this distribution, it varies considerably from one network to another. However, it does not depend on their size, as tiny networks (3 to 9 agents) have an average proportion of female agents of 31%, barely higher than that of intermediate-sized structures (27%) or those with over 100 agents (28%). Among the latter, the two largest networks, La Dame Blanche and Biscops, include 29 and 25% women respectively, while the most feminized is M.82, also linked to the British, with 39%. Generally speaking, the trend suggested by these eleven large networks is that the later a network is founded, the greater the place given to women, as if the trust placed in women had grown with experience. Nonetheless, there is a category of networks in which the proportion of women is significantly more important than elsewhere: those that are themselves headed by a woman, such as Ramble, Louise de Bettignies' network.

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<sup>13</sup> The largest of these all-male networks, called Clé de Sol, was not a perfect success: it had just 18 members and, above all, was headed by the ambiguous Léopold Wartel, an accomplished master of double-dealing, serving both French military intelligence and German counter-espionage. Élise Rezsöhazy, "Entre vraisemblables et faux-semblants : Léopold Wartel, agent for German counter-espionage in occupied Belgium during the First World War", in *14-18. La Grande Guerre à Mons et dans sa région*, by Pierre-Jean Niebes (Waterloo: Avant-Propos, 2015), 165-85. Cf. AGR, ASP, 2853-2855.

<sup>14</sup> On this small network, see AGR, ASP, 872.

<sup>15</sup> These also include 49 individuals whose gender could not be determined.

On average, women account for 39% of agents. However, these networks are very much in the minority, as the cadres of underground organizations are overwhelmingly male. Although few in number, women network leaders are by no means negligible, and it's important to understand who they are.

### *At the head of a network*

In all, 24 of the 224 networks were headed by a woman, i.e., just over one in ten. Admittedly, in five of these cases, the female leader replaced a male comrade, but the fact remains that in the vast majority of cases, the female leader is also the founder of the network, and generally remains at the head of the organization until it is dismantled. It should be noted, however, that half of these cases of female leadership concern intermediate-sized networks, the remainder being very small groups with fewer than 10 agents; none of the 11 largest networks was at any time in its existence headed by a woman.

The Frenchwoman Louise de Bettignies<sup>16</sup> and the Belgian Gabrielle Petit<sup>17</sup> are the best-known incarnations of these women called upon to lead such structures, and in a way their cases suggest the similarities and diversity found in the profiles of these network founders. The first trend is that most of these leaders were refugees or escapees from the occupied zone, recruited in the Netherlands, England, or France by representatives of the various Allied secret services, then sent to the occupied country to establish a new network. This was the case for Louise de Bettignies in March 1915, on behalf of the British Cameron organization, and for Gabrielle Petit the following July for a competing British structure, the Wallinger organization, which also depended on the British *Great Headquarter*. For the most part, the women sent on these missions had no experience of secret warfare, even though some, like Louise de Bettignies, had already committed a few patriotic and transgressive acts against the occupying order, such as smuggling mail across the border. However, they received very short training from their employers, focusing mainly on identifying enemy units and equipment, as well as some basic techniques for preparing and transmitting reports. On the whole, this *modus operandi* is not very different from that which applies to their male counterparts who are sent home to set up a network.

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<sup>16</sup> On the subject of Louise de Bettignies, we refer in general to Chantal Antier, *Louise de Bettignies. Espionne et héroïne de la Grande Guerre*, Paris, Tallandier, 2013. Cf. Chantal Antier in this issue.

<sup>17</sup> On Gabrielle Petit, cf. Sophie De Schaepdrijver, *Gabrielle Petit. The Death and Life of a Female Spy in the First World War*, London-New York, Bloomsbury, 2015.

Each case is unique, however, as illustrated by the case of Madeleine Doutreligne, whose recruitment cannot be dissociated from the circumstances that led to her move to the Netherlands<sup>18</sup>. Madeleine was the sister of Marthe Doutreligne, whose lover was Alexandre Franck, one of the first Belgian resistance fighters to be sentenced to death. A commercial traveler, Franck had been recruited by the Wallinger organization and sent to Belgium to set up a network. Arrested after a few weeks' activity, he was executed on September 23, 1915. A few weeks later, Marthe, no longer feeling safe, travels with her sister Madeleine to the Netherlands, where they meet up with Van Tichelen, Wallinger's confidant who had supervised Franck's intelligence activities. Both offer their services to Van Tichelen, no doubt with a view to avenging his loss by continuing his work. Too compromised, Marthe finally stayed in the Netherlands, but Madeleine, her younger sister, was sent back to Belgium by Van Tichelen in December 1915. Centered on Audenaerde (East Flanders), the Doutreligne network grew to a respectable size, with around 62 agents.

The case of Émilie Heuze, née Lahaye, contrasts with the previous ones, in that she did not pass through the Netherlands, nor was she recruited by any Allied service, but on the contrary decided spontaneously and in an occupied country to establish a network<sup>19</sup>. This was no accident, but rather an act of revenge for the arrest of her husband, Armand Heuze, who had been active with her in the Cavell and Willems transit networks. Left alone after her husband's deportation, Émilie put her clandestine experience to good use, surrounding herself with a few agents and gathering intelligence. The Heuze network is said to have established a link with the Netherlands, but it has never been possible to determine where this link led.

With the exception of Émilie Heuze, female network founders were refugees who were new to espionage, but who had been commissioned by the Allied services. They are also distinguished by the fact that they are generally free of family responsibilities, which is far from always being the case for their male counterparts. For example, the five women assigned to the Wallinger organization at different times during the war had in common the fact that they were young - all in their twenties - and single. The cases of Madeleine Doutreligne and Gabrielle Petit, born in 1891 and 1893 respectively, have already been mentioned, but the profiles of Marie Van den Eynde, who founded a very small network in 1917, and Alice Deleye and Alice Fredericy, who did the same in 1918 with the Alice I and II networks, are not very different<sup>20</sup>.

The four women called upon to network for Cameron are a little older (in their thirties), but not necessarily single. Louise de Bettignies, born in 1880, is well known. Rosa De De Fauw, née Van der Auwera, is much less well known, even though she heads the largest network run by a woman<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> On the Doutreligne network, see AGR, *ASP*, 2204-2212.

<sup>19</sup> On the Heuze network, see AGR, *ASP*, 2880.

<sup>20</sup> On these small networks, see AGR, *ASP*, 2320-2322 and 2370-2379.

<sup>21</sup> On the De Fauw network, see AGR, *ASP*, 2072-2075.



Originally from Courtrai, Mrs. De Fauw was recruited in October 1914 in Dunkirk, when she was trying to join her husband who had been mobilized. She met Cameron in Folkestone, who entrusted her to his trusted man in Flushing. The latter organizes her return to Kortrijk, in the zone occupied by the German 4. Army. The De Fauw network soon comprised 70 agents, recruited from various West Flanders locations close to the front. Although slightly larger, the De Fauw network is comparable in many respects to Louise de Bettignies' Ramble network: the former is exclusively Belgian, while the latter is predominantly French, but both are headed by a woman and worked for Cameron during the first year of occupation, in the *Operations- und Etappengebiet*, the German army zone. Both also had plans to establish a wireless link with their employer, but without much success. What's more, both networks came to a halt in the autumn of 1915. The difference between the two networks is, in fact, mainly a matter of memory: while Louise de Bettignies' name has entered the collective memory, Rosa De Fauw's has been completely forgotten. Threatened, De Fauw managed to escape the enemy by going into hiding. In the absence of imprisonment, a death sentence or death at the hands of the enemy, she was not awarded the palm of martyrdom.

The Cameron organization was at the origin of two other groups led by women, both created in January 1917. Their founders, however, were not infiltrated on a mission in an occupied country but recruited on the spot by agents sent for the purpose. Such cases are not exceptional in themselves but are probably a little more common among networks founded by men. The first of these two women, Irma Loucke, created the small De Ridder network in East Flanders, in the immediate vicinity of the border<sup>22</sup>. The case of the second is more original, insofar as she was recruited after a boatman handed her a clandestine letter written by her husband, a Belgian soldier interned in the Netherlands<sup>23</sup>. Approached by a Cameron agent, Auguste De Laet managed to convince his wife, Delphine Tassenoy, to set up a network, and entrusted her with instructions. However, this network, known as Roche, was never able to expand or organize its information gathering with the required rigor, and was dismantled after only a few weeks of activity.

French intelligence, for its part, relies on more mature women. Adrienne Beljean, née Durand, Jeanne Lowyck, widow of de Beir, and Berthe Maes, née Petijean, were born in the 1870s and they had contracted marriage<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> On the De Fauw network, see AGR, *ASP*, 2072-2075.

<sup>22</sup> On the De Ridder network, see AGR, *ASP*, 2045-2048.

<sup>23</sup> On Roche, see AGR, *ASP*, 2011-2014.

<sup>24</sup> On the networks they founded, see AGR, *ASP*, 2670-2673, 2691-2693 and 2758-2763. See also Jeanne de Beir's autobiographical account, *In the Eagle's Claws*, Bruges, Jos de Plancke, 1928.

The first two were sent in 1915 to set up a network in the *Operations- und Etappengebiet*, respectively in the North and in the Bruges region, while the third left in 1916 to do the same in Brabant. None of these networks grew significantly - their respective numbers hovered around fifteen members - and all were dismantled after a few months of activity. The fourth French network, founded by a woman, the young Laure Acar, was even smaller, and suffered a similar fate in 1915 in the Ghent region<sup>25</sup>.

The Tinsley organization, working for the *Secret Service* in the Netherlands, also entrusted several women with the task of setting up networks, but later, in 1916-1917. The two young women sent to East Flanders by the Oram service, working for Tinsley, each setting up a small network: Anna De Vos's tiny M.48, and Angèle Van Houcke's larger M.14<sup>26</sup>. In the province of Liège, two other female network leaders operated for the Frankignoul service, heading the tiny Renette and Heynen networks, headed respectively by the young Marie Sacré and Marie Vandencamp, widow of Heynen<sup>27</sup>. Hunter, Tinsley's third department, refrained from entrusting such missions to female agents.

Belgian intelligence was not much quicker to entrust such responsibilities to women. A notable exception was Louisa d'Havé, aged 20 at the outbreak of war and daughter of a wealthy industrialist from Ghent<sup>28</sup>. Authorized by the occupying authorities to leave Belgian territory, officially to buy textiles in the Netherlands for her father's industry, Louisa embarked at Flushing at the end of 1914 for Folkestone, then Le Havre, where the Belgian government had retreated. After the war, she recounted how she had tried to enlist as a spy for the Belgian War Ministry, so as to take part in the struggle, like her four brothers at the front. The attempt met with little success, but she eventually attracted the attention of Belgian military intelligence. They mistook her for a real spy, but one working for the enemy. Her boss, Joseph Mage, finally saw an opportunity and sent her back to Ghent as agent 40B, with a very specific mission: to convince her father to take advantage of the links he had forged with the occupying authorities to gain their trust and gather intelligence from the top. From the outset, his *modus operandi* was very different from that of the other networks, whose activities focused on observation, preferably of the railways.

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<sup>24</sup> On the networks they founded, see AGR, ASP, 2670-2673, 2691-2693 and 2758-2763. See also Jeanne de Beir's autobiographical account, *In the Eagle's Claws*, Bruges, Jos de Plancke, 1928.

<sup>25</sup> On the Acar network, see AGR, ASP, 2664-2666.

<sup>26</sup> On these two networks, see AGR, ASP, 1664-1671.

<sup>27</sup> On these two networks, see AGR, ASP, 872 and 887.

<sup>28</sup> Martijn Van Laere, *Louisa d'Havé. De Gentse vrouw die waarschuwde voor de eerste Duitse gasaanval*, Gent, Skribis, 2020. Cf. AGR, ASP, 2659-2660.

In addition to the 19 women entrusted with the task of founding an intelligence structure, five others were brought in to head a pre-existing organization. Three of them followed similar paths. Whether Jeanne Charlier for the Beverloo network, Marguerite Pottier for the M.105 Sencier network, or Irma Vermeeren for the tiny M.58 network, all three were young women called upon to replace their fiancé - or at least their good friend - forced to exfiltrate to the Netherlands to avoid arrest<sup>29</sup>. The case of the small Labens network is hardly different: its founder, Alidoor Labens, took refuge in the Netherlands, from where he continued to supervise activities, leaving the reins in the field to his sister, Florine, wife of Wostyn<sup>30</sup>. As for the Cornu network, it was the founder's aunt, Clémence Maes, née Descamps, who replaced him after a few weeks when he too decided to head for the Netherlands<sup>31</sup>. He was arrested on the move with a companion, but the Cornu network continued to operate for a year thanks to his aunt. The similarity of these situations reveals a salient feature of the logic behind succession at the head of a network: when a woman is called upon to succeed a man, it's never the result of improvisation following an unexpected arrest. On the contrary, it's always planned, when the network leader anticipates the danger and, deciding to take cover, entrusts the task of continuing his mission to a woman in his closest circle - in other words, someone he trusts and to whom he has an emotional bond.

### *Subordinates*

These 24 women are all the more remarkable in that they are not representative of the place generally assigned to women in intelligence networks, or even of their average profile. While most of these women leaders are unattached and single - whether due to bachelorhood, widowhood, or war-related circumstances - and therefore enjoy almost complete autonomy in carrying out their activities, the other women, who make up the overwhelming majority of those involved in intelligence in occupied countries, often operate in a subordinate position and within the family framework, not to say in the shadow of a man.

This subordination, even if not systematic, is reflected in the distribution of functions within networks. At all levels (network manager, section manager, etc.), only 3.2% of women hold managerial positions, compared with 10.3% of men. In other words, the shortage of women in management positions is not confined to the heads of organizations, but also extends to all levels of the hierarchy. Once again, one network is not the same as another, and among the largest of these, the situations are very different.

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<sup>29</sup> On these three networks, see AGR, *ASP*, 1403-1411, 1763 and 2096-2100.

<sup>30</sup> On the Labens network, see AGR, *ASP*, 2198-2203.

<sup>31</sup> On the Cornu network, see AGR, *ASP*, 2309-2313.

Whereas at Biscops (the second largest intelligence network), only two of the 27 identified executives are women, eight of the 39 top positions at the White Lady are held by women, a proportion three times higher than at Biscops<sup>32</sup>. Conceived by its initiators as a military unit, the White Lady is structured into three "battalions", each covering a vast geographical area of its own. One might think that the military dimension attributed to the network by its initiators - civilians but men - would have led to a masculinization of the network's recruitment. Not only was this not the case, but Battalion III was itself led by an unmarried teacher, Laure Tandel, assisted by her sister Louise. This unit alone has 190 agents, more than most of the larger intelligence networks, of whom 59 are women (31%)<sup>33</sup>. In itself, this is a high proportion, slightly higher than in the rest of the network, but it also means that, despite everything, the majority of the many agents under the Tandel sisters' responsibility are men. This represents a reversal of traditional gender relations which, while not unique, is nonetheless exceptional on such a scale. After the war, Walthère Dewé, head of the Dame blanche, assumed and even asserted this female presence at all levels, writing in 1919 in his report on the network's activities:

"Women have played a considerable role in our organization. Their intellectual contribution has been absolutely indispensable. They have been involved in all aspects of the life of our Corps; they have occupied the most elevated functions, as well as the most elementary. We have consecrated this situation by placing them indifferently in all posts... by entrusting them with the most delicate and perilous missions."<sup>34</sup>

Extremely cautious - and one of the keys to its success - the network went even further, providing for an all-female reserve leadership: in the event of mass deportation of men from the occupied territories, Juliette Durieu, Thérèse de Radiguès and Laure Tandel would have taken over the reins of the network<sup>35</sup>. Here again, the creation of a female reserve cadre by the White Lady is completely atypical, as most other networks relied on a single, essentially male hierarchy.

Another way of analyzing women's place in networks is to view them no longer as hierarchical structures endowed with executives, but rather from the angle of network theory, and thus to consider them as sets of "links" interconnecting "nodes"<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> On the Biscops network, see AGR, *ASP*, 2015-2025.

<sup>33</sup> Tammy Proctor, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>34</sup> Walthère Dewé, *Notice historique*, s.lnd, p.41, in AGR, *ASP*, 908.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Decock, *op. cit.*, p.86.

<sup>36</sup> On the use of network theory by historians, see Claire Lemerrier, "Analyse de réseaux et Histoire", in *Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2005, n°52/2, p. 88-112.

Such an analysis requires for each network, an extensive documentation, which is unfortunately not always available, and a great deal of time. We have, however, tried our hand at the exercise with one of the eleven major networks, Hernalsteens, which is also the largest French intelligence organization in occupied France<sup>37</sup>. This network has the advantage of being fairly well documented and, with 35 women out of 141 agents, has a gender distribution (25% women) close to that of the networks as a whole (27.6%). With only one woman out of its eleven managers, it is also fairly representative of women's place in the hierarchy. If we reconstruct all the links between the individuals making up this network, the structure obtained can be analyzed in different ways. The "centrality" of each network member can be determined, with a value ranging from 1 for the most central person in the network, in this case its leader, Oscar Hernalsteens, to a value tending towards 0 for the most peripheral individuals, i.e., those with very few links with other network members, often just one with another agent who himself has very few contacts. On this basis, we were able to determine that the average centrality of male network members is 0.11, compared with 0.08 for their female counterparts. In other words, in the web of links that is the Hernalsteens network, women occupy, on average, a more peripheral position. And if we rank the agents in descending order of their centrality, we find only six women out of the thirty-five people making up the top quartile, the first three of whom are respectively the network's secretary and main mailbox operator, the sole section manager, and the network manager's companion. In other words, while women make up a quarter of the network, their proportion drops to a sixth if only the most central people are considered.

At this stage, it's not possible to make comparisons, but the results obtained on this network, which don't seem to stand out from its peers in terms of the place occupied by women, show a tendency towards their subalternation. To understand this, we need to take a closer look at their profile. In this respect, civil status is the first element to be grasped, as it played such a key role in gender relations at the time, for women far more than for men, by legally restricting their abilities and defining - in interaction with other variables such as class - their place in society. Unfortunately, their marital status is unknown for 20.5% of them, while 48.2% are married and 28% single. There are also 4.8% widows, as well as two divorcees and two women separated from their husbands. Finally, for 1.1% of them, we simply know that they are not single, without being able to determine their marital status precisely. This first overview shows that single women- such as Louise de Bettignies or Gabrielle Petit - are in the minority within the networks, even though they are in the majority among those who have headed them.

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<sup>37</sup> Emmanuel Debruyne, "Border crossings. Hernalsteens. Le grand réseau du renseignement français dans les territoires occupés, 1914-1915", in *Nuova Antologia Militare*, special edition, September 2021, pp. 69-104.

Above all, almost three-quarters of women (72.2%) operate underground with at least one family member. This figure is even more striking when compared with that of men, who account for just 35.2% of the total, and in itself suggests a female commitment that is mainly rooted in the family. This proportion is higher among married women (79.2%), which leads us to hypothesize that their involvement is often linked to that of their husbands. The much lower rate among widows (53%) and, to a lesser extent, single women (67.2%) tends to reinforce this idea. In the latter case, the fact that two-thirds of single women work with at least one close relative suggests that many of them are young women whose commitment is also primarily to the family sphere, alongside a father, mother, or other siblings.

The family unit as a small intelligence unit does not necessarily operate according to a patriarchal model. Some are entirely feminized, like the Kessler family: the widowed mother of the family works for the White Lady with her four daughters, notably in mailroom and secretarial duties<sup>38</sup>. In her case, the male element is above all a source of inspiration, since her only son was killed in action at the start of the war. In other cases, it is a woman who is the driving force behind the commitment of her partner or other family members, as in the case of Mrs. Vandamme, head of a section of the Hernalsteens network, who is helped by her husband but without him playing a prominent role. In still other cases, it's the couple themselves who get involved as such, in a concerted manner, without there being any subordination of one to the other. The need to recruit several members of the same family at the same time for railway intelligence is likely to encourage such joint decisions. For example, Albert Frisque, recruited in June 1917 for the M.69 network, wrote in his activity report: "My wife and I decided to undertake this dangerous service, and eight days later M. Colleaux asked us for our decision. We accepted."<sup>39</sup> Although he is the writer of the report, probably as head of the family, Frisque does not put forward his own activity or distinguish his commitment from that of his wife.

Unfortunately, the information we have on how the recruitment was carried out is only available for a quarter of agents. Bearing in mind this methodological reservation and the possible biases it implies, among those whose recruitment is documented, one male agent in three is recruited by a family member (34.5%), compared with four out of five for their female counterparts (82.4%).

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<sup>38</sup> Tammy Proctor, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>39</sup> Report by Albert Frisque, Gembloux, January 19, 1920, in AGR, ASP, 1325.

These figures have undoubtedly undergone a certain distortion, since the proportion of women recruited by a close relative is higher than the proportion working underground with at least one close relative, but the fact remains that they converge with the previous ones to underline a much greater dependence on the family sphere for women than for men. In contrast to men, professional ties (2% vs. 26%) play only a derisory role in women's recruitment, largely explained by shorter schooling and lower employment rates. Perhaps more surprisingly, friendships play little part in women's recruitment (0.9%), whereas they are not negligible for men (8.4%). While schooling plays a minor role in both cases, recruitment by a spiritual figure, typically a parish priest, is almost as important for women (7.3%) as for men (9.7%) and is particularly concentrated in four major networks with a strong Catholic influence: Dame blanche, Biscops, Lux and Brésil.

The family is therefore often the door through which women enter the resistance. However, the family is not just a network of relationships. It can also represent a burden that can dissuade entry into resistance, particularly for women whose main responsibilities are housework and the upbringing, care, and supervision of children, especially if they are young. The time, fatigue, attention, mental workload, responsibilities, and lack of mobility involved are all serious drawbacks to the practice of intelligence work. As women traditionally have to shoulder the lion's share of the burden, we can assume that non-single women (married, but also widowed, divorced or separated) active in the networks have fewer family responsibilities than their male counterparts, following in the footsteps of their World War II epigones. However, the available data - again incomplete in that it only concerns just over a quarter of the agents concerned - belies this intuition: almost as many non-celibate women as their male counterparts have no children (8.6% and 9.6% respectively), and those with family responsibilities have a comparable number (an average of 2.89 and 2.9 respectively). This finding may come as a surprise, but it can probably be explained by the economic and social context of the Great War occupation, as well as by the intelligence methods used. Indeed, the disorganization of the occupied economy due to the disruption of international (and in part national) trade, looting, requisitioning and destruction, as well as voluntary or ordered stoppages, led to massive unemployment. A large proportion of men were therefore forced to stay at home during the week, resulting in a certain rebalancing of the division of labor, made all the more necessary by the fact that obtaining food had become a major item on the household timetable. This increased presence under the family roof proves to be an advantage for many engaged in railway observation.

Continuous observation of a railway line requires each member of the couple, possibly assisted by their children, to take turns at the window or in the garden to systematically record military convoys and their composition. This tedious and time-consuming task required a constant presence in the family home, as well as the establishment of a rotating system for acquiring information and managing the family and its living environment. Such constraints have helped to encourage clandestine action within the family, and therefore family and female recruitment, while at the same time bringing the profile of women recruited closer to that of men, insofar as both are more likely to come from the same family, within which gender assignments are rebalanced by the constraints of the moment.

There are many common motivations for men and women joining the Resistance, starting with patriotism. This can be seen, for example, in the justification given after the war by Palmyre Mathys, wife of Léopold Bonnami, for her involvement in the Carlot Louis network: "So that my husband could carry out the task entrusted to him (recording the composition of trains on the line from Ath to Grammont) without interruption, he had to find a collaborator, someone he could trust. His choice was me. Happy to be able to make such a valuable contribution to the defense of my country, I accepted wholeheartedly.<sup>40</sup> This patriotism is by no means symbolic: facing up to danger while helping the Allied armies is also a demonstration of solidarity with male compatriots engaged on the front: recruited in July 1915 for railway observation in the Bordeaux network, Elisa Tasiaux, wife of Brichard, recounts how she immediately accepted out of a sense of patriotism: "It tempted me so much," she says, "to help our poor soldiers who were at war; when I saw the cannons going by I thought: what a pity we can't let them know what's happening on the track."<sup>41</sup> This patriotism can also be fueled by hatred of the German invader, whom the occupied population finds hard to forgive for having violated neutrality, plunged the country into war, and inflicted massacres, destruction and humiliation on the population. This is what Laure Tandel expresses in the diary she kept before going underground, when she learns that the occupying authorities have forbidden the flying of the national colors: "Yet another affirmation of Brutal Force, the only right the Germans have here - yet another opportunity to drive deeper into us the Hatred they have taught us to find in our hearts."<sup>42</sup> Alongside patriotism, financial considerations are not necessarily absent from joining a network.

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<sup>40</sup> Individual file of Palmyre Mathys, Ath, May 19, 1919, in AGR, *ASP*, 2168.

<sup>41</sup> *Report by Madame Brichard, guard at Dave Namur*, by Gabrielle de Monge, June 1920, in AGR, *ASP*, 838.

<sup>42</sup> Notebook by Laure Tandel, s.l., September 17, 1914, in SGRS. Section Archives, *Fonds Tandel*, T16.



They rarely aim to make substantial profit from intelligence, even if the activity of the networks has been disrupted by the venality, or even financial malfeasance, of certain agents of both sexes<sup>43</sup>; more often, the remuneration sometimes accompanying observation tasks can appear, especially for modest families, as a necessity if one wants to devote oneself to it full-time while providing for the family, and as an opportunity to compensate for the loss of earnings caused by the occupation.

Patriotism, possibly accompanied by financial interest, is common to both sexes. However, it can take on series of inflections more specific to the female condition. One of these is the awareness of a unique opportunity to brave danger on par with men. This is suggested by the report written after the war by Thérèse de Radiguès, an agent of the White Lady: "The sensation of danger hanging night and day over our heads was not meant to discourage us, far from it; it seemed to us that the greater the danger became, the more charming the service was in our eyes."<sup>44</sup> This effect of attraction may reflect an aspiration to transcend the separation of genders by taking part in the war as a man, as a soldier. Espionage thus represents a form of militarization. The young Irène Bastin testifies to her friend Marie-Thérèse Collard's enthusiasm when she was recruited by the White Lady:

"We had the honor of becoming soldiers, thanks to the good Messrs. Dewé and Chauvin [the leaders of the White Lady], Marie-Thérèse didn't dare believe in the reality of this happiness. In the evenings, she couldn't sleep, and she told me several times: 'At last, what I've longed for has come true, I'm going to work for our Fatherland, and as a soldier.'<sup>45</sup>

This desire to assert their patriotic heroism is also tinged with strictly personal issues for many women left alone at home after their husband, father or brother has left for the front (or possibly for exile), both to defend their patriotic virtue and to demonstrate their solidarity - in effort as in danger - with loved ones engaged on the front. This is what the mother of two Yser front fighters testifies to, when she recalls her reaction to being approached by a recruiting agent from the Moerel network:

"Naturally, I couldn't refuse, because with the memory of my children, who had to stand their ground behind the Yser in spite of enormous difficulties, I felt morally obliged and urged to cooperate in the defense of France, and to fight this detestable and hated Prussian as hard as I could."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Emmanuel Debruyne, "Disinterested patriots or venal spies? Agents and money in occupied Belgium and France. 1914-1918", in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, n°232, October-November 2008, pp. 25-45.

<sup>44</sup> Rapport de Radiguès, in AGR, ASP, 979.

<sup>45</sup> IWM, La Dame blanche, box 1, folder 4 (a/b), quoted in Tammy Proctor, "Soldiers Without Uniforms. Women's Intelligence Work in Occupied Belgium, 1916-1918", in Serge Jaumain (e.a., ed.), *Une guerre totale? La Belgique dans la Première Guerre mondiale*, Bruxelles, AGR, 2005 (coll. *Etudes sur la Première Guerre mondiale*, n°11), pp. 117-129, here p. 126.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Maria-Teresa Abad Mier, *Les réseaux de renseignement du Grand quartier Général belge pendant la Première Guerre mondiale 1914-1918*, Licence, histoire, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1996, p. 150, n16.

Conversely, leading the fight from home can also be a way of allowing the man of the house to invest himself in the war, doubling his investment through his wife, while preserving the family's integrity. Thus, when her husband was recruited in June 1916 as a railway observer in the Négro network, Mrs. Dumonceau was delighted to hear of it and undertook to help him:

"I liked it because it meant I could keep my husband close to me, as he was determined to go to the front. This way, he could help his country as he did at the front, as the man from Mons had made him understand.<sup>47</sup>

### *Other profiles for other activities?*

The place of women in intelligence networks is not necessarily emblematic of their role in all forms of resistance during the Great War. The data we have for other organized actions against the occupying forces are less extensive and less systematic but allow us to sketch out a number of comparisons. Escape assistance is an important avatar of the secret war in occupied countries, which mainly consists of facilitating the concealment and subsequent exfiltration of lost soldiers, war volunteers, skilled workers or wanted persons, by leading them to the Dutch border and helping them to cross it. We have not collected exhaustive data on the members of escape networks, but those we do have shown a slightly more feminized milieu than intelligence. Three networks have been studied in depth: the Cavell, de Monge and Eude Magnée networks, the last two being linked to each other. Data are also available on a fourth group, known by the acronym VCL, for "*Volontaires civils liégeois*" (Civilian volunteers in Liège).

Escape networks - or "passage" networks, as they were commonly known at the time - are generally not as hierarchical as intelligence networks. They operate more like a chain than a pyramid, but nonetheless require a great deal of coordination, leading to the emergence of driving personalities for the organization. British nurse Edith Cavell, executed on October 12, 1915, along with another member of the network, Belgian architect Philippe Baucq, was one of them. Strictly speaking, however, she was not the mastermind of the "Cavell network": it was the international outcry<sup>48</sup> provoked by her execution that led to the network being associated with her.

<sup>47</sup> Report by Juliette Thibaut, épouse Dumonceau, slnd, in AGR, ASP, 2070.

<sup>48</sup> Katie Pickles, *Transnational Outrage: The Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell*, Basingstoke-New York, Palgrave Mc Millan, 2007.

In fact, coordination was not very centralized, and there were four key players in the overall coordination: Cavell herself, French teacher Louise Thuliez, and two Belgians: Prince Réginald de Croÿ and engineer Herman Capiiau<sup>49</sup>. Baucq was also a network leader, but at a more local level and rather late in the game. Two of the four main figures in the network are therefore women, and in general, the female presence is greater than in the intelligence sector: 67 of the 179 members of the network, or 37%, are women. In terms of centrality within the set of links formed by the network, not only are the two most central people women (Thuliez followed by Cavell), but they account for 14 of the 45 people making up the top quartile. To put it another way, women are more numerous than in intelligence, but also less subordinate. It's also worth noting that most of the women most involved in this sector - characterized, among other things, by a high degree of centrality in the network - are single. Free of family responsibilities and either professionally active or enjoying a privileged social status, they enjoy greater autonomy than most other women, which they put to good use in their clandestine involvement.

This affirmation of the role of women can also be seen in the escape networks of Monge and Eude Magnée<sup>50</sup>. The driving force behind the former was a woman, Viscountess Gabrielle de Monge, in her thirties and free of family responsibilities. She was the main organizer of a network of around sixty members, but in some of the small villages along the evacuation route, a large part of the local population lent a hand to gather, house, clothe and feed would-be exfiltrators. The Eude Magnée organization, named after the two French soldiers who set it up, was slightly larger, with around 82 employees, and relied in part on local communities, such as the Carmelites of Rochefort. Headed after the departure of René Eude and Charles Magnée for the Netherlands by a young woman of 24, Jeanne Dury, this network merged in part with that of Monge, with whom it shared several hideouts and guides, along partly common routes. These two networks include only 23% and 24% women respectively, but these figures do not reflect their real importance, on the one hand because in both cases, women are not rare among those most involved, and on the other because they are numerous within the communities that actively support the action of these two networks, without it being possible to identify most of their members individually. In the VCL sector, centered on the Liège region, 27 out of 80 members are women, a proportion of 34%, very similar to that of the Cavell network<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Emmanuel Debruyne, *Le réseau Edith Cavell. Des femmes et des hommes en résistance*, Brussels, Racine, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Clara Folie, "*On ne se méfie guère d'une femme...*" : gender issues in the passage services of Monge and Eude Magnée in occupied Belgium during the First World War, Master, History, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Romuald La Morte, *Les filières d'évasion clandestines dans les provinces de Liège et Limbourg durant la Première Guerre mondiale*, Master, Histoire, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2017, p. 58.

This high proportion of women is linked to the fact that, once again, it was a woman, Viscountess Renée de Baré de Comogne, who was at the helm. Like Gabrielle de Monge, Renée de Baré de Comogne enjoyed the social ascendancy conferred by aristocracy, was single and in her thirties, enabling her to invest herself fully and vigorously in the activities of her industry.

This increased role for women in escape networks is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that a certain number of gender roles are taken advantage of in the underground. Characteristics attributed to women, such as dedication and helping those in need, were essential to the operation of an escape network; indeed, such traits were massively emphasized in women's involvement in the Great War, whether as nurses or in charitable organizations. Likewise, a number of tasks traditionally carried out by women are just as fundamental in escape routes and can easily be transposed from the domestic sphere to clandestine action: provisioning, accommodation, clothing and various forms of care are all aspects of the demanding logistics in which many women were active. Finally, it should be stressed that the creation of these networks is much more spontaneous than that of intelligence networks. Whereas in the case of the latter, the initiative generally came from the allied secret services, escape assistance was most often the result of actions undertaken spontaneously by occupied people, who often reacted from the start of the war to situations encountered in their immediate environment. These individuals, confronted with people who felt threatened, or at any rate wished to escape enemy occupation, could be either male or female - whereas the secret services recruited mainly men - and their actions were first and foremost gestures of help in the face of distress. This aid often has a dual humanitarian and patriotic dimension, before becoming, through repetition, awareness and complexity, an organized and deliberate act of transgression of the occupying order - in other words, an act of resistance. And from this point of view, the humanitarian dimension of these initial, spontaneous gestures is also likely to encourage female investment, again according to dominant gender representations.

In this respect, secret correspondence organizations can be likened to exfiltration organizations. Operating like clandestine postal services, these networks enabled families left behind in occupied countries to correspond with their loved ones mobilized at the front. The exchange of such correspondence was forbidden by the occupying authorities, who feared that it would enable the transmission of information likely to compromise the security of the German armies and to boost enemy morale.

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<sup>51</sup> Romuald La Morte, *Les filières d'évasion clandestines dans les provinces de Liège et Limbourg durant la Première Guerre mondiale*, Master, Histoire, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2017, p. 58.

The mission of these networks was to collect private messages from families, centralize them and smuggle them across the Dutch border to Belgian and French soldiers in areas that had fallen into enemy hands. And in the opposite direction, messages from the latter to their families were collected and infiltrated via the Netherlands into the occupied zones, where they were distributed to their addressees. Little is known about the composition of these organizations, but it is possible to guess that women were heavily involved. The humanitarian character - again converging with the patriotic dimension - of this kind of enterprise is once again likely to meet the expectations of female involvement. But there's more to it than that, for reasons that are actually very pragmatic: women, as wives or mothers, but also as sisters or daughters, are in fact the main beneficiaries of such correspondence services, and the aspiration to their success can be a powerful incentive to take part. Research into the correspondence service known as *La Poste des Alliés* (Allied Post Office) provides a slightly more concrete insight into the composition of such an organization<sup>52</sup>. In this case, the network was created in 1915 by male initiators, but of the 303 participants identified, 31% were women. Once again, this is a higher proportion than that observed in the intelligence database, and for the same reasons as above, probably understates the number of women actually involved. On the other hand, women are not very present in the network hierarchy (4% of women have a managerial role, compared with 13% of men), but are very active at the end of the chain, i.e., as distributors (72% of women, compared with 67% of men).

The last major activity is probably the least feminized. This is the underground press. To date, 80 "prohibited" have been identified, most of them produced in Belgium (only three originated in occupied France)<sup>53</sup>. Information on these publications is often extremely incomplete, and no numbers have been kept for some of them. Fortunately, a few, generally the main ones, are fairly well documented: *La Libre Belgique*, by far the most widely distributed prohibited publication of the Occupation; *Droogstoppel* and *De Vrije Stem*, two Antwerp periodicals orchestrated by the same people; *La Revue de la Presse*, produced in Louvain<sup>54</sup>; and finally *L'Oiseau de France*, the only French underground to have managed to maintain its activity over the long term, not without changing its title several times<sup>55</sup>. Once again, women were in the minority:

6 of the 27 identified contributors to *Oiseau de France*; 9 of the 49 from *Droogstoppel* and *De Vrije Stem*; 79 of the 257 at *La Revue de la Presse*, or 31%; and 238 of the 979 at *La Libre Belgique*, or 24%.

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<sup>52</sup> For information on Poste des Alliés, see AGR, ASP, 3183-3208.

<sup>53</sup> Sophie De Schaepdrijver, Emmanuel Debruyne, "Sursum Corda: the underground press in occupied Belgium, 1914-1918", in *First World War Studies*, vol.4, n°1, 2013, p. 23-38.

<sup>54</sup> On these various prohibited newspapers, see AGR, ASP, 3117-3131.

<sup>55</sup> Jean Heuclin, Jean-Paul Visse, *La presse clandestine dans le Nord occupé (1914-1918)*, Valenciennes, Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2014.

These figures are not very different from those for the intelligence networks; however, they mask a fundamental difference: of all these women involved in the underground press, only 11 are involved in the actual production of the newspapers, with only one of them having editorial duties, in this case a single woman in her thirties, Thérèse Lemmens, for *De Vrije Stem*, and even then, without revealing her identity. The others are mostly involved in distribution. In other words, both the intellectual and material production of prohibited items is a quasi-monopoly for men, with women, with rare exceptions, relegated to the much more menial task of distribution. This phenomenon, already present in clandestine correspondence, is even more marked here, as the humanitarian character - more feminine in terms of gender assignments - of the operation here gives way to the intellectual dimension, deemed above all masculine.

Within the "Resistance" nebula, intelligence does not appear to be the most feminized form of commitment. While women were in the minority and subordinate in all forms of resistance, it was above all in aiding escape that they found the opportunity to get involved more frequently than elsewhere, and even to play a central role, especially if they were single.

### *Differentiated repression*

Women did not escape Germany's repressive apparatus. The German secret police, i.e., the *Zentralpolizeistelle* in the territory of the General-Gouvernement and the *Geheime Felpolizei* in the *Etappen- und Operationsgebiet*, managed to dismantle most of the networks after just a few months of activity<sup>56</sup>. Of the 2,668 officers arrested at least once, 607 (22.7%) were women. This proportion is slightly lower than the female representation of intelligence networks as a whole (27.6%), which can be explained in particular by the more junior, and therefore less exposed, roles of women. With this caveat, these figures suggest that the German secret police do not practice real gender discrimination in the arrests they make to break up networks.

What was the attitude of these women during the investigation? The sources are too incomplete to provide a sufficiently detailed answer, but it would undoubtedly reveal extreme variability from one individual to another, just as it does for the men. It's worth noting that some of them were subjected to violent practices during the investigation, particularly in Antwerp, even if in general the investigators of the German secret police seem to have shown more restraint towards them than towards their male colleagues<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Elise Rezsöhazy, *De la protection du secret militaire à l'occupation des populations civiles. Les polices secrètes allemandes derrière le front Ouest (1915-1918)*, PhD, History, art and archaeology, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2020. Cf. the article by Elise Rezsöhazy in this issue.

<sup>57</sup> Emmanuel Debruyne, Elise Rezsöhazy, Laurence van Ypersele, "Dans les mains de la police allemande. Les violences carcérales et policières comme expérience d'occupation en Belgique, 1914-1918", in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 2018/4, n° 272, p. 65- 90, here p. 85.

Their lesser involvement in leadership functions also helped to divert the most "insistent" interrogations away from them. Nonetheless, the brutality and, more frequently, the threats, including against family members, succeeded in extracting many confessions. One mother, an agent of the Wery Patria network, admitted after the war that she had broken down in such a situation:

"I denounced three of my collaborators, after my husband had warned them to flee, as the Germans [sic] had my papers containing their false names. To escape death, I was forced to make them known for the sake of my grandchildren."<sup>58</sup>

Nor is it possible to be much more precise about any gender-specificity in hearings before occupying war councils. The Belgian lawyer Sadi Kirschen, who defended dozens of occupiers before the war councils, in his post-war account of the proceedings, at least refutes the stereotypes that point to a supposed female weakness in such situations:

"Something that will seem strange to many people, women have generally shown themselves to be more reserved, less incontinent of language than men...."<sup>59</sup>

The fact remains, however, that these trials were moments of great tension, with the accused of both sexes putting their lives (and those of their accomplices) on the line. The German legal system provided for the death penalty in wartime espionage cases, as well as in cases of "high treason", and women were no exception<sup>60</sup>. Indeed, the best-known female figures in the underground struggle in occupied France are those who were sentenced to death and executed for acts of resistance. However, there were only ten such women for the whole of the Occupation and the occupied territories in the West, which is quite few compared with their 267 male counterparts who lost their lives. The best known internationally was Edith Cavell, sentenced for her involvement in an escape route. The other nine were sentenced to death in connection with intelligence work, either as part of a network or for sending back one or more pigeons dropped by the Allies with military information. The first to be executed, chronologically speaking, did not leave much of an imprint on people's memories:

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<sup>58</sup> Report by Hélène Willems, Tongeren, n.d., in AGR, ASP, 2724.

<sup>59</sup> Sadi Kirschen, *Devant les conseils de guerre allemands*, Brussels, Rossel & Fils, 1919, p. 25.

<sup>60</sup> On death sentences and executions, see Emmanuel Debruyne, Laurence van Ypersele, *Je serai fusillé demain. Les dernières lettres des patriotes belges et français fusillés par l'occupant. 1914-1918*, Brussels, Racine, 2011.

Louise Derache, a Liège-based member of the Lenders network, was executed on June 7, 1915. The international outrage provoked by Cavell's execution the following October, however, led the German authorities to adopt a cautious approach. It was not until April 1, 1916, that the next woman, Gabrielle Petit, was executed in Brussels. Her death was probably the result of her defiant and brazen attitude towards her judges, and her refusal to petition for clemency. Louise de Bettignies was also sentenced to death at around the same time and by the same court, but her sentence was commuted to hard labor for life. She was not one of the ten, but her name is often associated with them, as she died in prison two years later, due to lack of care while seriously ill. The fourth and last woman to be executed on government territory was Élise Grandprez, on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1917, for her involvement in the Lambrecht network<sup>61</sup>.

The other six are all executed later, in the stages and operations area. Five were executed within a very short space of time. DP network operatives Émilie Schatteman and Léonie Rammeloo were both shot in Ghent on September 12, 1917<sup>62</sup>. Their execution was followed three days later in the same place by that of Marie Prudence Desmet, from the Pégoud network which, like DP, depended on Wallinger. These three executions were linked, in that they were part of a series of fifteen following a trial for espionage held in Ghent at the beginning of the previous July. The next two took place in Tournai but were not linked to the dismantling of a network: Flore Lacroix and Georgina Danel were put to death on October 31, 1917, for sending back military intelligence pigeons dropped by the Allies<sup>63</sup>. The last execution took place in a similar case, in Saint-Amand, and resulted in the death of Angèle Lecat on March 25, 1918. To sum up, and notwithstanding Cavell's case, three Belgians were executed on government-general territory between 1915 and 1917 for participation in an intelligence network, then three more on stage territory in September 1917, and three French women were then executed in the stages in 1917 and 1918 for collecting and returning pigeons to the Allies. However emblematic they may be, these women, elevated to the rank of martyrs for the nation, or even for the Allied cause, are not representative of the fate reserved for female members of the Resistance by the German repressive apparatus. Nor was the execution of women for espionage unique to Germany: Belgium was even the first Allied country to execute a woman in such circumstances, following a botched trial<sup>64</sup>, and France carried out several executions of women during the war, the most famous being that of the Dutchwoman Margaretha Zelle, alias Mata Hari<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> See AGR, ASP, 1815.

<sup>62</sup> On the DP and Pégoud networks, see AGR, ASP, 2213-2228.

<sup>63</sup> See AGR, ASP, 2908, 2910 and 2919.

<sup>64</sup> Katrin Vanheule, *Over verraad en bespieding. De strafrechtelijke repressie van spionage voor de Duitse bezetter in België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, PhD, Law, Leuven, 2021, pp. 121-122 and 219-220.

<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, the UK does not appear to have executed any female spies, cf. Leonard Sellers, *Shot in the Tower: the story of the spies executed in the Tower of London during the First World War*, London, Leo Cooper, 1997.



The range of sentences handed down by German military tribunals in occupied territories was not limited to capital punishment. Although data on the practice of these military courts is scattered, incomplete and often imprecise - due to the destruction of their archives at the end of the war - we have identified 294 convictions of women involved in intelligence networks. Of these, at least 59 were sentenced to death, excluding those involved in carrier pigeons. In other words, in 90% of cases (53 out of 59), women sentenced to death were not executed and benefited from a pardon. The effects of the Cavell affair prompted the German authorities to exercise caution before executing a woman, but this only reinforced a trend already present before, insofar as of the five women sentenced to death for espionage before the Cavell affair, only Derache was executed. In addition, although the family situation is known for only half of these women, it appears that having dependent children probably played a part in obtaining a pardon. This tendency towards greater leniency for women on death row is once again not unique to Germany. In France, women are also more likely than men to be pardoned in cases of espionage<sup>66</sup>.

Women sentenced to death on commutation - such as the various network leaders Louise de Bettignies, Laure Acar, Jeanne de Beir and Adrienne Beljean - suffered the same fate as those sentenced to hard labor: they were deported to the German prison of Siegburg, near Bonn, to serve their sentences<sup>67</sup>. To date, we have counted 154 women active in intelligence networks who were deported to Germany, but due to gaps in the available documentation, we estimate that there were probably several dozen more, to which must of course be added those deported as a result of their involvement in other forms of resistance. At Siegburg, these foreign political prisoners, from all walks of life, from factory workers to princesses, were mixed up with German common law prisoners.

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<sup>66</sup> Vincent Suard, "L'espionnage au profit de l'Allemagne vu à travers les recours en grâce lors de condamnations à mort pour intelligence avec l'ennemi", in Robert Vandenbusche (ed.), *La résistance en France et en Belgique occupées (1914-1918)*, Villeneuve-d'Asq, IRHiS- CEGES, 2012, p. 171-189, here p. 186.

<sup>67</sup> On Siegburg, see Emmanuel Debruynne, "Les prisonniers politiques belges et français dans le système carcéral allemand, 1914-1918", in Nicolas Beaupré, Karine Rancé (dir.), *Arrachés et déplacés. Political refugees, prisoners of war, deportees. 1789-1918*, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2016, p.197-220. Cf. Chantal Antier, "Prisonnière française au bagne allemand de Siegburg 1915-1918. Louise de Bettignies", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 2014/1, n° 253, p. 27-41.

The regime to which they were subjected was slightly different from that of the latter, but no more favorable, and above all, they, who had enlisted for their country, experienced the additional punishment of being mixed up with women locked up because of their criminal past and, what's more, because of their enemy nationality. In addition to this humiliation, the inmates endured the rigors of very strict regulations, a management that all described as hostile towards them, and very inadequate supplies. Louise de Bettignies was not the only one to die in deportation; at least two other women of more modest means but involved in intelligence work like her, suffered her fate, while several others died during their incarceration in an occupied country or shortly after their liberation. Some of them had a more complex fate: for reasons of prison overcrowding<sup>68</sup>, they were transferred to other German prisons, such as Delitzsch or Sagan. During the last months of the war, some were repatriated to Belgium, to the Vilvorde prison. Others were released and repatriated early for health reasons. However, most of the foreign political prisoners remained in Siegburg until November 8, 1918, when German revolutionary sailors liberated them from the prison. The same scenario was repeated in Delitzsch two days later.

Women involved in intelligence networks in occupied countries are decidedly far from the image of the fatal spy conveyed by the imaginary world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dominant figures in the memory of this first "Resistance" experience are themselves not really representative of what this female experience was like. Only a handful of women were executed or, more generally, died as a result of their involvement, and those who headed up a network, usually small-scale, are scarcely more numerous. However unrepresentative they may be, a Louise de Bettignies or a Gabrielle Petit show us that among these women, differences in profile may have contributed to very dissimilar trajectories. Matrimonial ties did not prevent clandestine involvement, and in many cases undoubtedly encouraged it, as certain constraints of the secret war may have favored commitment as a couple, starting with the tasks of continuous observation of rail traffic. In most cases, life as a couple tends to relegate female resistance fighters to the periphery of the network and to subordinate roles, even if this is not an absolute rule. While married women make up the majority of female members of intelligence networks, the small minority of women who are called upon to found and lead a network, and sometimes to suffer its fatal consequences, were mostly single - like Petit or de Bettignies - or widows or women whose husbands were absent because of the war.

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<sup>68</sup> According to Louise Thuliez, such transfers occurred when the population of the female section of the prison exceeded 300 individuals, cf. *Condamnée à mort*, Paris, Flammarion, 1933, p. 247.

It is these women, mainly because of their tragic fate, who have remained in the memory. With the exception of those who took up the pen, the others remain anonymous.

This trend can also be observed in other forms of resistance during the Great War, although it should be noted that, overall, escape aid offered women more opportunities for involvement and responsibility than intelligence, without ensuring them a majority presence or a dominant role. Clandestine warfare in the occupied territories was not, therefore, strictly speaking a "women's war", nor was it confined to a few exceptional figures enjoying a degree of emancipation. On the contrary, it was a war open to women, in the sense that many of them found it an opportunity to participate discreetly in the confrontation of armies, not directly on the battlefield, but by exposing their lives to the enemy and giving themselves the possibility of influencing the outcome of the battle thanks to the intelligence they gathered or transmitted, in spite of and to the detriment of their adversary. In this sense, this particular commitment goes further into the dynamics of war than that of the countless women who worked daily to keep belligerent societies and economies running, and also further than the commitment of those who worked more directly for the war effort in medical services or armaments factories.

After the war, this voluntary work and its strong military dimension raised the question of the type of recognition due to these women, and in particular that of the militarization of their status<sup>69</sup>. This question was particularly acute in the case of the Dame Blanche, which was conceived from the outset as a military unit. As such, its main leaders intended to have the network and its agents recognized as such by the British authorities after the war, which implied, among other things, officially granting them military status, for both men and women.

There are many facets to this recognition. While the place of the main female figures of the secret war in the collective memory has already been studied, many other questions remain unanswered as to how others emerged from the war. What about the material and symbolic recognition given to survivors? Or how this experience affected their life trajectory, their social or political commitment, or their children's education? Or what about the implementation of the full suffrage rights enjoyed by Belgian women who had been imprisoned by the enemy for patriotic motives?

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<sup>69</sup> Emmanuel Debruyne, "Sortir de l'ombre. Des combattants clandestins en quête de reconnaissance", in Pierre-Alain Tallier & Patrick Nefors (eds.), *Quand les canons se taisent. En toen zwegen de kanonnen. When the Guns fall Silent*, Brussels, Archives générales du Royaume, 2010, p. 449-479.

Or the mutual recognition they accorded each other in the associative world, notably through the Association of Former Political Prisoners of Siegburg, founded in 1919 and continuing long after the Second World War. Many aspects of the legacy of women's involvement in the intelligence component of this early "resistance" remain largely undiscovered<sup>70</sup>.

**Emmanuel Debruyne**

<sup>70</sup> Interesting advances on this subject can be found in Alison S. Fell, *Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018.

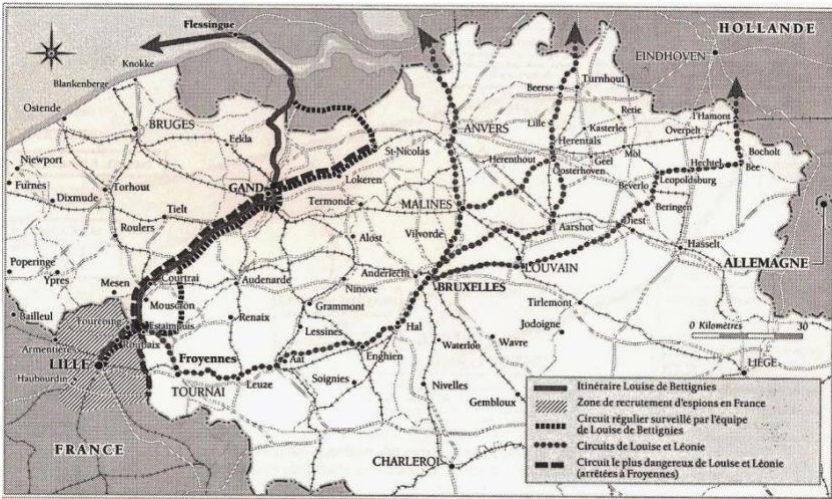


Fig. 1 - The different itineraries of *Ramble* and Louise de Bettignies



Fig. 2 - Drawing published in *La Croix du Nord* in 1916, before Louise's conviction. Archives of the de Bettignies Family

# Louise de Bettignies

## A woman of intelligence during the Great War

Dr. Chantal Antier

### ABSTRACT

The involvement of women in Allied intelligence services during WWI marked a historic turning point in the feminization of this profession, although recognition of their decisive work came rather late in the 20th century. Some emblematic figures nevertheless stood out quite quickly: Louise de Bettignies, who headed the *Ramble* network for British intelligence, was one of them. From her training in espionage practices in 1914 to her arrest and sentencing in 1916 to fifteen years of forced labor until her death in a Cologne hospital on September 27, 1918, this article retraces the intelligence experience of the nicknamed "Northern Joan of Arc".

**Key words:** Louise de Bettignies - *Ramble* network - British Intelligence - Occupied zone - Free zone

The Great War of 1914-1918 is constantly being remembered by the French, thanks to the many books and period magazines, archives, and the Centenary, which was recently celebrated. As a result, letters and military papers have been found in families, sometimes forgotten, and now discovered by younger generations. Letters written by soldiers and their wives alike provide painful testimonials from the combatants, and often courageous ones from their families. Everyone tries to recount daily events on a regular basis or asks for advice. Little by little, a new role for women began to emerge: in addition to caring for the wounded, some were ready to put their lives on the line to save their country. This work, essential in wartime, would evolve in different ways over the course of these four bloody years. Staff and intelligence services used military nurses not only as nurses, but also as informers and even spies. Some women, like Louise de Bettignies, voluntarily founded resistance networks against the invaders, navigating between occupied and free zones at their own risk to pass on military information.

*The use of wound care to inform*

The general staff's idea was to use these nursing sisters to gather information from French and foreign wounded in hospitals. Intelligence services were to make increasing use of these sources of information. The first Allies to develop this system, having already practiced it during the Second Boer War between 1899 and 1902, were the British: their nurses from England learned to listen in on enemy casualties and pass on military intelligence to their commanders<sup>1</sup>. A veritable "women's employment policy" was thus organized. As soon as the Germans invaded Northern France and Belgium, close to Great Britain, the British intelligence services developed this form of espionage, aided by the French and Belgians: meeting at the inter-allied conference in Veurne (Belgium), their three countries set up a Joint Intelligence Bureau on November 22, 1914<sup>2</sup>. Although it was difficult to set up, as each country wanted to keep and use the information gathered for its own purposes, this office enabled espionage to develop in northern France and Belgium, with more and more women practicing it from their homes, sometimes alone, sometimes with their families, sometimes with neighbors and friends.

Little by little, newspapers and magazines encouraged civilians in occupied zones to spy on the enemy and secretly report the movements of their troops. Even children's magazines were used. In 1915, in the magazine *Un Poilu de 12 ans*, Arnould Galopin wrote several episodes about young boys<sup>3</sup>. They help the gendarmes and soldiers to flush out pro-German spies at night, in the forest or near their homes. Women and young people, often obliged to stay at home by order of the occupying forces, agreed to watch the movements of German regiments from their windows or gardens near railroad lines. Night and day, networks of women intelligence agents were formed in northern France and Belgium, taking revenge for German brutality against the population.

*How are the intelligence services organized?*

Seeing the value of these reports from the medical corps to the wounded, British intelligence services improved the system by using more and more female civilian spies, who were less distrusted than men. The arrest of a large number of Belgians and French from the North increasingly encouraged women to take on a surveillance role at the frontiers: they drove horse-drawn carriages, disguising themselves so as to be able to pass the same enemy surveillance posts several times, and often transporting men from one country to another.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Antier, *Louise de Bettignies, espionne et héroïne de la Grande Guerre*, Paris, Tallandier, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> L. van Ypersele, *De la guerre de l'ombre aux ombres de la guerre*, Charleroi, Éd. Labor, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> C. Antier, M. Walle, O. Lahaie, *Les espionnes dans la Grande Guerre*, Rennes, Ouest-France, 2008.

As the war spread, the Germans increasingly monitored the population of invaded countries, realizing that a great deal of trafficking was taking place that they could not control. If they can stop these defectors, they brutally round them up at night in towns and villages to take them to work in the fields, or to transfer them to Germany to replace their workforce in the armaments factories.

As a result, Belgian families, and women in particular, shared the work of monitoring German troops in Belgium, passing on messages about battalion movements, military train schedules and directions, which were then passed on to the Secret Service. They formed tightly knit communities, growing in number as the war wore on, to cope with the arrests and abuse they suffered. Their family origins, whether working class or noble, did not prevent them from working together and dividing up their travels across Belgium to bring information to the British intelligence services, whose headquarters were in the Netherlands, and remained neutral.

*Spies in the service of France and its Allies*

Female espionage is on the rise in France and Belgium. This role was not always well received by French and Belgian men, who learned that their wives were ready to provide the enemy with help and support, even agreeing to become their mistresses, in order to obtain important military intelligence. Some were discovered by the Germans and taken to prison camps; others, such as Edith Cavell and Gabrielle Petit, were shot; others died of disease after the war, on their return home.

Among these women, Louise de Bettignies, a Frenchwoman from Lille, played an important role. The British asked her not only to create the *Ramble* network in Belgium, but also to carry secret messages. Arrested, she endured the hell of the Siegburg prison camp in Germany, before dying alone in Cologne hospital on September 17, 1918, at the age of 38. Discreetly buried by her German guards in a corner of the city cemetery, her body was not found by British soldiers until 1920. Her courage was finally celebrated in Belgium and, above all, in France.

Louise de Bettignies played a decisive role. A spy and heroine, she was named to the Order of the Army on April 20, 1916, a few weeks after her death sentence, by Marshal Joffre in the following terms: "She assumed grave responsibilities, displaying, in a word, a heroism that has rarely been surpassed...". Major Baumann, from the German counterespionage considered Louise's fighting spirit "equal to that of an army corps".



*The unusual destiny of a patriotic Lille woman*

The seventh child of a family from Lille, Louise de Bettignies, with a talent for languages, worked before the war as a nanny for some of Europe's leading families: Bavarian, Polish, English, and Italian, to help her widowed mother financially<sup>4</sup>. Her family, worried at the start of the war and especially after the invasion of Belgium, took refuge near Béthune at the end of August 1914. Louise left them to return to Lille to care for the first wounded and refugees. Along with her sister Germaine, she was recruited by the Red Cross hospital and helped supply the French soldiers defending the city under German bombardment. Despite the reproaches of her companions, she also looked after the wounded Germans and even offered to translate letters to their families<sup>5</sup>.

With Lille cut off from the rest of France by the German occupation, young patriots organized themselves to carry mail to Free France. Under the name of Alice Dubois, Louise reached the Dutch-Belgian border and took a boat to Folkestone, carrying three hundred messages sewn into her dress. When the boat arrives, Intelligence Service officers interrogated the passengers. Fluent in English, she gave precise information on the brutality of German troops in Belgium and Northern France. The British, aware of her ability to speak their language and provide accurate information, asked Louise to work for them. She asked for confirmation from the officers of the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Bureau in Amiens, then from General Joffre in Chantilly, and finally for her widowed mother's authorization to work with the British. She is encouraged as a Catholic by her Director of Conscience. Learning that she would be paid, she accepted the request, enabling her to help her family financially.

*Training a spy*

During a quick training course in England, Louise learns the rudiments of espionage: writing in sympathetic ink, the use secret codes, the types of intelligence to be gathered, including observation of priority railroads and troop movements, disguise techniques, ways of dealing with the enemy in an occupied country, ways of finding help among the population to build up a network. She is taught how to calligraph messages in Indian ink and lemon juice so finely that they can only be read with a magnifying glass. Messages are hidden in rings, toothpaste tubes and dentures. They're passed on to others thanks to matches cut at different ends, with the teeth of a comb, with a postage stamp whose indentation indicates the decryption code.

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<sup>4</sup> C. Antier, M. Walle, O. Lahaie, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> C. Antier, *op. cit.*

Fake binoculars were used to conceal a camera, and even the revolutionary pens later copied by filmmakers.

An important part of training these spies is also psychological conditioning. But Louise has already understood that she can only rely on herself in the event of arrest, and that her silence must be absolute during interrogations to protect the work of her agents and the entire secret service.

### *Creation of the Ramble network*

In March 1915, the Intelligence Service asked Louise to set up a vast spy network, *Ramble*. By May 18, it had 40 members. As the war wore on, the network grew. Within the network, each member is responsible for a specific geographical region. Louise provides abundant data on German artillery, positions, and ammunition depots<sup>6</sup>. She was supported in her efforts by two close friends and members of the Resistance: Germaine Féron-Vrau, from a large family in Lille, used her many contacts among the unemployed workers at a textile factory belonging to her uncle, while Marie-Léonie Vanhoutte, from Roubaix, was a great patriot, smuggling young soldiers and recruits to Holland<sup>7</sup>. The network also received support from numerous notables, priests, and nuns. The average age of women was between 25 and 35, and they accounted for 39% of members of networks such as Oram, Hunter, Roche or La Dame blanche, often taking on leadership roles<sup>8</sup>.

Louise's career was divided into three phases: first, the hardest period of recruiting agents in French and Belgian towns and villages; then a period of directing *Ramble*; and finally, until her arrest, writing reports for the British. French, Flemish and Walloon smugglers escorted Louise on foot or by car, along roads and country lanes, or by boat on the many canals that crisscrossed northern France and Belgium. Sometimes they had to swim across them or cross them in washing tubs. One of them later recalled: "We had to follow her; we couldn't refuse her anything!"<sup>9</sup>. These dangerous journeys, which Louise accepted with courage and determination, worried her mother, to whom she responded,

"You mustn't think about being arrested, because you'd never get through.  
But I always carry my Child of Mary medal with my name on it. If my body  
is ever found, they'll know who I am."

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<sup>6</sup> P. Krop, *Les secrets de l'espionnage français*. Paris, Payot, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> C. Antier, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> C. Antier, M. Walle, O. Lahaie, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> C. Antier, *op. cit.*

Indeed, the members of her network only know Louise under the pseudonyms Alice Dubois, Marie, Pauline, or even her nickname, "Mademoiselle Vite-Vite"<sup>10</sup>, which aptly describes her speed of decision and action. The Intelligence Service also uses the technology of the moment: radio, so that Louise can keep in touch with the intelligence service in Lille, where every week volunteer informers come on market days to share their harvest of information.

*Louise de Bettignies, "Joan of Arc of the North".*

Louise is responsible for ensuring the cohesion of the *Ramble* network. Very often, she herself carries the most important information to the Netherlands by train or on foot (orders, letters, reports), as well as essential equipment (melinite, spare parts for radio sets, balloons for pigeons), not forgetting the sinews of war: money to pay the spies. All hiding places are good: in clothes, shoes, rings, and belts. She even carries pigeons with coded messages<sup>11</sup>. A network leader, Louise lived her days under the inoffensive mask of a peasant woman or shopkeeper, then changed back into Alice Dubois at night. She also disguised herself as a German officer to travel from Armentières to Saint-Omer. On another mission, she was arrested at the Belgian border; without a passport, she was taken to a German police station. In her skirts were sewn important messages and a secret code brought back from London. She managed to slip through the net and reach Lille.

Unfortunately, by the end of the summer of 1915, German-organized body searches, arrests and deportations were on the increase. In 1916, during the Battle of Verdun, the Germans stepped up their surveillance and arrested women carrying mail. Louise asked the British for a rest, exhausted by her many dangerous and difficult missions. During her all-too-short stay with her mother in Le Touquet, her companion Marie-Léonie Vanhoutte is arrested by the Germans in Froyennes, Belgium. This event gave those around her a bad feeling, which became reality when Louise was arrested in the same town. Possessing three identity cards in different names and discovered swallowing a secret message, she was taken to the Saint Gilles prison in Brussels, where she was reunited with Marie-Léonie, who had been transferred there.

After six months in prison, a German police inspector discovers that the two women have the same address and are therefore working together. While Louise fiercely denies any involvement in espionage, Léonie is the weak link in their defense. Denunciations, betrayals, confessions obtained through intimidation and physical violence finally bear fruit. The trial of the two women takes place in March 1916.

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<sup>10</sup> A. Redier, *La guerre des femmes*, sl, La Vraie France, 1924; Mame, 1926 (reissued 1946).

<sup>11</sup> C. Antier, *op. cit.*

The indictment was in German, and Louise spoke directly in this language, which she had mastered to impress the seven members of the war council, but nevertheless requested the services of an interpreter, as she was French. They were tried on April 1, 1916: Louise was sentenced to death, but thanks to the intervention of the Spanish ambassador<sup>12</sup>, her sentence was reduced to hard labor for life in Siegburg; Léonie was given 15 years hard labor.

*Louise's resistance continues in Siegburg prison*

The young women were transferred to the Siegburg fortress in Germany, where there was a penal colony for men and women. The three hundred women prisoners, of all nationalities, were divided into two groups: the Browns, who were more dangerous and often in solitary confinement, and the Grays, some of whom were sentenced to a few months<sup>13</sup>. Louise's group included Belgian women: some nobles, such as the Princesse de Croÿ and the Countess de Belleville, who had been part of networks, but also Belgian officers' wives and nuns from various orders who had helped fugitives cross the border. The rules were harsh, with punishments and solitary confinement for the slightest peccadillo; living conditions were lamentable and depended largely on the financial situation of the convicts and the French Red Cross parcels which helped to improve the inadequate diet and simple services such as washing clothes. All had to accept the work imposed on them: embroidery, making buttons for German officers' uniforms, upholstering to restore chairs, or untangling and winding balls of string.

Revolted by the daily humiliations she had to endure; Louise encouraged the other inmates to show respect. In December 1916, she discovered that female workers were responsible for making grenade warheads for use against Allied troops. Citing Article 6 of the Hague Conventions, which prohibits any prisoner from participating in the manufacture of any weapon for the enemy, Louise convinced many of the inmates to stop all work. Judged responsible for the rebellion, she was thrown into solitary confinement for forty-eight hours, without wool, blankets, or food. Outraged by this mistreatment, her fellow inmates organized a riot during Sunday mass: after patriotic shouts and songs, they overturned benches and continued to protest. They were severely punished, and some ended up in solitary confinement, but the management backed down.

On her release, Louise was denied all the benefits she had earned, including receiving letters and parcels. Forced to wear the inmates' dresses, she had to work in the workshop. In the event of poor workmanship, her food is withheld. She lodged a complaint against her treatment, hoping to be transferred to Switzerland due to her deteriorating health.

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<sup>12</sup> The Spanish ambassador, neutral country, was in charge of protecting French prisoners.

<sup>13</sup> C. Antier, *op. cit.*

In May 1917, she learns that her request is rejected, as this favor is reserved for military prisoners of war and not political prisoners. With renewed energy, Louise supported the patriots who refused to sing in German. But her morale was low, and her physical and mental state deteriorated: she missed her family's mail terribly, and the news of the war was hardly reassuring.

*End of life for a great heroine*

In April 1918, Louise underwent surgery for a cancerous breast tumor in the prison lazaretto, without anesthesia and in unsanitary conditions that led to infection and a serious deterioration in her health. Suffering from pleurisy, she was finally taken to hospital in Cologne on September 17. Continually under surveillance in her room, and with no visitors, as her family was unable to obtain permission from the Germans, the Allies, or the Spanish ambassador to see her again before her death on September 27, 1918.

She is buried in the town's cemetery. Discovered by British soldiers in 1920, her body was brought back to France, and major ceremonies were held in Lille. French, British, and Belgian decorations were placed on her coffin, and she received numerous honors, including *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*, *Croix de guerre avec palme*, Officer of the British Empire and the British Military Medal<sup>14</sup>. It was not until 1927 that a statue of Louise de Bettignies, surrounded by two of her companions who were also secret agents, was unveiled in Lille by Marshal Foch. A subscription was organized by Marshal Foch and General Weygand.<sup>15</sup> The same year, at her family's request, a monument was erected in St Amand les Eaux, where her family originated, and another in Lille.

According to his sister, Countess Hélène d'Argœuves,

"Louise de Bettignies was not a spy in the strictest sense of the word but a leader of intelligence agents, and she bore the burdens and risks<sup>16</sup>.

Women's investment in a hitherto male-dominated environment was belatedly recognized and appreciated. They were often accused of patriotic and religious exaltation by their political leaders. Louise rose to the challenge, serving her country out of hatred of the occupying forces. A methodical and efficient organizer, she combined courage, tenacity, and patriotism, and remained committed to her moral mission until her death.

**Chantal Antier**

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<sup>14</sup> H. d'Argœuves, *Louise de Bettignies*; Paris, Éd. du Vieux Colombier, 1956.

<sup>15</sup> C. Antier, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> H. d'Argœuves, *op. cit.*

# The role and place of women in the German secret police in occupied Belgium and France during the First World War

Dr. Élise Rezsöhazy  
CegeSoma, State Archives, Anderlecht (Belgium)

## ABSTRACT

If the Great War allowed the development of the feminisation of French and British intelligence networks, the German intelligence services (*GFR* and *ZSt*) also saw an increase in the number of Belgian and German women working with them in Belgium and throughout occupied France. They were given a number of specific positions, including auxiliary and body search officers, police office officers and secretaries. By focusing on the reality of the work of these women, this article proposes to explore the inevitable amalgam between *femme fatale* and intelligence officer, and the reality that this received idea covers within German counterintelligence during WWI.

**Key words:** German intelligence - Spy - World War I - Belgium - Occupied France - *Geheime Feldpolizeien* - *Zentralpolizeistelle* - *Femme fatale* - Spy-lover

In Belgium and the ten French departments occupied in whole or in part, the development of organized or isolated threats, embodied by the occupied Belgians and French, prompted the German occupier to set up a counter-espionage body responsible for protecting military secrecy and the dignitaries of its army. German secret police forces were set up and developed throughout the conflict, both in the army and stage zones and in the General Government zone. These included the *Geheime Feldpolizeien* (Secret field police) (*GFP*) attached to the various German armies, established along the front, and the *Zentralpolizeistelle* (Central police station) (*Z.St.*) in the zone of the General Government, a civil-military regime that governs the vast majority of Belgian territory<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The subject of this article was studied by the author during her doctoral thesis at the Université catholique de Louvain, where she carried out her research as a Fonds national de la recherche scientifique aspirant: Élise Rezsöhazy, *De la protection du secret militaire à l'occupation des populations civiles. Les polices secrètes allemandes sur le front Ouest (1914- 1918)*, PhD, History, Louvain-la-Neuve, March 2020.



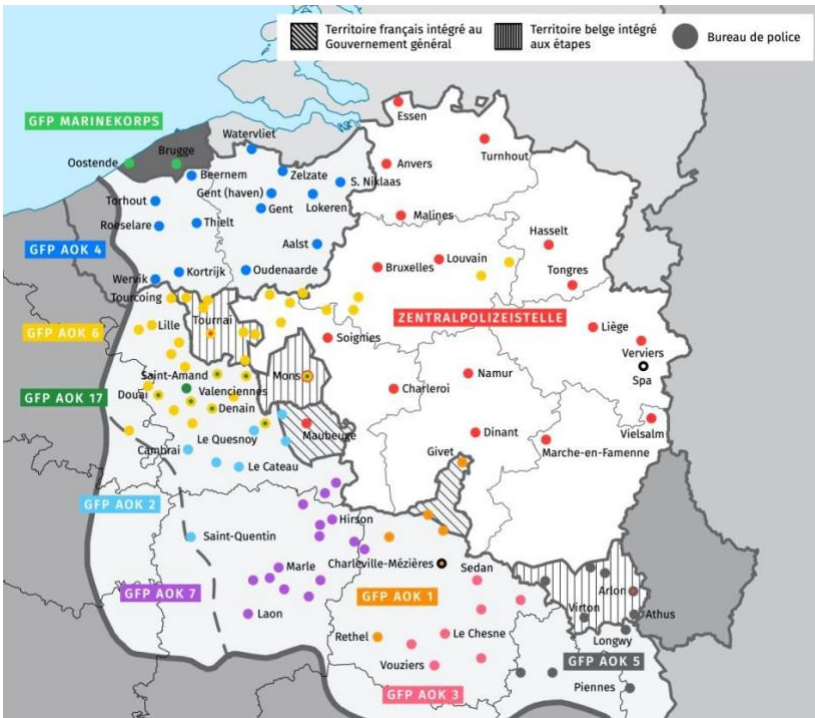


Fig. 1 - Occupied zones on the Western Front, including all identified police offices.

Their roles and missions, which evolved over the course of the war, were essentially focused on the occupied populations, every element of which was a potential threat to the army's security. Dismantling intelligence networks and escape routes, tracking down French agents flown in over the lines, interrogating espionage, and sabotage suspects, identifying troublemakers, confiscating carrier pigeons, as well as monitoring civilian movements, making rounds in estaminets and supervising priests' sermons were all part of the police officers' daily routine, which nevertheless varied widely from region to region.

German police officers were employed in the police offices set up in the towns and villages of the occupied zones. Among them, some, who were recruited at the start of the conflict in the Empire, are career police officers, while others - the majority - are shopkeepers, lawyers, hotel keepers, coffee waiters, etc. To complete these teams, it quickly became necessary to hire native auxiliaries who knew the occupied societies and were able to infiltrate them discreetly. Indicators and agents from Belgium and France joined the offices and became the real field agents of the German secret police (*Vertrauensleute* and *Agenten*). Orders, secretaries, and letters were all elements that enabled the police bureaus to function, to keep their accounts up to date, to copy the reports provided by the agents, and to pass on wanted notices to the other police bureaus in the region.



The world of the police is essentially a masculine one, as it lies at the crossroads of two milieus where the masculine predominates at the beginning of the 20th century: the army and the police. But the secret police couldn't carry out all their missions if they hadn't enlisted the services of a series of Belgian and German women. In many ways, women were indispensable to this male-dominated world: they were entrusted with certain missions on an exclusive basis, and allowed access to certain places that were off-limits to male police officers or agents. Secretaries, search attendants and female agents are all integral parts of the teams at these offices.

It is precisely these profiles that we intend to focus on in this article, in order to consider the functions, roles and places occupied by women within police bureaus, as well as the imaginaries that surround them. Indeed, while the roles of these women are delineated and defined, amalgams between *femme fatale* and spy carry a great deal of weight in the imaginary world. The women with whom the German police officers stationed in Belgium and France forged relationships are also profiles of women who, in a way, were part of this secret police in the sense that they were present alongside its members and were also the victims of numerous shortcuts and stereotypes. The aim of this article is to set the record straight, clearly distinguishing reality from the stereotypes that cling to the skin of women working for the secret police. What functions do these women perform within the police force? What status do they enjoy? What missions are entrusted to them? Are certain functions specifically assigned to them? As police bureaus are real social spaces where police officers, administrative staff and agents meet and bond, what relationships do men and women have within them?

### *Body search assistants*

In police offices, women may be assigned to administrative work as clerical assistants or secretaries, although it is not always the case that these functions are exclusively female.

However, the unsystematic nature of the data relating to this staff means that we cannot offer any valid statistics. In Antwerp, for example, in the second half of the war, out of 53 employees, including police officers and administrative staff, we count nine female employees<sup>2</sup>. Women working in police offices are considered to be "collaborators" (*Büro- Hilfsarbeiterinnen*- office assistants), but are not fully-fledged employees (*Beamtinnen*- female civil servants), a status enjoyed by police officers. These include women delegated to carry out body searches on suspects or women who have to be moved out of occupied areas, or women detainees. In Charleville-Mézières, for example, the policeman who employed a certain Marie Louise Garnier, was "very proud" of her work<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Archives de l'État (AÉ), Liège, Parquet général de la cour d'Appel de Liège, Fonds "répression de la collaboration", Dossier Coulon et consorts, *Wohnungsliste*, Antwerp, n.d.

<sup>3</sup> Archives générales du Royaume (AGR), Brussels, Commission des Archives des Services patriotiques (CAP), no. 121, *La police secrète de campagne du Grand Quartier général*, by FPK Waegelé, slnd [between November 1918 and August 1919], p. 2.

This seems to be an exclusively feminine task. Indeed, we have no record of it being carried out by men. However, we would need to verify this in the accounts left by female resistance fighters and evacuees of their wartime experiences. In our sources, on the other hand, there are situations where, in the absence of women, body searches could not be carried out, thus posing difficulties for ensuring continuity of service. On October 29, 1917, Major Witte, in charge of Section *IIIb West* - the department of the General Staff in charge of intelligence on the Western Front - expressed concern that some police forces did not yet have the personnel required for these searches and asked for a list of *GFP* offices in need<sup>4</sup>.

The presence of women attached to the police force was therefore particularly required during population movements organized by the occupying forces. Three types of population displacement were observed in the zone during the conflict: the deportation of civilians as hostages to Germany, evacuations due to military operations or for "economic" reasons, such as forced labor, and finally the repatriation to the unoccupied zone of those deemed "useless", including a large number of women. These displaced persons and forced laborers number in the hundreds of thousands<sup>5</sup>. These displacements are managed by the local occupation structures, but the security stakes are such that they must call on additional, expert forces, in this case the secret police. Indeed, according to the occupiers, control of these masses in movement is essential because "the large number of civilian workers and evacuees housed in the territory of the stages facilitates espionage". On the other hand, for the 7<sup>th</sup> army's stage inspection, "the discovery of agents and the means of intelligence that slip in among them is made more difficult" by the mass of civilians gathered on platforms and trains at the time of movement<sup>6</sup>. Recourse to the secret police was particularly necessary for the last two types of movement.

As for people evacuated from occupied areas, it was essential for the secret police to ensure that they did not bring with them any information that could be passed on to the allied intelligence officers who questioned them at the end of their journey. When trains departed, police officers had to check luggage, which was then numbered and kept in a locked room<sup>7</sup>. When boarding the train, the displaced persons must be searched. The body search of women seems to be particularly thorough, as it has been noted that they have already attempted to hide unauthorized objects "in umbrella canes and hollowed-out heels, hairstyles, hats, genitals, armpits, etc."<sup>8</sup>. To this end, the stage inspection expressly seconds female personnel.

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<sup>4</sup> Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), Freiburg im Breisgau, PH3/603, *Circular from Major Witte of the IIIb West to all NOs and to the Zentralpolizeistellen Brüssel and Luxemburg*, October 29, 1917.

<sup>5</sup> On these movements, see among others Jens Thiel, *'Menschenbassin Belgien'. Anwerbung, Deportation und Zwangsarbeit im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Essen, Klartext, 2007 and Philippe Nivet, *Les réfugiés français de la Grande Guerre. Les "Boches du Nord"*, Paris, Economica, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (LABW), Generallandesarchiv (GLA), Karlsruhe, 456 F146 Nr.14, *Circulaire de l'inspection d'étapes 7*, EHO, March 20, 1917.

<sup>7</sup> LABW, Hauptstaatsarchiv (HStA), Stuttgart, M30/1 Bü 84, *Merkblatt über Abschüblingstransporte nach dem unbesetzten Frankreich*, by *GFP im HQ Mézières- Charleville*, [autumn 1917].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

In the General Government area, controlling movements across the Belgian-Dutch border is one of the main tasks of the offices established in these regions. The aim was not only to control passage at points where it was authorized under very strict conditions, but also to prevent any clandestine attempts to cross the border. In April 1915, the *Zentralpolizeistelle*, which had been in existence since the end of December 1914, considered that the border surveillance system still had major shortcomings. Among other things, the absence of female personnel prevented the control of women crossing the border<sup>9</sup>. This shows that a certain deference to women's privacy exists within the secret police, at least in these particular situations of body searches<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (LABW), Generallandesarchiv (GLA), Karlsruhe, 456 F146 Nr.14, *Circulaire de l'inspection d'étapes 7*, EHO, March 20, 1917.

<sup>7</sup> LABW, Hauptstaatsarchiv (HStA), Stuttgart, M30/1 Bü 84, *Merkblatt über Abschüblingstransporte nach dem unbesetzten Frankreich*, by *GFP im HQ Mézières- Charleville*, [autumn 1917].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA), Abt. IV, Muncih, HS 2261, Nachlass von Hurt, *Erfahrungen auf den Arbeitsgebieten der Zentralpolizeistelle*, April 14, 1915.

<sup>10</sup> Within the prisons, female resistance fighters do suffer physical and psychological violence. However, despite the fact that they account for around a quarter of intelligence officers and are arrested in the same proportions, only one of the nine deaths recorded during the investigation process is a woman. A certain gender-related restraint may have limited this violence, just as it may also have limited the executions of women, this time downstream of the judicial process. It should be noted, however, that women were proportionately less numerous in leadership positions within the networks, making them lower-priority targets for interrogation. With the exception of three forced abortions in Antwerp, we found no cases of sexual violence against women. For more on violence in prisons, see : Emmanuel Debruyne, Élise Rezsöházy, Laurence van Ypersele, "Dans les mains de la police allemande. Les violences carcérales et policières comme expérience d'occupation en Belgique, 1914-1918", in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 272/4, 2018.

Police forces are naturally obliged to look for such helpers outside their own all-male corps. However, the selection criteria for these personnel were as, if not more, stringent than those for police officers: exemplary behavior, knowledge of the language and culture, intellectual and perceptive faculties, were all required in order to gain the trust of the recruit. At first, the police used nurses, but without success<sup>11</sup>. In March 1917, in Tourcoing, faced with the increasingly urgent need to recruit a body search officer (*polizeiliche Durchsuchungsperson*), due to the growing number of women crossing the border, the local office asked the central office to recruit her. An Alsatian woman, Elvira Happ, born November 5, 1892, in Mulhouse, who had worked as a preceptress in Roubaix before the war, was assigned to the Tourcoing *Zweigstelle* (branch office) from April 1 1917, in exchange for accommodation, food and a monthly salary of 100 marks<sup>12</sup>. These women were also attached to prisons, where body searches were frequent, such as *Frau Unzner*, who served from November 29, 1915, to July 10, 1918, in the 6<sup>th</sup> army, located north of the front, in the North department.

It is extremely difficult to put forward an estimate of the number of women required for this type of work, as they do not appear on police staff lists, nor are they official employees of an office<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, female employees who have to be used for certain specific tasks are not systematically attached to the police. They are, for example, made available by the step-by-step inspection<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> BA-MA, Freiburg im Breisgau, PH3/603, *Circular from Major Witte of the IIIb West to all NOs and ZPSt. Brüssel and Luxemburg*, October 29, 1917.

<sup>12</sup> BayHStA, Abt. IV, Munich, AOK 6, 845, *Letter from Spieth of the GFP AOK 6 Zweigstelle Tourcoing to the Zentrale der GFP AOK 6*, Tourcoing, March 30, 1917. After the war, Elvira Happ was arrested in Paris, where she was living at the time, on suspicion of intelligence with the enemy. The article in *Le Petit Parisien* reporting the event also refers to her as the mistress of 6<sup>e</sup> army policeman Albin Schaller, and as having denounced numerous compatriots. *Le Petit Parisien*, March 9, 1919.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 847, *Attestation by FPK Obst GFP 6 Zentrale*, July 10, 1918.

<sup>14</sup> LABW, HStA, Stuttgart, M33/2 Bü 490, *Circular from the Quartiermeister of Gruppe Vailly*, KHQ, January 25, 1918.

### *Police officers*

The other position in which we find women is that of agent. Of the 297 counter-espionage agents we identified, 16% (49) were women. They are mostly unemployed, housewives or commercial employees, and are aged between 20 and 30, although a few are over 30. We identified only two women over the age of 40. Although they are less numerous than their male counterparts, women not only form a nebula around a core of male agents, but also play an active role in operations and investigations on an equal footing with men. They are therefore an integral part of this core group. Although, unlike men, women do not possess weapons, they carry out the same activities and missions: infiltration, breach of trust, double-dealing, etc. They also enjoy the same status as men i.e., that of trusted man - or should we say woman - (*Vertrauensleute*) or agent (*Agent* or *Agentin* in the feminine form). Some female agents are even far more efficient and better regarded by their superiors than their male counterparts. A female agent such as Mariette Möller, to whom we'll return later, is an *Agentin* and thus enjoys a higher status within the Brussels B office than other agents, who are simply *Vertrauensleute*. Women are therefore not forced to remain at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder. However, the limited information available on these statuses, for both men and women, does not allow us to determine the distribution of women between these two statuses: is the proportion of women equivalent to that of men, or is there, on the contrary, an imbalance?

If women are entrusted with the same type of mission as men, we may nevertheless wonder whether there isn't a form of gendered separation of certain missions based, among other things, on the gender of counter-espionage targets. In fact, the police fought against women who were involved in intelligence services, who crossed borders loaded with mail, who took advantage of the lesser suspicion towards them to observe fortifications, who welcomed, fed, and housed soldiers and spies in occupied zones, who observed the passage of German army trains through occupied zones to note every detail. Wouldn't the shadowing of Resistance fighters more often be entrusted to female counter-espionage agents? While we can't put forward any concrete figures, our sources do seem to suggest that this was the case. The women in the secret police force, are they more capable of inspiring the confidence of their resistant counterparts?

*Zentralpolizeistelle* agent Eugénie Thiberghien, for example, is entrusted with capturing the trust of Rachel Pevenasse, a member of the Biscops-Walraevens service<sup>15</sup>:

"Around two o'clock in the afternoon, a woman arrived [...] She said she had come to warn [sic] my father of the danger he was in because the service had been discovered, and then she said she also had to warn Horace and Ulisse, whose identity she asked us for, saying she absolutely had to see them that very day. [...] I forgot to tell you that to inspire our confidence, she showed us a picture of the Sacred Heart, which was an allusion to the title of our service, which we called Sacred Heart Service<sup>16</sup>.

However, there's no question of an exclusively gender-based *modus operandi*, whereby women work with men or vice versa, and women only deal with resistance fighters and men with resistance fighters. Every agent is likely to approach both men and women, just as every female agent can approach both sexes.

On the other hand, a gender-based division of staff duties did apply in prisons. From an architectural point of view, women's sections were systematically set up in German-run prisons, although they had already been in place on the eve of the conflict. In the cells of resistance fighters, only women were introduced to play the role of sheep. Naturally, the introduction of men into a wing specifically reserved for women could only arouse the Resistance leader's suspicions.

In this battle against resistance and the threats posed by occupied civilians, certain environments are therefore open only to women, because of the proximity that female agents enjoy with their equals. While the imaginary world leads us to believe that women enjoyed a form of intimacy with men to which not all agents could aspire, there is no evidence that female agents in German counterespionage used their charms to gain access to the information they sought. It is, however, true that some women had a special relationship with their male counterparts.

In fact, women recruited as agents rarely joined German counterespionage on their own, and when they did, they were generally single or at least unmarried. A similar observation is made by Emmanuel Debruyne, who argues that "the involvement of female members of the Resistance was no less strong or serious; but it is conditioned by the activity of a male relative"<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The Biscops intelligence service, active from March 1916 to July 1918, depended on the Cameron organization of the British GQG. With 241 members, it was the second largest intelligence network after the *White Lady*.

<sup>16</sup> AÉ, Liège, Parquet général de la cour d'Appel de Liège, Fonds "répression de la collaboration", Dossier Coulon et consorts, *Deposition of Rachel Pevenasse to the examining magistrate Liège*, February 11, 1921.

<sup>17</sup> Laurence van Ypersele, Emmanuel Debruyne, *De la guerre de l'ombre aux ombres de la guerre*, Brussels, Labor, 2004, p. 75.

Of the 49 women we have identified, only 12 are single, divorced, separated, or widowed, while 29 are in a relationship, sometimes with officers or policemen, a relationship to which we return. We do not know the situation of eight of them.

The couple is therefore a unit that is regularly involved in counterespionage. Husbands and wives, or cohabitants, work together in the service of the secret police. Three couples in particular were active on behalf of the secret police in Belgium: Eugénie Thiberghien and Émile Delacourt, French nationals born respectively in Tourcoing on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1891, and Roubaix on September 29, 1889, who were active in Liège, Brussels and Antwerp; Émile Libois and Flora Culot in Namur; and Gaston Goffaux and his wife Marie Möller, who herself worked with her sister. Gaston Goffaux, sometimes called Jean, was perhaps the most active agent of the German secret police in occupied Belgium and France, as well as in the Netherlands. He was born on May 3, 1880, in Charleroi, and later moved to the Brussels conurbation of Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, where he lived with his wife and worked as a hairdresser before joining the police. Marie, or Mariette Möller is of German descent. Daughter of Ferdinand Möller and Elisabeth Bettag, she was born in Brussels on March 17, 1890, and thus became the little sister of Marthe Möller, born in 1888, who was also accused of being in the service of the secret police with her husband André De Muylder, and both tried by the Military Court in Brussels in 1919. Gaston and Marie joined the Brussels office together, where they both obtained *Agent* status. They took part in the collapse of a number of important networks, including the Jacquet committee and the Stévigny English GQG service, whose leader, Émile Stévigny, was shot in Brussels on December 13, 1917.

Flora Culot and Émile Libois were not married, but were a couple before the war, or at least at the start of the conflict. Flora Culot was born on July 8, 1889, in Hautmont, in the North department, and married Léon Plumard in 1908, with whom she had no children. She first entered the service of the Maubeuge *Polizeistelle*, probably until the territory was integrated into the stage zone. She was suspected by the Allied services of acting as a "postal intermediary between the front and the invaded regions" on behalf of the Germans in the Netherlands<sup>18</sup>. With her lover Émile Libois, whom she had met in Brussels, she went to Namur, where they both joined the secret police "as informers and spies"<sup>19</sup>. She bears the number P.5. Known by the pseudonym Mariette or "L'hotélerie", she practiced both infiltration and "moutonnage" in the prisons of Namur, Brussels, and Liège, with women.

<sup>18</sup> AÉ, Liège, Parquet général de la cour d'Appel de Liège, Fonds " répression de la collaboration ", Dossier Culot et Libois, *Note de Hollande n° 1149 au sujet de Florat Culot*, February 24, 1918.

<sup>19</sup> *La Gazette de Liège*, June 27, 1922.

She was particularly active in the Verviers area, where she posed as a courier for men and letters. After the war, she was sentenced to death following her trial for incivility. Émile Libois was born in Brussels on December 12, 1883, and married Marie Versteegen. A wood engraver, he lived in Jette before settling in Namur with Flora. Although they sometimes worked together, not all their missions were carried out as a duo. They represent the perfect type of agent, using many of the methods already mentioned to infiltrate networks, and diversifying their *modus operandi*.

Involvement "within the family" has several advantages for both the agent and his or her employer. Firstly, recruitment within family networks fosters relationships of trust between officers, and also between police and recruits, since there is already an inter-knowledge<sup>20</sup>. In addition, this pre-existing knowledge of the conflict makes for more efficient duo work, better understanding of each other, better anticipation of each other's actions, and hence better coordination. On the other hand, most of the couples involved have no children, and generally speaking, as mentioned above, women involved in counterespionage are rarely mothers.

Women's involvement in counterespionage therefore remained dependent on the roles assigned to women at the time. Before the war, women were confined to their roles as mothers, housewives and wives, forbidden to engage in any activity considered virile. Historian Anne-Marie Sohn distinguishes four tasks attributed to women: housework, motherhood, caregiving, and medicine. Women who were at odds with one or more of these tasks were considered marginal<sup>21</sup>. Although the family life of female counterespionage agents is rarely mentioned, we can say that their care and medical tasks are far from being fulfilled and are even largely hindered or even thwarted by their involvement. Espionage in particular is perceived as an activity reserved for men, and it is no doubt for this reason that women in couples commit themselves alongside their husbands, and therefore with their husbands' approval. Unmarried women, on the other hand, escape this direct male control, and thanks to the conflict that dilutes the boundaries between the genders, they gain access to these new functions that were previously forbidden to them. Marie Otte, for example, aged 27 at the start of the conflict, was living with her father. Her father was also a private detective and benefited from his daughter's support in certain cases. It was after her father's death in April 1915, when she was no longer subject to any male control, that she was recruited by an agent in Brussels to collaborate with the police, but also the intelligence services, for which she travels to Switzerland<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Alain Dewerpe, *Espion. Une anthropologie historique du secret d'état contemporain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 166-167.

<sup>21</sup> Anne-Marie Sohn, "Les rôles féminins dans la vie privée. Approche méthodologique et bilan de recherches", in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 28/4, 1981, pp. 599-600.

<sup>22</sup> AGR 2, Brussels, Fonds Moscou, no. 359 (Marie Otte), *Acte d'accusation*, Brussels, November 30, 1919.



Generally speaking, in the intelligence war, women who had stayed behind were able to occupy a new place and play hitherto unheard-of roles, becoming involved in resistance networks and counterespionage.

*The spy as lover*

As we can see, it's hard for women to shake off the roles they've been assigned and the imaginary images that cling to them. Women involved in counterespionage suffered from stereotypes linked to the role they played and their proximity to the occupying power, stereotypes associated with the image of the female spy at the beginning of the 20th century. However, we must be careful to distinguish reality from the fantasies associated with the genre, which had a bright future when the war began. In pre-war imaginations and fiction, the link between spying for the enemy and romantic or even purely carnal relationships was tenuous, and the association was systematic<sup>23</sup>. There is a reciprocal movement between suspicions of espionage and suspicions of intimate relations with the occupier; female spies are suspected of having had an affair with the German, or even their employer, and female lovers are suspected of having engaged in espionage. One feeds on the other, and the evocation of one almost inevitably implies the evocation of the other. Such a judgment combines "moral fault against the individual and patriotic fault against the community"<sup>24</sup>. For the occupied population, it is therefore inconceivable that a woman working for the secret police would not also have a romantic relationship with a German policeman.

A War Office report published after the war gives an idea of the negative representations associated with female agents, when the author points out that "all these tasks were carried out with the help of agents composed mainly of renegade local inhabitants, very often women of loose morals". Indeed, the image of the female spy is often associated with prostitution or questionable morality, as is also evidenced by the War Office report, which does not hesitate to say that female agents "of loose morals" are employed "in their profession as prostitutes"<sup>25</sup>. In any case, these women are portrayed as promiscuous, misbehaving, and fond of "nuptials" and parties with the Germans. Fritz Ball, for example, likes to point out that "Miss Scherrer Anna was something of a mistress to the entire Landweerlen staff"<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Tammy Proctor, *Female Intelligence. Women and espionage in the First World War* (London: New York University Press, 2003), pp. 123-126.

<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel Debruyne, *Femmes à Boches. Occupation du corps féminin, dans la France et la Belgique de la Grande Guerre*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2018, p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> *The German Police System as applied to Military Security in War*, p. 160.

<sup>26</sup> AGR, Brussels, CAP, no. 133, *Statement by Léonard Peeters*, May 3, 1919, p. 6.

These shortcuts linked to the image of the female spy are particularly evident in trials in the years following the conflict. Generally speaking, speeches and portrayals of traitors - both male and female - in the press, testimonies and indictments, always depict a marginal and evil individual, venal and immoral. The press undoubtedly best expresses the traits with which these traitors are portrayed, inspiring nothing but disgust. The vocabulary used to talk about counter-espionage agents is varied and always infamous:

These included "the abominable double spy", "the diabolical police", "the sinister hand", "this miserable rascal", "the infamous profession", "the ignoble profession of spy", "Boche spy", "Boche informer spy", etc. In addition to this range of insults, women were subjected to other variations reflecting a sexist view of women. For example, Alice Aubert, who is said to have been an auxiliary of the *GFP* of *AOK 7*, is described as a "fury" or a "gorgon", as well as an "atrocious provider for the Germans", who "inflicted infernal terror on everyone", or who inflicted her "bloodthirsty hatred" on the "valiant French". To top it all off, "Alice Aubert's conduct was so disgraceful that it disgusted the Germans themselves!"<sup>27</sup>.

However, we found only one prostitute among our agents, and nowhere is there any mention of a woman having used her charms to accomplish her mission. As historian Tammy Proctor points out, this practice is more fantasy than fact,

"despite the abundance of evidence that women are competent and effective agents and informants, their popular image portrays female spies as seductresses who used their sexuality to glean information from powerful but sensitive men"<sup>28</sup>.

In fact, the women active in the Allied resistance could just as easily have been seduced by some mole who approached them with the aim of extracting information. Although seduction techniques were obviously not reserved for women, although they were more common in the imagination, they do not seem to have been commonplace in German counterespionage. As historian Alain Dewerpe points out, "these commonplaces seem more the product of the imaginations of the men who produced them than of a reality which, as things stand, remains to be attested".

In fact, the figure of the spy is highly ambiguous, based on the woman's very relationship to sexuality. On the one hand, she's considered a good spy by nature, because she loves intrigue and knows how to get her own way.

"On the other hand, she's weak and can't handle the pressure of shadow warfare. Irrational too, she couldn't be efficient and carry out her missions properly. Thanks to her sexuality, she can be as dangerous as she is effective, but, as Alain Dewerpe writes, it's "the bad spy [who] takes over in the contemporary imagination"<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> *Le Petit Journal*, February 6, 1919.

<sup>28</sup> Tammy Proctor, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> Alain Dewerpe, *op. cit.* p. 165, 163, 164.

As for François Caberg, a former agent of the *Polizeistelle* in Liège, in his account of German counterespionage after the war, he portrays women as gifted for the vile task of espionage:

"Young or old, beautiful or ugly, the woman will always be extremely dangerous as a spy, for if her ugliness or age deprive her of charms, she will know how to find another quality that will make her forget her faults. We generally employ women with rather shady pasts, whom a need for money has brought low, or whom a fault has downgraded"<sup>30</sup>.

Hans Henning von Grote, a German officer, claims that love is the only factor capable of making intelligence officers talk, while money itself fails to convince them. For him, "the spy's best ally has always been, and always will be, the woman with her charms", adding further that "erotic attempts play their part in espionage and are indispensable to it. We must, moreover, distinguish from this tactic applied to the masses, the rarer cases, but how much more instructive, where love has taken the first part and won decisive victories over silence"<sup>31</sup>. This is also the opinion shared by François Caberg, for whom women "thanks to their natural weapons: beauty, charm, grace and persuasion, are able to break through where men have failed"<sup>32</sup>. Officers and policemen have taken on board this image of women, whose physical appearance is their main advantage and most formidable weapon. Léopold Wartel, for example, states that:

"Recruiting female staff was infinitely more difficult for the various police chiefs than recruiting male agents. [They must] 1) be intelligent and pretty 2) be able to keep the secrets entrusted to them 3) be methodical 4) not hesitate, depending on the case, to occupy the same room as the suspect for one or two nights 5) have a serious exterior and remain suitable during their stay in the offices"<sup>33</sup>.

While some women active in counterespionage may have accumulated lovers, they are certainly not the norm, nor are they numerous. The case of the "Bury-Picard woman" is particularly interesting. Antoinette Bury was the wife of Jean Picard, an agent at Bureau A in Brussels. After one of their missions failed, they were deported to Germany as "undesirables", where they were employed in the camps as secret agents, in particular at the Holzminden camp for Lieutenant Pöhlmann, an intelligence officer.

<sup>30</sup> Archives des Affaires étrangères belges (AÉB), Brussels, Classement des 10 000, Dossier 10 944, *Les dessous de l'espionnage allemand pendant la guerre. Révélations d'un espion au service de l'Allemagne*, by François Caberg, Unterseen, August 1918, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Von Lettow-Vorberck, *L'espionnage et le contre-espionnage pendant la guerre mondiale d'après les archives militaires du Reich*, translated into German by Lacaze, 2 vols, Paris, Payot, 1934, pp. 211, 215.

<sup>32</sup> AÉB, Bruxelles, Classement des 10 000, Dossier 10 944, *op. cit.* p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> AGR, Bruxelles, CAP, n° 3011, *La Guerre Secrète. Mémoires d'un policier de la rue de Berlaumont*, by Léopold Wartel, 1921, p. 71.

Fritz Ball argues that Antoinette Bury became the mistress of the officer, who then took "personal steps in Brussels so that she could [sic] return"<sup>34</sup>. Back in Brussels, she became the mistress of Goldschmidt and then of an agent of the Brussels *Polizeistelle A*, a certain Fritz Magnus. It was in this office, moreover, that Antoinette Bury performed her duties as a counter-espionage agent. She moved to Brussels with Fritz Magnus, leaving her husband in the camps in Germany<sup>35</sup>.

According to witnesses called at her trial, Claire d'Haeyere in Tourcoing was the mistress of policeman Hugo Meyerstein for several years, at the same time as working as an agent for the *GFP AOK 6*, while her friend Marguerite Dumez regularly welcomed German policemen and officers into her home to "have a ball" and play music until the early hours. In fact, it seems that this house was made available to her by the *Kommandantur* (Commandant's office) so that she could organize lodgings (*Einquartierung*) for soldiers<sup>36</sup>. These encounters were undoubtedly all the more spontaneous given that his house was located at number 42 boulevard Gambetta, while the police offices were set up at number 69, literally on the other side of the street<sup>37</sup>. Undoubtedly, the relationship these women may have forged with the occupier, and even more so with an occupier who wielded a certain amount of power, such as the *Kommandanten* and other civil servants, gendarmes, and police officers, contributed to their being accused of being the neighborhood whistleblowers or the spies who brought down the greatest patriots, which was obviously not systematically the case, far from it. In a context where rapprochement with the occupying forces was not tolerated, where espionage was perceived as an infamous activity, and where denouncing a Resistance fighter was tantamount to committing a crime against the homeland, the female agents committed a triple offence, combining the image of the "Boche woman", a traitor and a spy.

### *The lover as spy*

As we see in the example of Marguerite Dumez, in the other direction, a woman who got close to the occupier, without being involved in any espionage or counter-espionage activities, would be associated with the pejorative image of the spy, the whistle-blower. In reality, such shortcuts are not only made by women. Generally speaking, for a man or a woman, moving around freely, keep company with the Germans or become rich is enough to designate someone as likely to be in the pay of the Germans, or even as a spy.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, no. 120, *Report no. 2 by police officer Fritz Ball*, [1919], p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52-54.

<sup>36</sup> AGR 2, Bruxelles, Cour d'assises du Brabant, Dossiers inciviques (1919-1926), no. 34 (Claire D'Haeyere), *Letter from von Tessin of the Tourcoing Kommandantur to Marguerite Dumez*, Tourcoing, November 15, 1917.

<sup>37</sup> Several depositions and testimonies report these facts in AGR 2, Bruxelles, Cour d'assises du Brabant, Dossiers inciviques (1919-1926), n° 34 (Claire D'Haeyere).

However, women in relationships with police officers were particularly vulnerable to these shortcuts, and targeted by the denunciations of their fellow citizens, because the Occupation gave rise to representations of the Boches woman, who denounces at the same time as she maintains intimate relationships with the occupier.

Such an association is clearly evident in the diaries of occupied men and women researched by Emmanuel Debruyne, or in the statements of repatriates analyzed by James Connolly. For example, a repatriate who arrived in France via Switzerland describes Mme Pourez-Conteran from Roubaix as a possible spy, because she had intimate relations with German officers and was the mistress of *Kommandant* Hofmann, for whom she acted as interpreter<sup>38</sup>. He reports the testimony of Eugénie Deruelle, in the Aisne region, who describes the prostitutes of Sains-Richaumont as "a clique of spies to be so distrusted"<sup>39</sup>. In February 1917, a group of repatriates from Solesmes in the North explained that "in Solesmes, women of ill repute denounce the population, and the Germans themselves admit that they are their best intelligence agents on hiding places, on conversations, on all the doings of the inhabitants"<sup>40</sup>, while a man from Croix indicated that a local woman "was in constant contact with German officers and in charge of recruiting light women for espionage"<sup>41</sup>. Women, more than men, therefore, arouse fears and fantasies when it comes to espionage and denunciation. In the interrogations of repatriates analyzed by James Connolly, denunciations of women as suspects are more numerous than those concerning men<sup>42</sup>. However, these shortcuts were part and parcel of a wider context in which the occupied had difficulty distinguishing between the roles actually played by the men and women who had made contact with Germans, whatever their nature, and between the different police forces. In this poisonous, tense, and oppressive atmosphere, the inhabitants were quick to suspect one another and to see every member of the German administration as a police officer. Civilians find it hard to distinguish between the various occupying services and administrations. As a result, anyone working for the occupying forces is likely to be perceived as a police spy.

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<sup>38</sup> James Connolly, *The experience of occupation in the Nord, 1914-18. Living with the enemy in First World War France*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2018, p. 79.

<sup>39</sup> Guillaume Giguët, *Les carnets d'Eugénie Deruelle. Une civile en zone occupée durant la Grande Guerre*, Amiens, Encrage, 2010, p. 515; Debruyne Emmanuel, *op. cit.* p. 167.

<sup>40</sup> Archives départementales de Haute-Savoie, 4 M 513, Rapport 701, February 8, 1917, *Résumé des interrogatoires de 470 personnes du Nord*. The quote is from James Connolly's paper "The Culture of the Occupied and Surveillance: Some Reflections" at the Potsdam Study Day "German Counterintelligence and Political Policing in the Occupied Territories, 1914-19" on June 20, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Service historique de la Défense (SHD), Vincennes, 19 N 547, 3<sup>e</sup> armée état-major, 2<sup>e</sup> bureau S.R., n° 4496, *Circulaire au Q.G.A.*, 14 avril 1916.

<sup>42</sup> James Connolly, *op. cit.* p. 38.

The same discourse can be found in the denunciations received by the public prosecutor's office in the aftermath of the war. In spite of the fact that judges, following an investigation, considered that there was no case to answer, and public prosecutors dismissed many cases, the large number of denunciations led to a significant increase in the number of women on trial compared to the pre-war years. Among individuals tried for espionage in Belgium, the proportion of women on trial is much higher than the proportion actually involved in counterespionage. Whereas in our corpus they account for 16% of all agents, they make up 25% of defendants before the Military Court and the Brabant Assize Court. The military auditor's office near the Grand Quartier Général prosecuted 26% of women for espionage, while 30% of those accused of uncivil behavior were prosecuted for espionage. In fact, the discrepancies were most noticeable at the investigation stage, while many prosecutions were subsequently dropped, reflecting the climate of denunciation towards women. In France, while the crime of intelligence with the enemy covers a more diversified reality than the article on the basis of which agents in Belgium were convicted, historian Renée Martinage nevertheless notes that a third of all persons indicted before the Cour d'assises du Nord were women, compared with a tenth under normal circumstances<sup>43</sup>. In these figures, the gender dimension is very clear: of the 28 women on trial, only one was not accused of denunciation. Philippe Salson also notes that, between 1918 and 1923, women made up 40% of the defendants he was able to trace, despite heuristic difficulties. Denunciation is, in fact, the "female" crime of intelligence with the enemy par excellence, as Laurence Bernard, who studied the files of the Military Court<sup>44</sup>, also found. Nevertheless, in each case, they represent a minority of the total number of defendants, figures which are at odds with the imaginary images developed during the conflict, according to which women were more compromised than men<sup>45</sup>.

The lover is certainly not systematically a spy, but the policemen did form relationships with some of the occupants, which lasted for varying lengths of time. The fact that the policemen are anchored, for months or even years, in the spaces they share with the occupied allows them to forge close ties with them. This bond is particularly paradoxical given that it is precisely these occupiers whom they must control, and whom it would be in their best interests to keep at a distance, to avoid any leakage of information. The union of a German policeman with an occupied woman could prove all the more damaging to the interests of the army, since the policemen are the first to have to defend these interests and, rightly promise when they take their oath to preserve and protect military secrets.

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<sup>43</sup> Renée Martinage, "Les collaborateurs devant la cour d'assises du Nord après la très Grande Guerre", in *Revue du Nord*, 309 (1995), p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> Guillaume Baclin, Xavier Rousseaux, Laurence Bernard, *En première ligne. La justice militaire belge face à l'incivisme au sortir de la Première Guerre mondiale*, Brussels, Archives générales du Royaume, 2010, p. 113.

<sup>45</sup> Philippe Salson, *L'Aisne occupée. Les civils dans la Grande Guerre*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, p. 180.

*Feldpolizeikommissar* (Field Police Commissioner) Thoma emphasized the need for police officers to remain aloof and objective in his letters of recommendation to police officers in the 6<sup>th</sup> army at the end of the conflict, testifying to the importance of this quality, which would certainly be lost in the case of a union<sup>46</sup>. No doubt these connections, as well as the friendly relations that police officers were able to forge with the occupied, prompted the *AOK 6* to call its police officers to order in January 1918:

"Officers, civil servants and soldiers working with the 6<sup>th</sup> Army *PFM* are required to maintain secrecy on matters entrusted to them for processing and those of which they become aware through their official activities; they must not disclose such information to persons not concerned with such matters, unless such disclosure is required by the matter itself.

"All objects and information relating to the intelligence service and defense against espionage are kept secret in the interests of national defense; their provision or disclosure to persons not involved in the service endangers the security of the *Reich* and results in a court decision for treason against military secrets under the law of 3.6.14 or treason against the state under sections 89 and 90 of the Imperial Penal Code"<sup>47</sup>.

Such risks may have deterred some. If these relationships are born between two individuals, they are also built under the reproving gaze of the occupying authority and the occupied, who publicly condemn any form of rapprochement, forcing the protagonists to enter into a double game between the private and public spheres<sup>48</sup>.

Without falling into a purely opportunistic and caricatured vision, maintaining relations with the occupied, beyond the *Vertrauensleute* (confidential representatives), also offers police officers the opportunity to obtain information on certain individuals, on the habits of the inhabitants, on places conducive to intrigue and criminal acts. Among these relationships, carnal or amorous ones bring other women into the heart of the web of relationships that police officers build with members of their bureaus. Romantic relationships between members of the occupying and occupied administration are more spontaneous as some of them stay permanently in the homes of the occupied, sometimes deprived of male referents. This gave them time to establish deeper ties with civilians, while moral and patriotic barriers were gradually lowered.

Numerous examples confirm that many police officers are having love affairs with women they've been with for months or even years, especially as many of them are still young and single. Their knowledge, admittedly imperfect and incomplete, sometimes wobbly, of the French language, nevertheless helps to create bonds.

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<sup>46</sup> BayHStA, Abt. IV, Munich, AOK 6, 856, *Dienstzeugnis by FPK Thoma to policeman Bredel*, AHQ, November 14, 1918.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 847, *Dienstbefehl des Oberkommandos der 6. Armee*, January 23, 1918.

<sup>48</sup> Philippe Salson, "Peut-on faire une lecture sociale de l'expérience d'occupation?", in James Connolly, e. a. (ed.), *En territoire ennemi. Expérience d'occupation, transferts, héritages (1914-1949)*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2018, p. 79.

Once the language barrier has been broken down, it's easier to build peaceful relationships, not just because people now understand each other, but because they can move beyond the "hierarchical submission" of the occupied to the occupier, whom they don't understand, towards a more egalitarian relationship based on mutual understanding. While the emergence of such relationships is largely facilitated by the fact that soldiers or members of the German administration live in the occupant's home, such circumstances occur less frequently in the case of police officers, some of whom occupy independent accommodation. The emergence of feelings, or at least a certain attraction for the other, could also be limited by the status of police officers. While the occupiers and soldiers may agree that they regret the cruelty of war, a despair that helps them to get closer<sup>49</sup>, the policemen contribute to the particularly difficult lot suffered by the occupied and embody the "other".

In his analysis of the diary of Henriette Moisson, a 19-year-old student living in Origny-Sainte-Benoite in the Aisne region of France, Philippe Salson shows that, while she formed relationships with the German "barbarism" and the oppressive occupier, the "poor" German soldier suffered just as much as the occupied. In his analysis of the diary of Henriette Moisson, a 19-year-old student from Origny-Sainte-Benoite in the Aisne, Philippe Salson shows that, although she developed relationships with the German soldiers and discovered a humanity in them that led her to appreciate them, she continued to reject the occupying policy, which embodied the initial representation of the barbaric Boche<sup>50</sup>.

No doubt it was for these reasons that the police officers developed closer relationships with the Belgian and French women they employed, who had already crossed the line drawn by the national community, which required that a patriotic distance be maintained from the German. The frequency of encounters between police officers and female agents may also have contributed to the development of feelings, although it is never possible to be sure of their presence or to define with certainty the very nature of the bond. Several post-war files on women accused of intelligence with the enemy in France, and of espionage and denunciation in Belgium, mention such relationships, of varying length and intensity, between police officers and occupied women.

In occupied territories, women are well integrated into police offices, and are even indispensable, because the restraint we observed on the part of police officers towards women meant that they had to entrust tasks involving physical contact with them to employees recruited from outside their teams. These women were either German nationals from the Empire, for example for secretarial tasks requiring a knowledge of the German language or were auxiliaries from the occupied zones. These natives essentially took on two functions: body searches and as counterespionage agents.

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<sup>49</sup> Emmanuel Debruyne, *op. cit.* p. 145, 128-133.

<sup>50</sup> Philippe Salson, *op. cit.* p. 79.



So, it's essentially because the secret police need women that they are hired. While it's not possible to say that women are considered equal to men in police offices, we can say that some of them enjoy the highest status. Female officers are also entrusted with missions that are equivalent to those of men. On the other hand, women involved in counterespionage are subject to numerous stereotypes linked to their gender and occupation, both within police offices and - above all - within the companies they work for. Women working for the German secret police were seen as lovers of policemen and promiscuous, while women who had more or less lasting and serious relationships with German policemen, without themselves being in the service of counterespionage, were seen as spies. The few testimonials from male officers we found also paint a negative picture of women. However, we do not know what the police themselves thought of the women they employed.

A study of the internal workings and missions of the various police bureaus shows that the role of women in German counterespionage is certainly not limited to that attributed to the *femme fatale* spy at the end of the 19th century. They are sometimes at the forefront of the dismantling of a network or attend police interrogations. But these women, who live in a male-dominated world, find it hard to get involved when there is no male figure to accompany them. At the beginning of the 20th century, women were obliged to take on certain roles, including that of wife. Without necessarily being a secondary part of a team, women in the office have often - but not always - entered at the same time as their spouse, or because they have become the spouse of a member of the office, police officer or agent. This is not to say that women only join the force because they have followed a man, but it does raise questions about their motivation to join these teams. This does not mean, however, that they are not active independently of their spouses, even if some missions are carried out as a couple, which in theory always allows greater confidence in one's mission partner. Women in the German secret police therefore play roles equivalent to their male counterparts, but will never have access to the police profession, which is reserved for men.

**Élise Rezsöhazy**

# Lydia Oswald, a spy of great stature or a "thin link"? Nazi intelligence?<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Fabien Lostec  
University of Rennes 2,  
TEMPORA

## ABSTRACT

Although the study of the history of intelligence increasingly takes into account the involvement of women in the activities of the services, the case of Lydia Oswald remains fairly confidential. Thus, even more than for some of her more famous colleagues - Mata-Hari or Marthe Richer in particular - making the distinction between what is legend and what was the reality of Lydia Oswald's espionage activity is a major challenge for the historian of intelligence, as the reliable sources concerning her are few and difficult to exploit. Recruited during the inter-war period in a context of latent international tensions by the intelligence services of the Third Reich, her arrest gave rise to the construction of a legend by the press that requires a thorough revision. The present article thus proposes, through a cross-analysis of these articles and various archives, to paint a nuanced portrait of Lydia Oswald and her life as a spy.

**Key words** : Lydia Oswald - Spy - Inter-war period - Counter-espionage - Spanish Civil War - German Intelligence - Third Reich - Press - Archives

"Is she a spy? A blonde lady is arrested at Brest station just as she is about to take the train to Paris in the company of a lieutenant<sup>2</sup>." It was with this entry that *La Dépêche de Brest* first mentioned in its columns an espionage affair that was to hold the public's attention for several weeks in the spring of 1935: the Lydia Oswald affair. After spending just over a month in the city of Ponant, the woman was arrested on charges of having gleaned military information for Nazi Germany.

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<sup>1</sup> This article expands on and updates, in the light of new sources, our paper: "Une espionne nazie en rade de Brest: l'affaire Lydia Oswald", *En Envoy* [online], 7, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, March 3, 1935.

Tried the following September, along with two naval officers suspected of being her accomplices, she was finally sentenced to nine months in prison.

For a long time, the subject of cinema, the press, literature and even comic strips, intelligence has entered the field of analysis of historians over the last twenty years<sup>3</sup>. In this developing historiography, women have not been forgotten, at least when it comes to their actions during the world wars. Although Lydia Oswald was active during the rise of fascism, she did so in peacetime, and has received little scholarly attention. She therefore remains in the shadow of far more famous spies, such as Mata Hari or Marthe Richard. Like the latter, however, she is surrounded by a number of stereotypes that need to be deconstructed<sup>4</sup>. According to a dichotomous gendered imaginary, men who work in the world of secrecy fight or exercise command functions; women, on the other hand, are more likely to use seduction and manipulation. "Because they are less physically strong, and often in lower social positions, women are structurally on the side of the hidden, of intrigue", says Érik Neveu<sup>5</sup>. However, the image of female spies is more ambiguous than it seems. On the one hand, they are portrayed as being good at what they do because of their taste for conspiracy, their ability to control their sexuality and to avoid attracting attention; on the other, they are described as being unfit for such an activity because they are irrational, unable to control their emotions and insufficiently concerned with love of country<sup>6</sup>. During the inter-war years, women were numerous in intelligence circles, their presence correlating in particular with the rise of the secret services, itself linked to the expansion of the state apparatus, which had been very significant since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, French counterespionage was in the hands of both the police and the army, the former being responsible for guarding arsenals and military establishments<sup>7</sup>. Although rivals, these services had to work together to deal with the particularly acute threat posed by Hitler. According to Olivier Forcade, German intelligence was "part of the Reich's clandestine rearmament and a permanent means of circumventing the Treaty of Versailles<sup>8</sup>".

But the Nazis weren't the only ones, and certainly not the first, to take an interest in Brest, France's second-largest military port after Toulon.

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<sup>3</sup> On Lydia Oswald, see the twin comics by Briac, *Quitter Brest*, Nantes, Sixto, 2015 and *Avel Reter*, Brest, Nadoz vor Embannadurioù, 2015. On the historiography of the issue in France: Olivier Forcade, "Objets, approches et problématiques d'une histoire française du renseignement: un champ historiographique en construction", *Histoire, économie, société*, 2012/2, pp. 99-110.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Chantal Antier, Marianne Walle, Olivier Lahaie, *Les espionnes dans la Grande Guerre*, Rennes, Ouest-France, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Érik Neveu, "L'espionne", in François Rouquet, Fabrice Virgili, Danièle Voldman (dir.), *Amours, guerres et sexualité*, Paris, Gallimard/BDIC/Musée de l'Armée, 2007, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Alain Dewerpe, *Espion, une anthropologie historique du secret d'État contemporain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 163.

<sup>7</sup> This distribution followed the Dreyfus Affair. Previously, counter-espionage had been exclusively in the hands of the Army: Olivier Forcade, *La République secrète: histoire des services spéciaux français de 1918 à 1939*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2008, p. 23-31.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 280.

The city, with a population of just under 80,000, was visited by Andrée Lefebvre. Tried in Paris in 1926, she was sentenced to six months in prison and fined 500 francs for spying on the arsenal on behalf of a British MI6 officer. In the 1920s and 1930s, several Soviet intelligence agents were also arrested here<sup>9</sup>. In an increasingly uncertain international context, the Communists and Nazis were undoubtedly those who attracted the greatest attention from French intelligence. The fact remains that, by definition, the men and women of secrecy leave few traces: what posed problems for police officers and judges in the past also poses problems for historians today.

It's always tricky to disentangle legend from reality when working on spies, but here the difficulties are even greater due to the lack of sources. It was impossible, for example, to consult Lydia Oswald's minute of judgement and procedural file, both of which were destroyed by the bombing raids on Brest in 1944. Only a few papers, kept at the Central repository of military justice archives in Le Blanc (Indre), were not burnt, but they tell us little about the case as such. The press of the time is a great help. The *Gallica* and *Retronews* websites list over 80 newspapers published in France that devoted at least one article to Lydia Oswald - for a total of almost 700 articles. Unsurprisingly, the papers were most numerous during the key moments of the case (arrest and trial).

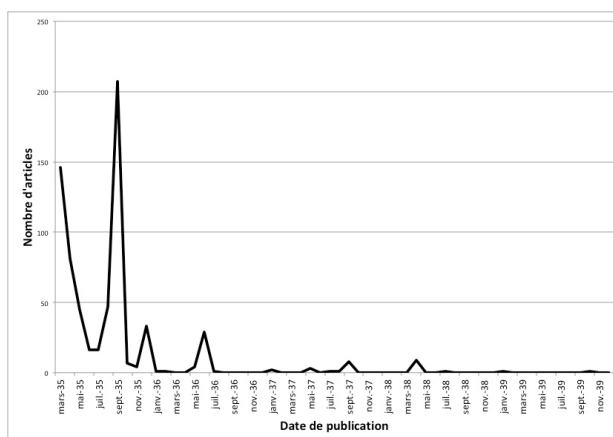


Fig 1: Chronology of articles on the Lydia Oswald affair in the French press

<sup>9</sup> Roger Faligot, *Brest l'insoumise*, Brest, Éd. Dialogues, 2016, p. 436-440. On Soviet espionage, see in particular Georges Vidal, "L'affaire Fantômas (1932). Le contre-espionnage français et les prémices de la préparation à la guerre", *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 119, 2013, p. 3-14.

Of all these newspapers, three stand out for the accuracy of the information they provide. These are *Paris-Soir*, *La Dépêche de Brest* and *L'Ouest-Éclair*, the logical focus of our study. Lydia Oswald's life was also chronicled in a series of articles published by the British tabloid *The People*, to which the spy gave her recollections in June 1936. The affair took on an international dimension. The *British newspaper archive* refers to some sixty articles about Lydia Oswald, published in 27 different newspapers between March and December 1935. These papers appeared in the national, regional, and even local press, from Belfast to Coventry via Liverpool, and from Dundee to Portsmouth via Leeds. Some of the headlines are eloquent, such as that of the *Belfast Newsletter*, in its December 2, 1935 edition: "Spy who fell love" or "L'espionne qui est tombée amoureux"<sup>10</sup>. It's easy to see that the press sometimes provides more information on the representations of the spy mentioned above than on Lydia Oswald's actual activities. Especially as some journalists are deeply influenced by the images of the spy novel, which then becomes a genre in its own right. Press articles can be usefully supplemented by archives held at the Defense Historical Service at Vincennes, as well as by research by Roger Faligot at the National Archives in London and Bernard Hauteclouque at the Federal Archives in Berne<sup>11</sup>. The documents consulted by the two historians mainly concern Lydia Oswald's life after her release from prison. Still suspected of being a spy, she was tracked by certain Western European intelligence services<sup>12</sup>.

By gathering this documentation, the aim of this article is to broaden and deepen our knowledge of Lydia Oswald, even if her career can, at times, only be written in dotted lines. The aim is to study her motivations and actions, while analyzing the image of the spy in the press of the time. To do this, we'll begin by presenting Lydia Oswald's itinerary before she appears on the radar screens of French counterespionage.

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<sup>10</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, December 2, 1935.

<sup>11</sup> At the SHD, see the three files on Lydia Oswald in 7 N2 2200/2 (1935-1938), 7 N2 2976/28 (January 1934-April 1935) and 7 N2 2593/9 (1927-1937). At the National Archives in Kew, the *Security Service* devotes a file to him under KV 2/3386. At the Federal Archives in Berne, six procedures concern Lydia Oswald: E4320B#1984/29#565 (Oswald, Lydia, 1906, archives of the Attorney General's Office, Berne), E2200.41-04#1000/1678#38 (Oswald Lydia, archives of the Swiss Embassy in Paris), E2200.136-01#1000/182#70 (Mr. Otto Leuenberger, journalist, and his companion Lydia Oswald, stay in Japan, archives of the Federal Administration, Bern), E2001E#1000/1571#877 (Oswald, Lydia, 1906, Department of Political Affairs), E2001C#1000/1534#3804 (Leuenberger Hans O., Zürich. Akten s. B.51.13.13 von 1935-36, Oswald Lydia, Federal Administration, Bern), E2001C#1000/1534#3964 (Oswald Lydia, Frl. Akten s. B.32.21 von 1937-39, Federal Administration, Bern).

<sup>12</sup> Roger Faligot, *op. cit.* p. 798; Bernard Hauteclouque, "Lydia Oswald, une Mata Hari venue de Suisse", *Société française d'histoire de la Police*, accessed November 11, 2022, <http://www.sfhp.fr/index.php?post/2019/03/12/LYDIA-OSWALD-une-Mata-Hari-venue-de-Switzerland>.

We then examine her activities in Brest and her trial. A final section will trace her career after the verdict and find out whether she is still involved in the intelligence community.

*From Lydia Oswald to Miss Switzerland*

Lydia Oswald was born on September 13, 1906, in St. Gallen, German-speaking Switzerland, to a Swiss father, Heinrich Oswald, and a German mother, Helena Kiesling<sup>13</sup>. The former was a house painter - or draughtsman - and the latter did not seem to have a profession. The modesty of her background forced Lydia Oswald to work from the age of 14, in a chemists, where she stuck labels on "specialty bottles against neurasthenia"<sup>14</sup>. She then went on to work in various "trading houses" of her country, sometimes as a saleswoman, sometimes as a secretary.

"Her brothers and sisters followed the same path: Manfred worked in a hosiery factory, Mignon became a secretary in Geneva and Léo joined the French Foreign Legion. His siblings followed the same path: Manfred worked in a hosiery factory, Mignon became a secretary in Geneva and Léo joined the French Foreign Legion. All saw their father leave the family home in 1923, then wander from country to country before dying in a hospice in Algiers in 1931.

In 1925, at the age of 19, Lydia Oswald became an au pair in Marseille. From then on, she never stopped migrating. We find her in Italy, then Algeria - where she hopes to see her father again? - as a model. It was in Algeria, in the spring of 1930, that she became involved with a wealthy Arab from Orléansville. Police records indicate that she wanted to marry him, claiming to be pregnant by his works. She then became close to a journalist, with whom she travelled to Barcelona. It also appears that she tried to immigrate to Canada and the United States but was turned away. Was this because the American authorities already suspected her of espionage? Lydia Oswald simply asserts that she didn't have a visa. After spending some time in Europe (Great Britain, Switzerland), she crossed the Atlantic again. She would then have lived in the United States- New York and Los Angeles in particular - as well as Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia. These travels, and the adventures associated with them, would later classify the young woman as a "demi-mondaine". This image fits perfectly with that of the spy, blending the stereotypes of luxury and seduction<sup>15</sup>. Maintained by wealthy lovers, Lydia Oswald is described as a woman who likes the easy life, earning a lot of money without putting in much effort.

Lydia Oswald returned to Europe in 1933, probably aboard the *Champlain*. We find her gravitating around the circles of the Société of Nations in Geneva, where she was dubbed *Miss Switzerland*<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> On the spy's youth, we refer you to Bernard Hauteclouque, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Paris-Soir*, May 17, 1936.

<sup>15</sup> In the collective imagination, female spies were necessarily "women of little virtue", a spying on women was considered contrary to morality: Chantal Antier, "Espionnage et espionnes de la Grande Guerre", *Revue historique des armées*, 247, 2007, p. 42-51.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that some journalists report that Lydia Oswald entered SDN circles in September 1934, when she had already been recruited.

Coming from the linguistic crossroads that is Switzerland, she was fluent in several languages - French, English, German and, to a lesser extent, Italian and Spanish - which was an asset in the cosmopolitan world of the League of Nations, particularly conducive to espionage<sup>17</sup>. It was this mastery of languages that partly explains his recruitment by the *Abwehr* (Defense) in 1934.

It's hard to say what motivated Lydia Oswald's commitment, whether it was money, a desire to escape her ordinary life, a taste for adventure or ideology. However, no trace of politicization is discernible in the young woman's life during this period, which would tend to validate the other hypotheses. Similarly, Marianne Walle points out that the motivations of agents recruited by German intelligence:

"These motivations are sometimes supplemented by the pleasure of plotting intrigues or taking part in major world events"<sup>18</sup>.

It is also difficult to know exactly which agent recruited Lydia Oswald. The only lead we can follow at present is that of Roger Faligot, who indicates that it was a "pseudo-German journalist following the instructions of Colonel Otto Ehinger of the *Abwehr* post in Stuttgart"<sup>19</sup>. In his book *Les espionnes du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Spies of the 20th century), Raymond Ruffin notes that Lydia Oswald went on to become a pupil of the famous Elsbeth Schragmüller, known as *Fräulein Doktor*<sup>20</sup>. A kind of icon of female espionage, this woman has given rise to many legends. Pierre Bouchardon, the military examining magistrate who investigated the Mata Hari trial, but who never met Elsbeth Schragmüller, paints an unusual portrait of her:

"She smokes Russian cigarettes and complacently shows off her calves by crossing her legs [...]. No one questions her orders, which she never repeats... The colonels talk to her with their hands on their cap visors and heels together [...]. From time to time, she plays with a Browning that she pulls from her pocket or caresses the pommel of a riding crop with a hand heavily laden with rings"<sup>21</sup>.

Simultaneously frightening and attractive, this woman who commands men is, according to Alain Dewerpe, a "masochistic fantasy"<sup>22</sup>. Beyond the representations, we know that Elsbeth Schragmüller plays an important role in the German intelligence center in Brussels during the First World War.

<sup>17</sup> Bernard Hauteclouque, art. cité. Lydia Oswald also claims to have been introduced to languages in her youth, after her working days: *Paris-Soir*, May 17, 1936.

<sup>18</sup> Marianne Walle, "Fräulein Doktor Elsbeth Schragmüller", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 232, 2008, p. 52.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Faligot, *op. cit.* p. 798.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Ruffin, *Les espionnes du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Chaintreaux, France-Empire Monde, 2013, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Bouchardon, *Souvenirs*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1953, pp. 296-297.

<sup>22</sup> Alain Dewerpe, *op. cit.* p. 164.

In particular, she is known to have trained a number of spies at the Antwerp intelligence center, including Mata Hari. The scenario proposed by Raymond Ruffin cannot be accepted, however, as Elsbeth Schragmüller pursued an academic career after the war, until her dismissal in 1934 following the Rohm affair - her father and brother were shot during the Night of the Long Knives - and her death in 1940. No source on the Oswald affair explicitly mentions this woman.

What's more, after her arrest, the young spy declared that she had been trained by a certain "Major Gompart" in Lindau (Bavaria), on the shores of Lake Constance<sup>23</sup>. The town is home to a German intelligence center, a branch of the Stuttgart center, reserved for training female agents. Very close to Lydia Oswald's birthplace, it recruited almost exclusively from within Switzerland<sup>24</sup>. The young woman would have been trained there for three weeks in the spring of 1934. While this period may seem relatively short, it was very common at the time<sup>25</sup>. The future spy learned to handle codes and sympathetic inks. She trained in weapons recognition and studied topography and transmission techniques.

*In the shadow of the swastika*

Without being isolated, Lydia Oswald is, like many spies, a single woman without children. This situation facilitated her immersion in Brest, where she had already been followed by the French counter-espionage services for several months. They decided to apprehend her at the beginning of March 1935. Placed in police custody, the young girl had to answer for her actions before an examining magistrate.

After her training, Lydia Oswald was soon sent on missions. In June 1934, she tried to be recruited by the 2<sup>nd</sup> office of the army general staff, i.e., the military intelligence service. The latter immediately placed the young woman under surveillance and alerted the National Security, which distributed her description to all its staff<sup>26</sup>. In particular, agents based in Geneva were tasked with gathering information on her<sup>27</sup>. French military ports seemed to be a prime target, as Lydia Oswald made a short stay in Toulon before moving on to Brest. Nazi ambitions obviously explain such missions to French arsenals, but the fact that the *Abwehr* was headed by Admiral Canaris - a former submariner - since the beginning of 1935 should also be taken into account.

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<sup>23</sup> Bernard Hauteclouque, art. cité.

<sup>24</sup> Henri Navarre, *Le service de renseignements 1871-1944*, Paris, Plon, 1978, p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> Marianne Walle, art. cité, p. 55; Sébastien Laurent, art. cité, p. 283.

<sup>26</sup> When the 2<sup>e</sup> office is informed of espionage activities directly targeting the armed forces or military establishments, it must immediately inform the Sûreté Générale or the Préfecture de Police: Georges Vidal, art. cité, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Hauteclouque, art. cité.



In any case, it was on the train from Paris to Finistère that the spy, then posing as a reporter, became close to a 29-year-old ensign, René Guignard. Did this encounter happen by chance, or not? Lydia Oswald later claimed that her handler had given her a photograph of Guignard, with instructions to seduce him<sup>28</sup>.

After arriving in the city of Ponant at the end of January 1935, the young woman took up residence at the Hotel *Le Continental*, giving her true identity. After her arrest, some journalists thought Oswald was an alias. Using "distorting stereotypes based on an obsession with the occult and conspiracy", in the words of Sébastien Laurent, they probably sought to amplify the mysterious nature of the affair, while at the same time casting doubt on the spy's approach, which they likened to casualness<sup>29</sup>. Thus, in *La Dépêche de Brest* of March 4, 1935, we read that:

"The identity papers found in the defendant's possession and her passport do indeed bear the name Oswald, as she claims to call herself, but certain irregularities, notably concerning her place of birth, lead us to believe that Oswald is an assumed name, taken to hide her true identity, and perhaps she is also hiding her true nationality<sup>30</sup>".

The press also emphasized the luxury of the hotel, as well as the size of the tips that the young woman allegedly left for the staff, confirming the clichés about the spy<sup>31</sup>. Lydia Oswald then frequented several of the city's restaurants, cafés, and nightclubs, in the company of René Guignard. It was thanks to him that she managed to get to the cruiser *Émile Bertin*. With the ship's ensign due to sail for the West Indies, the young woman became the mistress of one of her friends, also aged 29, Count and Lieutenant Jean de Forceville. The couple frequently dined together in restaurants, and on several occasions visited the officer's apartment on rue d'Aiguillon. Above all, Forceville in turn took Lydia Oswald aboard a warship under construction: the cruiser *La Galissonnière*. The two ships visited by the spy were then flagships of the French Navy. Launched in 1933, they were equipped with nine 152 mm guns and 6 550 mm torpedo tubes. But it was above all the testing in Brest of a new wireless radio-controlled torpedo that seemed to interest the *Abwehr*. In 1936, Lydia Oswald told *The People* newspaper: "I was responsible for obtaining information on the arming of the cruisers *Émile Bertin* and *La Galissonnière* with 'secret guns' and a new torpedo launcher".

After spending a month in the vicinity of the Brest arsenal, Lydia Oswald decides to travel abroad for several weeks with his lover.

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<sup>28</sup> *Paris-Soir*, May 17, 1936.

<sup>29</sup> Sébastien Laurent, "Le service secret de l'État", Marc-Olivier Baruch, Vincent Duclert (dir.), *Serviteurs de l'État*, Paris, La Découverte, 2000, p. 275.

<sup>30</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, March 4, 1935.

<sup>31</sup> See for example *La Dépêche de Brest*, March 3, 1935.

According to Henri Navarre, it was a man called Gassmann who informed the French authorities of this plan. A member of the *Abwehr*, this Austrian, who opposed the Nazis, had in fact been working for French counterespionage since 1932<sup>32</sup>. The young woman's behavior and her exclusive association with the military having reinforced their suspicions, Inspector Linas - who had come specially from rue des Saussaies (Paris) - and Special Superintendent Cadet decided not to offer her a possible one-way ticket<sup>33</sup>. The arrest took place at Brest station on the morning of March 2, 1935, as the couple were about to board a train bound for the capital. Covered in multicolored butterflies, the young woman's suitcase bore witness to her many trips to Europe and America. While searching the suitcase, the police found some of the spy's correspondence and a questionnaire about warships. Influenced by a highly gendered imagination, the journalists saw this as a document designed to compensate for her lack of technical knowledge<sup>34</sup>.

Lydia Oswald and Jean de Forceville were subsequently taken into police custody. The questionnaire left no doubt as to her relations with Germany, and the young woman was reportedly forced to "acknowledge that she was indeed in the service of that country, but she stated emphatically that she had never yet given it any information [...]"<sup>35</sup>. This time, the information gathered by the journalists seems to blur their gendered representations. Indeed, the young woman's confession does not prevent her from remaining very calm. Forceville, on the other hand, is distraught when he learns that he has been seduced by a spy in the service of Germany. In the *Ouest-Éclair* of March 5, 1935, a journalist reported that:

"This naval lieutenant, who belonged to an old family and enjoyed a large personal fortune, had unfortunately allowed himself to be seduced by the charm of the spy, to whom he was attached by a deep feeling. Plans for the future were even made between them, and Lydia Oswald willingly gave herself up as this officer's fiancée"<sup>36</sup>.

Affected by his officer's honor, Jean de Forceville even expressed the intention of committing suicide, which led to him being placed under observation at the maritime hospital<sup>37</sup>. Not only do female spies use their charm to as a way of getting information, but they devitalize the men they trap: Lydia Oswald refers the soldier to traits usually associated with the female sex, such as weakness, gullibility, and lack of emotional control.

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<sup>32</sup> Roger Faligot, *op. cit.* p. 441-442.

<sup>33</sup> After the Dreyfus Affair and the creation of the Sûreté Générale in 1899, which took charge of counter-espionage, intelligence and counter-espionage went through a period of upheaval. The military members of the Intelligence Service continued to investigate cases, but as they were not judicial police officers, they were assigned (as they had been before the Dreyfus Affair) two Sûreté officers to carry out investigations: Gaby Aron-Castaing, *Soldats sans uniforme. La répression policière de l'espionnage et de la trahison, de l'Affaire Dreyfus à 1945*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>35</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, March 4, 1935.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, March 5, 1935.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, March 4, 1935. Perhaps this gesture also reflects the officers' long-standing aversion to espionage: Alain Dewerpe, "La République a-t-elle besoin d'espions?", Marc-Olivier Baruch, Vincent Duclert (dir.), *op. cit.* p. 141-142.

Paradoxically, it is these characteristics, combined with the officer's family reputation and apparent lack of motive, particularly financial, that prompt the police to quickly clear Forceville of any wrongdoing.

For her part, the spy remained in police custody until the morning of March 3, 1935. As her accomplices had undoubtedly been informed of her arrest, they sent her no further mail from that date onwards. Like all intelligence agents, Lydia Oswald could not expect to be supported by her employers, who were anxious not to compromise themselves, so she had to face the investigation alone. This was entrusted to the examining magistrate of the maritime council of war. Initially confined to the Bouguen civil prison, the young woman was logically transferred to the Pontaniou military prison in Recouvrance. Although she seemed to cope relatively well with her imprisonment, she nevertheless suffered from the contrast between these places and the environments she had frequented in previous years. "The only thing that bothers her is the presence in this resting place of certain parasites that are obviously unpleasant for such a refined person", reads a journalist<sup>38</sup>. A sign that she was perceived as an exceptional prisoner, when a fire broke out in Pontaniou on July 18, 1935, *L'Ouest-Éclair* was careful to point out that "the inmates, including the spy Lydia Oswald, had to be evacuated". The Swiss woman was then entrusted to the care of the warders' wives, who had taken refuge in the prison laundry<sup>39</sup>.

In the press, the Oswald affair is, at least initially, considered important. In the medium-sized town of Brest, it had a very strong resonance:

"The spy affair uncovered in Brest is still the talk of the town. For the past three days, all the talk in Brest has been about Lydia Oswald, the blonde spy, and her distinguished young friend, the lieutenant. The romantic aspects of this case, which could obviously inspire a screenwriter, have aroused particular public interest. However, the case needs to be taken more seriously, and each day sees the spy's guilt become clearer and clearer"<sup>40</sup>.

For journalists in Brest, the dividing line between fiction and reality is relatively narrow. Their representations were influenced by the great figures of the popular novel of the interwar period, such as Fantômas, whose adventures were adapted for the big screen<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, March 9, 1935

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, July 19, 1935.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, March 6, 1935.

<sup>41</sup> Dominique Kalifa, *Tu entreras dans le siècle en lisant Fantômas*, Paris, Vendémiaire, 2017. The adventures of Fantômas were serialized in the press of the time, notably in *La Dépêche de Brest*.

An article published in *La Dépêche de Brest*; Lydia Oswald hid her face in a silk scarf to dissuade onlookers gathered outside the courthouse from photographing her. A few minutes later, "the "beautiful unknown" hid her face again... in the manner of Fantômas. But if journalists are convinced that this case is important, it's not so much because of the spy's hidden face as because of the "absolute mystery surrounding the investigation". Even if they are annoyed by the precautions being taken to ensure that nothing leaks out of the investigation, many point out that a well-conducted investigation should lead to a major crackdown on the intelligence agents in Germany's pay. At the same time, this lack of information, which can also be amplified by journalists to highlight their investigative skills, leaves the field open to rumors.

The Security National first carried out a number of searches in France and abroad to trace the agents whose names and post office box numbers had been found in Lydia Oswald's correspondence. They discovered that all her mail was addressed to her by registered mail and that, shortly before her arrest, she had sent two telegrams and four letters by express mail to Paris and Switzerland<sup>42</sup>. In particular, they found a message written in German by a certain "dokter" from Leipzig, thanking her for the information she had provided. Another German agent sent her a coded message from Geneva, which included the sentence: "Thanks for the eggs from Émile's hen, but he's taking care of the pipes." Thanked for the information she had passed on about the *Émile Bertin*, Lydia Oswald would here be invited to obtain more information about the torpedoes. All these elements undermine the defendant's defense, as does the 5,000-franc money order sent to her from Switzerland<sup>43</sup>.

In addition to her correspondence, the police are questioning the young woman's movements since she moved to the banks of the Penfeld. The journalists' report that she was absent for a week to travel to Paris, in the company of Jean de Forceville, to attend a ball for former students of the Brest Naval Academy<sup>44</sup>. The question then arises as to whether she took advantage of this opportunity to make contact with her handler, who would have given her instructions or collected the information in his possession. While the journalist who reported on the arrest in Paris of "one of the main heads of German espionage in France" in *L'Ouest-Éclair* on April 11, 1945, indicated that no correlation seemed to exist between this affair and the Oswald affair, he was nevertheless careful to specify that "the fact remains possible"<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, March 4, 1935.

<sup>43</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, March 7, 1935. This sum, which would correspond to the spy's monthly salary, was relatively large at the time. For example, a laborer earned just over 600 francs a month, a junior judge just over 1,800 francs a month and a lieutenant-colonel 4,300 francs a month.

<sup>44</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, March 3, 1935; *L'Ouest-Éclair*, March 4, 1935.

<sup>45</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, April 11, 1935.

Similarly, the investigators want to know more about the couple's stay in Saint-Malo, in particular at the home of a naval officer. On-site investigations did not lead to any charges being brought against the officer. However, they did uncover the whereabouts of a dancer working in an establishment in the town's old quarter, which the couple had frequented during their stay. Above all, this young woman had a Germanic-sounding name and had arrived in Brest just a few hours after Lydia Oswald and Jean de Forceville. She seems all the more suspicious in that, before leaving Saint-Malo, she sent two parcels to an address "mentioned a foreign-sounding name and an eastern frontier town<sup>46</sup>." Sometime later, it was discovered that she was passing on empty jam jars and used silk stockings to her mother<sup>47</sup>. As for the Swiss woman, she supposedly came "with the simple aim of giving a singing tour in a cabaret [...]"<sup>48</sup>.

The espionage case doubles as a narcotics case. When Forceville was arrested at Brest station, police seized opium and smoking equipment from his suitcase. During a search, a kilo of the same drug was found at his home, concealed in bottles of port wine<sup>49</sup>. From then on, some journalists claimed that the opium had been used by the spy to facilitate the officer's confessions. In her "confidences" to the English press, the spy implied that "a man under the influence of alcohol or drugs is more likely to lose control of himself, to speak less carefully<sup>50</sup>". Without denying the disinhibition caused by opium, Lydia Oswald here seeks to construct her own myth. More simply, opium was widely used in naval circles. A number of servicemen were regular smokers, especially those who had been to the Far East, such as Forceville. Finally, the press echoed the testimony of the lieutenant's neighbors, who said they had seen a car pull up in front of their building at around 2:30 a.m. the night before the couple attempted to leave. Lydia Oswald allegedly got out into the street and handed a package to the driver of the car, the discussion taking place in a foreign language. In reality, the vehicle was none other than the bus taken by the lovers to Brest station, not at 2.30 a.m. but at 5.30 a.m.<sup>51</sup>.

All these rumors did not stand up to the test of investigation, which failed to bring down the German espionage networks. In fact, several months after the affair began, the press reported that "the mountain had given birth to a mouse! However, the reasons for this failure differ according to one's point of view, between an overly talkative press and the over-secretive police<sup>52</sup>. Lydia Oswald is no longer described as a high-profile spy, but as a "thin link" in German intelligence.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, March 7, 1935.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, March 8, 1935.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, March 18, 1935.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, March 7, 1935.

<sup>50</sup> Bernard Hauteclouque, art. cité.

<sup>51</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, March 9, 1935.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, September 9, 1935.

*Lydia Oswald faces her judges: a trial of a kind*

Sitting in the dock alongside René Guignard, who had returned from the West Indies, and Jean de Forceville, Lydia Oswald was tried for espionage by an all-male tribunal: the Brest Maritime War Council. This composition influenced the proceedings, which were marked by gender differentiation. Like most female criminals on trial, Lydia Oswald was an "eternal victim" and an "eternal culprit"<sup>53</sup>. Lydia Oswald's trial began on September 10, 1935. The court was presided over by a naval captain, Franquet, assisted by a frigate captain, three corvette captains and two lieutenants. Lydia Oswald was thus faced with seven men, plus the Government Commissioner. On the first day of the hearing, there was a relatively large number of armed sailors lined up at the back of the courtroom, as well as sixteen "helmeted and armed" gendarmes surrounding the courtroom.

However, as one journalist put it, "the atmosphere was not created" and all these precautions were useless: there was in fact "nobody under the vault, nobody on the stone steps giving access to the maritime court [...]"<sup>54</sup>. Brest residents' lack of interest in the trial was largely due to the information published in the press prior to the trial. The articles emphasized the low value of the information transmitted by the spy to the Germans. The very fact that the accused was a woman seemed to provoke a double reaction. While it initially helped to arouse public curiosity, it also tended to relegate the case to the level of anecdote. This can be seen in a number of papers that continue to insist on the seriousness of the affair, but also in these few lines, published on September 9, 1935. According to the author, compared to other espionage cases, the Lydia Oswald affair:

The "foreign power" does not appear to be of primary importance. The direct agent with whom such and such a foreign power is in contact is here a woman. However intelligent this woman may be, it cannot be assumed that the information she has in fact [...] passed on to Germany is not of the utmost importance. cannot be compared to those that an officer in direct contact with a foreign power may have sold<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Frédéric Chauvaud, Gilles Malandain (dir.), *Impossibles victimes, impossibles coupables. Les femmes devant la justice (XIXe-XXe siècles)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009. On the ambiguity of relations between women and justice, see also Christine Bard et al (dir.), *Femmes et justice pénale XIXe-XXe siècles*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, September 9, 1935.

Above all, the people of Brest lost interest in the case because they had moved on. Between Lydia Oswald's arrest and trial, the social context was particularly tense. When, in July 1935, the Laval government decided to raise taxes and cut wages by around 10% to get France out of the economic crisis, the 6,000 workers at the arsenal went on strike. And when they demanded that the forces of law and order be withdrawn from their workplace, violent clashes broke out between August 6 and 8, resulting in the deaths of three of them<sup>56</sup>. In all, only 16 people attended the hearing, including 10 women, as a journalist from *La Dépêche de Brest* pointed out<sup>57</sup>. This precision is important, as if the author were raising the anomaly of women taking an interest in political and military issues. The presence of women diminishes the solemnity of the moment and turns the trial into a form of entertainment. In a broader sense, we find here a whole imaginary linked to the knitters of the French Revolution, when the crowd is assimilated to the register of the irrational and the feminine. Already small, the audience was absent for the second day of debates. "Not a curious person, not even a woman! Also, Commissioner Huau had cancelled the rather extensive security service that had been in operation the day before", notes *L'Ouest-Éclair*<sup>58</sup>. The fact that the proceedings were held behind closed doors no doubt also deterred the public from coming to court.

Requested by the government commissioner, this in camera session further complicated the journalists' task. It was adopted unanimously by the court, in accordance with article 143 of the Code of Military Justice. This article specifies that "in camera proceedings must be ordered in cases where disclosure could be dangerous to public morals or order, or prejudicial to national defense<sup>59</sup>". Only representatives of the Ministry of the Navy and the Maritime Prefect, the Navy shorthand typist, the Special Commissioner of Brest Station, and members of the Public Prosecutor's Office were allowed to follow the proceedings. As for the 15 witnesses called in this case - mainly character witnesses called by the defense - they were called one after the other. They did not attend the examination of the defendants and, before that, the reading of the indictment, some one hundred pages long<sup>60</sup>. After the witnesses have been heard, the government commissioner delivers his summing-up, and the defense lawyers make their closing arguments.

Before being removed from the courtroom, the journalists witness a key moment in the trial: the defendants entering the dock. Some see Lydia Oswald for the first time.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, September 9, 1935.

<sup>56</sup> Roger Faligot, *op. cit.* p. 447 ff.

<sup>57</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>58</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, September 12, 1935.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>60</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, September 11, 1935.

The idea they had of her did not always correspond to reality, not least because the accused was, according to them, far removed from the clichés attached to the figure of the spy, always intertwined with that of the femme fatale. Sometime earlier, for example, *L'Ouest-Éclair's* correspondent was disappointed to note that the Swiss woman's hair was not blond but light chestnut<sup>61</sup>. In fact, Lydia Oswald's physiognomy came under particular scrutiny, far more so than that of her co-defendants. We read that the spy is:

"She's still slender and sporty in the brown suit that molds her bust exactly, and that she kept for the six months she was in prison. She wears her eternal little felt hat in the same color, which gracefully caresses her wavy hair. Perhaps she's lost a little weight... so little! Her sharp profile is lit up by an extremely youthful smile. There's no trace of blush on the cheekbones. The lips are ruddy"<sup>62</sup>.

Elsewhere, we learn that "her hair, which had grown while she was in prison, came back into contact with the scissors and curling iron"<sup>63</sup>. Beyond the physical descriptions, the image of the young woman appears relatively ambiguous in the articles devoted to her, testifying to the trouble that female criminals arouse in journalists who, like the judges, are all or almost all men.

On the one hand, by describing her as essentially preoccupied with her appearance and "supremely elegant", journalists describe a woman who perfectly respects gender representations<sup>64</sup>. Her coquetry is in line with the character traits naturally attributed to the female sex. Beautiful but inconsequential, seductive but irresponsible, she would be overwhelmed by her espionage missions, necessarily too heavy for a woman. Journalists point to signs of fragility, even weakness, in her attitude. One of them thinks he saw her fingers "trembling a little with uncertainty and anxiety". A few lines further down, the same person says that "we thought Lydia would let out some tears. It was just a false alarm"<sup>65</sup>. Military tribunals, like the assize courts studied by Frédéric Chauvaud, seem to "demand tears", especially when the accused are women<sup>66</sup>. The Swiss woman's smiles are also mentioned, as if to demonstrate her lack of understanding of the seriousness of the facts and the stakes of the trial.

On the other hand, since the spy's body was used to obtain information, it is considered a weapon: "it is through sex that the weapons of the weak may not be weak weapons," says Érik Neveu<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, March 6, 1935.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>63</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>64</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> Frédéric Chauvaud, *La chair des prétoires. Histoire sensible de la cour d'assises, 1881- 1932*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010, p. 204.

<sup>67</sup> Érik Neveu, art. cité, p. 86.



While seduction does indeed seem to be a fact of life in this case, Lydia Oswald's beauty is a constant reminder. She "knew [...] how to give herself a discreet beauty that was all the more attractive", reads *La Dépêche de Brest* of March 4, 1935. Comments such as these refer to broader representations, associating feminine beauty with dangerousness, whereas masculine beauty is always positively connoted<sup>68</sup>. His "ingenuous air conceals a keen sense of reality and an undoubtedly Machiavellian temperament" adds another journalist<sup>69</sup>. More than intelligence, it's a question of cunning, which emphasizes the threat posed by the young woman<sup>70</sup>. Along the way, the press mobilizes the figure of the strange, even monstrous woman: "this girl from another race is so curious" writes Rémi Ménoret in the columns of *L'Ouest Éclair*; "she remains the impenetrable vamp she has always been, draped in her dignity, rebellious and proud at the same time<sup>71</sup>." This figure of the monster obscures any political motivations on the part of the spy: because she is a woman, Lydia Oswald cannot have acted out of ideology. But it also betrays the dismay of journalists faced with an accused "whose personality and behavior make her seem as exceptional as she is frightening, and thus fundamentally incomprehensible", writes Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini in a case of a different nature<sup>72</sup>. This image is all the more easily mobilized when Lydia Oswald challenges certain gendered representations. Observers are astonished by her ability to control her emotions, and by the fact that she speaks loudly and clearly when addressing the judges. She is described as provocative and insensitive, especially in relation to her two co-defendants. According to the journalists, she is solely responsible for their situation, and they are systematically portrayed as her victims.

On September 11, 1935, the second day of the trial, the Government Commissioner called for a sentence for each of the defendants but did not set a quantum. The two officers, who had just spent six months in preventive detention in "coastal forts", were suspected of having knowingly aided Lydia Oswald in her activities, even though they were aware of her intentions: René Guignard, by introducing her aboard the *Émile Bertin*; Jean de Forceville, by providing her with the secret documents in the *Émile Bertin*; and Jean de Forceville, Jean de Forceville by making the secret documents in his apartment available to her, and taking her aboard La Galissonnière<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Érik Neveu, art. cité, p. 86.

<sup>68</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, March 4, 1935.

<sup>69</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>70</sup> As with many female spies, however, Lydia Oswald's manipulative intelligence was "limited by a vain overestimation of her charms", which led to her downfall: Érik Neveu, "L'espionne", art. cité, p. 87.

<sup>71</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, September 12, 1935 and November 28, 1935. This image is echoed in the spy's confessions to *Paris-Soir*, May 17, 1936: "In her confidences, Lydia Oswald is absolutely frank, cynically brutal. [...] This is the story of a ravishing and monstrous woman, of a vile soul who has the fearlessness of her infamy."

<sup>72</sup> Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini, "Le crime, le monstre et l'imaginaire social. L'affaire Lacenaire", in Anna Caiozzo and Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini (eds.), *Monstre et imaginaire social*, Paris, Creaphis, 2008, p. 308.

<sup>73</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, September 11, 1935.

Playing the lovers caught in the trap of the femme fatale card to the full, their lawyers plead innocence. As for Lydia Oswald, she denies the charges against her. Her defender, Maître Le Goc, is therefore also calling for acquittal. However, he does not appear to have had a decisive influence on her defense strategy. Even before he took charge of her case, the press reported that:

"As she prepared to use all her seductive powers to tempt this officer to serve her purposes and fulfill the mission entrusted to her, she let herself fall in love with him.  
From that moment on, she had given up all thoughts of espionage and thought only of her friend and her love, which, it seemed, would lead her to marriage<sup>74</sup>."

The accused also mobilizes gender stereotypes, attempting to shift her case from political and military terrain to that of passion. This portrayal of a woman blinded by her love is reminiscent of the female follower, frequently used by the accused. Unable to control her feelings, Lydia Oswald acts only according to the men she associates with. Since her motives for appearing in court are part of relatively classic gender relations, her autonomy is denied, and her transgression relativized. Such a discourse might lead one to believe that Lydia Oswald also acted in the service of Germany out of love for a man. For those who judge her, for whom the political involvement of women remains partly unthinkable in an era when they do not have the right to vote, this defensive strategy may not only provide a credible explanation for her mission, but also for her failure.

Journalists report that when the president of the court asked the Swiss woman if she had anything to add in her defense:

"[...] something seemed to knot in the throat of the tall girl whose dark eyes stared at the maritime judges. She couldn't control her emotion and let out a sob:  
"I beg the pardon of Messrs Guignard and de Forceville for having dragged them into this adventure." [...]  
"Yes, I had come to Brest with the specific intention of collecting documents of interest to the navy, but I was overwhelmed, saved by these two true French gentlemen."  
And so, in a leap of conscience, this woman who had been admonished to tell the truth had just returned the honor to two officers of the French Navy<sup>75</sup>."

Lydia Oswald finally breaks down in the face of the ceremonial nature of military justice and the weight of the accusations. While her repentance may be feigned in order to elicit the magistrates' compassion, it is nonetheless the sign of a certain victory: that of a masculine social, moral and penal order, as if the trial was finally an opportunity to close the "gender gap" caused by this affair<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, March 6, 1935.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, September 12, 1935.

<sup>76</sup> Judith Butler, *Trouble dans le genre. Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Paris, La Découverte, 2006 [1990].

It's in the same spirit that we should analyze the remark by a journalist, who believes that the two days of hearings "have worn out the nerves" of Lydia Oswald. Reaffirming the inequality of the sexes also proclaims the inequality of nations. Through the figure of the two officers, virtuous masculine France supplanted perverted feminine Germany, represented by the spy.

After two hours of deliberation, the sentence was pronounced before an audience that was certainly larger than at the start of the trial, but still very limited: "the benches [...] are just about full", noted a journalist from *L'Ouest-Éclair*<sup>77</sup>. By a majority of four votes to three, the court found Lydia Oswald not guilty of espionage. On the other hand, it unanimously found her guilty of attempted espionage, an offence under article 8 of the law of January 26, 1934<sup>78</sup>. While the magistrates were unable to prove that the young woman had passed on information to Germany, they did assert that she had come to Brest with instructions from German agents to provide them with secret information relating to national defense; her "personal and ongoing" relations with the two officers, Guignard and Forceville, testifying to the fact that her espionage attempt had been given a "high profile"<sup>79</sup>. And if she has not succeeded in carrying out her project, it is only due to circumstances beyond her control, the magistrates point out.

Lydia Oswald was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment and ordered to pay 5,000 francs to the Treasury, corresponding to the sum she had received during her mission in Brest. This was a relatively light sentence. The law of January 26, 1934, states that any attempt at espionage is to be considered as the crime of espionage itself: Lydia Oswald should therefore have been sentenced to a minimum of three years' imprisonment. It seems that the gender of the accused and her defense strategy had an influence on the judges' decision, in a case "where feeling plays a role at least [as] considerable as reason"<sup>80</sup>. As for the two officers, they were acquitted<sup>81</sup>. The court asserted that they were unaware of the spy's intentions. Although negligent, they had not acted with the aim of harming national defense. The Government Commissioner even shook their hands at the end of the trial<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, September 12, 1935.

<sup>78</sup> Law of January 26, 1934, "tending to repress espionage offenses and criminal acts compromising the external security of the State", *Journal officiel de la République française*, January 30, 1934, pp. 915-917. This text defines secret information as being of a military, diplomatic or economic nature. In particular, it sought to correct the imperfections - or what was then considered excessive indulgence - of the law of April 18, 1886, which for the first time identified and punished peacetime espionage as a specific crime: Alain Dewerpe, art. cité, p. 144.

<sup>79</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, September 12, 1935.

<sup>80</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, September 12, 1935.

<sup>81</sup> *La Dépêche de Brest*, September 11, 1935.

<sup>82</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, September 12, 1935.

This handshake can of course be seen as a gesture of support for two officers whose honor had been damaged, and who were placed on inactive status by the Navy following the verdict. But it can also be interpreted as a sign of relief at seeing the guilty party outside their group, marked by a very strong esprit de corps.

*After the trial: a career as a spy continues?*

After the verdict, Lydia Oswald returned to Pontaniou prison. Her preventive detention being taken into account, she was confined there until December 2, 1935. She then had to be escorted back to the border, in accordance with the expulsion order issued against her by the magistrates. A few days before her release, she sent a telegram to her mother to inform her of her imminent arrival. The authorities, anxious to avoid an improbable indiscretion, extract the spy from prison at 4am. She passed between a double hedge of maritime gendarmes, and then got into a car with the curtains drawn, accompanied by two inspectors from the local police<sup>83</sup>. The route she took back to Switzerland, however, is more uncertain, and the contradictory information we have on this subject testifies to the more or less romantic character that the press is still trying to give to the affair. According to some journalists, to avoid disturbing the peace, the police took the spy to Châteaulin, where she took a train to Nantes, Lyon, Annemasse, and Geneva. At the same time, another article stated that she had arrived in Switzerland on December 3 on the express train from Paris<sup>84</sup>. She told the waiting journalists "that the whole Brest affair was a stupid joke and that she had never intended to engage in espionage<sup>85</sup>". Questioned by the Geneva Security police, she travelled to Zurich and then St. Gallen, where she was reunited with her mother. Sometime earlier, her mother had been approached by the British press, which was seeking exclusivity for her daughter's memoirs. Now under pressure from the many curious onlookers who wanted to know more about the Brest affair, Helena Kiesling suggested to her financially strapped daughter that she couldn't stay at home.

The young woman soon made the acquaintance of Hans Leuenberger, a 27-year-old Swiss journalist and filmmaker, who became her lover<sup>86</sup>. From March 1936 to December 1937, the couple were employed by the *Schweizer Illustrierte Zeitung* to chronicle an automobile journey from Zurich to Tokyo. While each stage of the journey was reported on, the lovers travelled through Turkey, Iraq, Persia, British Indies, Siam, and China.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, December 3, 1935.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, December 4, 1935.

<sup>85</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, December 4, 1935.

<sup>86</sup> On Lydia Oswald's itinerary after the Brest affair, we refer the reader to Bernard Hauteclouque, art. cité.

Two points are worth noting here. Firstly, as Bernard Hauteclouque points out, this itinerary carefully avoided Syria and Indochina, then under French authority. Secondly, the couple were arrested by the Turkish authorities. Probably informed by French counterespionage, which had not lost sight of Lydia Oswald, a journalist from *L'Ouest-Éclair* wrote, with much irony, that "the two travelers must have inadvertently entered a military zone, the only probable cause of their arrest<sup>87</sup>." Without elaborating on the couple's motives, *Paris-Soir* reported that "it is the Swiss legation that is taking the necessary steps for their release<sup>88</sup>". Once released, the lovers were blocked at the border by the news that Persia had refused them visas and, once in Bombay, that they were undesirable in all British-administered territories. This decision by the *Foreign Office* was no doubt a factor in the publication of Lydia Oswald's memoirs in *The People*, entitled:

*"Lydia Oswald, The Modern Mata Hari! All the Love Secrets of the Spy Girls<sup>89</sup>".* The Swiss authorities finally lifted the ban. However, they remained under surveillance until they reached Tokyo, from where they took a boat to Europe in July 1937.

The trip, which was well attended in Switzerland, gave the lovers a certain notoriety and, in the process, enabled them to assert their political positions. While Hans Leuenberger had never hidden his sympathies for Nazi Germany, even calling for "a clear and definitive stance on the Jewish question" in a propaganda brochure he co-published in 1938, this position was a novelty for Lydia Oswald. A few months later, she in turn published a brochure, with her portrait on the cover, entitled: "In the pay of the foreigner? While the German-speaking Swiss were seen by some compatriots as a fifth column preparing the invasion of their country by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich, the young woman tried, on the contrary, to demonstrate the advantages for her country of rallying to Nazism. She criticizes Switzerland's neutrality, "decadent democracies with no future", not forgetting to extol the virtues of fascism. In the preface, her lover recalls that she accepted "difficult missions", leading to her arrest and "nine months' confinement". She herself writes that, at the time, "I decided to devote myself to the country of my preference, and finally paid for my commitment with the loss of my freedom<sup>90</sup>." By highlighting her activities as a spy and presenting herself as a convinced Nazi from the first half of the 1930s, the Swiss woman undoubtedly adds depth to her present commitment, to further assert herself on the Hitler propaganda scene.

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<sup>87</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, June 14, 1936.

<sup>88</sup> *Paris-Soir*, June 14, 1936. It should be noted that this information, along with others, appeared on the front page of this newspaper, with a photo of Lydia Oswald.

<sup>89</sup> *Paris-Soir* also published the spy's memoirs, under the title "Oui je suis une espionne! La confession de Lydia Oswald [...] Chasseresse d'hommes et de secrets [...]": *Paris-Soir*, May 17, 1936. Lydia Oswald had sold her memorabilia when she was penniless.

<sup>90</sup> Bernard Hauteclouque, art. cité.

After being suspected by the St. Gallen police of launching an anti-Jewish press campaign, Lydia Oswald travels with her lover to the Sudetenland in April-May 1938, shortly before the region is annexed by the Nazis. After the declaration of war, the couple moved to Berlin. British intelligence reports that, in July 1941, Lydia Oswald was listed among those employed by the *Gestapo* on assignments outside Germany<sup>91</sup>. The young woman frequently returned to Switzerland with her partner, and, in January 1944, they broadcast the documentary they had just made, *Ukraine 1943*. Shot with the approval of the Nazi authorities, the film depicts a Ukraine "liberated" from Soviet occupation by the *Wehrmacht* (German Armed Forces). It depicts a now happy population, without ever mentioning the war or the massacres perpetrated by the Germans and their local henchmen, particularly against the Jews. In the summer of 1944, the couple followed up with two new documentaries in the same tone, this time on Ustasha-ruled Bosnia and Croatia. Although Lydia Oswald and Hans Leuenberger's propaganda activities were not in doubt, the Swiss police were never able to gather enough evidence to prosecute them for espionage. After the war, although they were forced to suspend their activities for a time, they were not troubled for their propaganda in the service of the *Third Reich*. From 1946 onwards, they were able to make new documentaries in Latin America and Africa, before going their separate ways in the early 1950s. Leuenberger continued to publish documentaries and books, and Lydia Oswald became the company's secretary and mistress of the European director of the *Hearst* press group, Dr. von Wiegand. It was no doubt for this reason that the American Secretary of State wanted to know more about her. In the midst of the Cold War, he understood that the Swiss woman was now working for the USSR, as implied in a letter dated January 1953:

"The United States Department of State American Embassy  
1, Grosvenor Square  
London, W1  
January 5, 1953  
N°4258-65-819  
Dear Mr. Reed,

Lydia Oswald, born on September 13, 1906, in St. Gallen, Switzerland, is said to be a Soviet agent. In early 1951, she is said to have been in Madrid, Spain, and from there to Morocco with Carl Heinz VON WIEGAND. It is reported that she was convicted of espionage in Brest on September 11, 1935, and received a nine-month prison sentence. She was also reportedly convicted in Switzerland for German espionage. I would appreciate any information you may have on her career as a spy. Yours sincerely

J.A. Cimperman Legal

Attaché

MR. R.T. Reed

Leconfield House

Curzon Street

London, W1

Security Information -Confidential<sup>92</sup>."

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<sup>91</sup> National Archives, London, KV 2/3386, letter from R.T. Reed, Security Service, to J.A. Cimperman Esq. Reed, *Security Service*, for J.A. Cimperman Esq. of the American Embassy in London, January 20, 1953.

<sup>92</sup> National Archives, London, KV 2/3386.

As for the French authorities, they still seemed interested in Lydia Oswald in 1969, as evidenced by the response of the head of the Central Depot of military justice archives - one of the few documents still preserved at Le Blanc today - to a question from the Ministry of National Defense on her subject<sup>93</sup>.

The Oswald affair is paradoxical. In view of the insignificance of the results obtained by this undoubtedly inadequately trained spy, her fate received enormous media coverage in Brittany, France and abroad. Monopolizing the attention of journalists, she relegated to oblivion other spies operating in Brest at the same time, or in the years that followed<sup>94</sup>. The Swiss lady even remains a benchmark through which all subsequent espionage cases are analyzed. On April 15, 1938, more than three years after the event, *L'Ouest-Éclair* reported for example, that a "mimic" of Lydia Oswald had been convicted in Paris<sup>95</sup>. The young woman's name is also mentioned in other cases, such as that of Norman Baillie-Stewart. Convicted in 1933 of spying for Germany, this British army officer was released a few years later. The newspaper *Paris-Soir*, which began to doubt Lydia Oswald's entry into the world of intelligence, reported that "the mysterious Marie-Louise he refused to name during his trial was the spy Lydia Oswald<sup>96</sup>". In addition to the press, the Swiss woman inspired artists. In his now-forgotten novel *Et Dieu créa d'abord Lilith* (1937), Marc Chadoune turns his main character, a Danish spy, into a double of Lydia Oswald<sup>97</sup>. This echo can be explained by the case's main protagonists, who mobilize a number of stereotypical figures and give substance to the fantasies of the spy novel, then in full development.

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<sup>93</sup> Dépôt central des archives de la justice militaire, Le Blanc, CA 1557, case file Lydia Oswald, Jean de Forceville and René Guignard.

<sup>94</sup> Brest may not be a "nest of spies", but other espionage cases took place there in the 1930s. See, for example, Patrick Gourlay, *Nuit franquiste. L'attaque du sous-marin républicain C-2, 1937*, Spézet, Coop Breizh, 2013.

<sup>95</sup> *L'Ouest-Éclair*, April 15, 1935.

<sup>96</sup> *Paris-Soir*, January 22, 1937.

<sup>97</sup> Roger Faligot, *op. cit.* p. 443-444. In a lecture given in Brest on November 12, 2016, Jacques Arnol pointed out that Lydia Oswald had also inspired a song by Jean Dussoleil.

The image we are given of Lydia Oswald fits in perfectly with the imaginary of the spy, based on models such as Mata Hari and Marthe Richard: "a seductress, a beautiful, fatal and shy woman", explains Érik Neveu. This woman "attracts men, especially officers in possession of secrets, [and] extorts them from them on the pillow", adds the historian<sup>98</sup>. However, behind this portrait of the spy may lie a woman motivated by political convictions. At least that's what Lydia Oswald points out in *hindsight*, to further her career in the service of Nazi propaganda. It remains to be seen whether this woman continued her spying activities after leaving the Brest harbor, or whether the suspicions hanging over her are pure fantasy. While other sources may be able to clear up this fog, the story of this woman who died in Zurich in May 1982 - at the age of 76 - will remain exceptional in any case.

**Fabien Lostec**

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<sup>98</sup> Érik Neveu, art. cité, p. 86.



## Après 13 jours de détention...

# Lydia Oswald subit, avec le sourire, sept heures d'interrogatoire au Palais de justice

## « Je suis innocente, nous dit-elle, et la vérité finira bien par triompher »

Pour la première fois, depuis treize jours qu'elle était emprisonnée au Bougen, Lydia Oswald est sortie. Pour la première fois, quittant son austère cellule aux murs blanchis à la chaux, la jeune femme a pu entrevoir, pendant son transport en automobile, l'animation de la rue et respirer librement l'air matinal.

Sans doute, Lydia Oswald attendait-elle ce moment avec impatience et la promenade de la prison jusqu'au Palais de justice fut pour elle une véritable joie.

### L'attente

Hier matin, quelques curieux s'étaient arrêtés devant le Palais de justice, leur attention ayant été attirée sans doute par la présence de plusieurs photographes et journalistes. Le brouillard glacial, peu propice à la rapide « mitraille » des objectifs, s'épaissit peu à peu. On prévoyait que l'interrogatoire de Lydia aurait lieu vers 10 heures, et l'attente ne fut pas trompée. La conduite intérieure qui effectue parfois le transport des prisonniers isolés apparut enfin au bout de la rue Voltaire. Ce fut une véritable ratée vers les appareils photographiques.

Rien n'avait contribué au « succès » de cette première sortie comme le mystère qui, depuis bientôt deux semaines, entourait la personnalité de l'inculpée. La curiosité toute professionnelle des reporters était enfin éteinte par un satisfait.

### Elle ?

L'auto stoppe devant la grille du Palais. C'est tout au plus si une dizaine de personnes ont eu la patience d'attendre. La rue, toute baignée d'un morne brouillard, est déserte.

La porte de la voiture s'ouvre et, la première, Lydia Oswald descend. Allure



Lydia OSWALD (Ph. Dépêche)

faire et se laisse alors mitrailler avec complaisance.

— Oh ! Messieurs... Messieurs...  
Puis son visage s'illumine d'un sourire. D'un pas décidé, la jeune femme gravit les marches du Palais, suivie du gendarme et du garde mobile, qui escortent jusqu'à la porte du cabinet de M. Crenn, juge d'instruction.

Lydia Oswald, coiffée d'un petit chapeau brun, genre tyrolien, orné d'une coquette petite plume « très mode », portait un maniveau sport en tissu gris beige à chevrons.

La jeune femme, dont la coiffure ressemble à celle qui fit la gloire de Greta

### Midi

La scène du matin avait été très brève. Cependant on savait que l'interrogatoire se terminerait vers midi. A cette heure, le nombre des curieux amassés devant le Palais était assez considérable.

— « Elle » va venir, disait-on...

Lorsque Lydia Oswald sortit du cabinet du juge d'instruction, elle semblait être encore plus qu'au matin maladroite d'elle-même. Souriante, tenant même parfois aux éclats elle accéda encore au désir des photographes.

— Pourquoi diable diast-elle, avec un léger accent prendre tant de clichés ?

— Obligation professionnelle !

— Eh bien allez-y ! Mais faites vite !

En tous cas je compte bien que vous me ferez parvenir des épreuves, cela n'aussera...

— Et comment ?

— M. le juge y pourvoiera sans doute...

— Et la prison ?

— Oh ! la prison...

Lydia Oswald fait une moue d'enfant volontaire, hausse les épaules, ne trouve son rire frais et repart entre ses deux gardiens.

Ainsi, la jeune femme ne paraît nullement affectée de sa mésaventure, elle se front à l'orage.

Lydia Oswald, on le sait, est au régime des prévenus et repart du dehors le panier de victuailles nécessaires à ses repas.

Elle se beaucoup pour occuper les longues heures de solitude.

Comme quelqu'un lui demandait ce qu'elle faisait encore, elle répondit :

— Pour me réchauffer, je fais beaucoup de gymnastique suédoise.

— Très calmes. Croyez-moi, je dors. Je dors bien.

A 14 heures, Lydia Oswald était à nouveau introduite dans le cabinet de M. Crenn, où elle devait « faire tête » pendant plus de cinq heures aux questions du juge d'instruction.

Mais cela n'était pas pour l'émouvoir. En entrant, elle esquissa un petit pas de danse, comme par défi aux tendreuses discussions qui l'attendaient.

Nous n'avons, évidemment, pas pu savoir ce dont il avait été question au cours de cet interrogatoire interminable et sans doute épuisant pour une nature moins solide que celle de Lydia Oswald.

### Petites confidences

A sa sortie, la jeune femme semblait aussi fraîche et souriante que si elle avait quitté un cercle d'amies.

Il nous fut alors donné de pouvoir lui poser quelques questions hâtives et de prendre une interview express.

Question directe :

— Vous êtes donc coupable ?

— Coupable ? Non ! Non je ne le suis pas !

— Alors, vous n'avez jamais livré de documents...

— Non ! Jamais. Je suis absolument innocente !

— Mais pensez-vous pouvoir le prouver ?

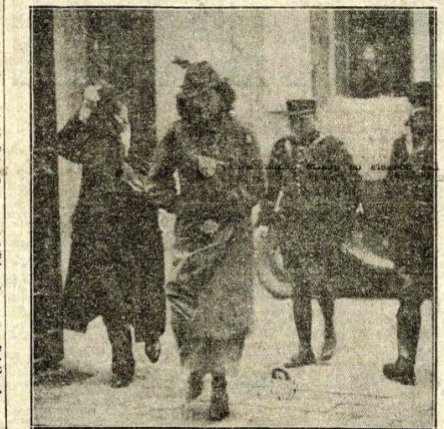
Lydia Oswald part d'un rire bon enfant.

— Bien sûr que je le pense ! Je l'espère de tout mon cœur !... C'est une lamentable histoire.

— Ainsi vous espérez être bientôt libre et retrouver la vie normale ?

— Je le crois sûrement. Et voyez-vous, si j'avais quelque chose à me reprocher, je n'aurais pas maintenant la mine souriante que vous me voyez. Je vous le répète, je suis innocente et la vérité finira bien par triompher.

Mais ce qu'il faudrait savoir, c'est ce que pense le juge d'instruction et lui reste impénétrable.



Lydia OSWALD arrive au Palais, hier matin

(Ph. Dépêche)

souple et décidée.

D'abord, elle baisse la tête en souriant et lève un peu la main comme pour dire aux photographes qui la cernent :

— Je vous en prie !

Puis, changeant brusquement d'attitude, elle se redresse, promenant sur l'assistance un regard calme et voi-

Garbo, conservé en cette circonstance difficile, toute sa dignité.

L'expression du visage est tantôt très féminine et tantôt assez « garponnière ».

Son sourire est spontané et répond bien à la malice juvénile des yeux « largement ouverts sur l'aventure ».

Telle se présente Lydia Oswald.

# Jeanne Georgel A French woman in the service of Germany

Simon Rémy  
Vosges departmental archives

## ABSTRACT

In the 20th century, the imagination surrounding the role of women in intelligence was often tinged with eroticism and sexist stereotypes that emphasized the role of spies as women in charge of gathering information and confidential documents with the help of their charms on the corner of pillows. If at first glance the case of Jeanne Georgel, arrested in Barcelona in February 1937 for espionage, seems to conform to this preconceived idea, the exploration of her life path reveals a singular figure of female espionage in the first half of the 20th century. Based on a thorough review of the diplomatic archives of Nantes and a meeting with Jeanne Georgel herself, this article sheds light on her recruitment and her beginnings in the world of German intelligence at the beginning of the 1930s, thus retracing the singular destiny of a female spy far from the usual clichés.

**Key words :** Jeanne Georgel - Spy - German Intelligence - 1930s - Europe - Gender Stereotypes - Recruitment

In February 1937, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, a strange case hit the headlines. Jeanne Georgel, a dancer from the Vosges who claimed to be a Russian countess, was arrested in Barcelona on espionage charges. For a few days, one article followed another about this strange woman that seemed straight out of a Robert Boucard novel. The journalistic treatment of the case resonates with the myths of an era. The pretty dancer, Jeanne Georgel, alias Vera Danichewski, pretending to be a spy, ticks all the boxes of a fashionable genre. Mata-Hari and Marthe Richard were already well known and established stereotypes. But Jeanne Georgel is not what you'd expect. The story told in the newspaper columns is only a brief moment in a long story. Behind the scenes of sordid cabarets and under the flashbulbs of photographers, her life, revealed by the archives, is surprising and lets us glimpse, in her wake, a whole part of the history of the information.

As we delve into Jeanne Georgel's past and search for the traces she left behind, we discover a treasure trove of archives and an incredible life. Her chaotic career has yet to reveal all its secrets, but I can already tell you about her first steps in the intelligence business, and in particular the key stage of recruitment. After explaining how I met Jeanne Georgel, I'll look back at her youth and recruitment into the German intelligence services in the early 1930s.

### *Why Jeanne Georgel?*

First, let me explain how I met Jeanne Georgel. Digging through the old press in search of stories of famous but forgotten Vosgians, I came across a third-column article on the front page of the daily *Paris Midi* of February 14, 1937, headlined:

"The strange novel of Constance Georgel, known as Countess Vera Danichewski, a beautiful woman and dancer in her own right... who has just been arrested in Barcelona on espionage charges".

The story intrigued me, and I decided to dig a little deeper into the subject. I'm not at all a specialist in the history of intelligence, and I have no idea where this research will lead. I start by scouring *gallica* for all the articles published at the time relating this strange espionage affair. They all tell more or less the same story: Jeanne Georgel was born in September 1911 in Saint-Dié-des-Vosges. She is said to have fallen in love with a Spanish aristocrat who rescued her from her sordid daily life as a cabaret dancer. With her lover, she agreed to act as a spy for Franco's regime.

Jeanne Georgel's story appears in the newspaper columns at three points in time. First, at the time of her arrest on February 14, 1937. We learn that a young French woman from the Vosges has been arrested in Barcelona for spying for Franco. Day after day, journalists delved deeper into the portrait of the young spy, and more details emerged. We know her date and place of birth, and the names of her parents. We also learn that she lived in Saint-Nicolas-de-Port, worked in a hosiery factory in Nancy, then left home to join a troupe of dancers in Paris.

Several weeks later, Jeanne Georgel's story returned to the headlines for her trial, which took place on April 1, 1937. In the days leading up to the hearing, two former co-prisoners spoke of their encounters with the spy. They describe a strong, highly intelligent, and self-confident young woman, even publicly assuming her role as a spy for Franco.

Following the trial, which resulted in a 20-year prison sentence, Jeanne Georgel is back in the news in Spanish and French magazines. First, there's a long interview with the journalist Etheria Artay, which appeared in successive issues of *Mi Revista* magazine.

The story was reprinted in a relatively similar form in the French factual magazine *Confession*. A similar article also appeared in *Marie Claire* magazine. In these various articles, taken from the only one published in *Mi Revista*, Jeanne Georgel gives a confessional account of her life as a dancer. She recounts her travels throughout Europe and North Africa, and her many social encounters. She ends her story with an account of her fall in Republican Spain. The story she seeks to convey is that of a naive young girl, trapped by her feelings for a young man who was none other than a Republican counter-espionage policeman.

*Following Jeanne Georgel*

Once I'd assimilated all the material readily available online, I set out to corroborate the stories that seemed too incredible to be true.

My first instinct was to go to the Diplomatic Archives in Nantes to consult the archives of the French Consulate in Barcelona. My idea was that if Jeanne Georgel had been imprisoned in Barcelona, then the consulate should probably have some information on her. I contacted the Diplomatic Archives in Nantes and asked if the archives of the French Consulate in Barcelona from this period were kept there. The archivists confirm the existence of archives from the Barcelona post, but they are not classified. I obtained a copy of the deposit slip, which enabled me to target a few files. These files can be consulted in the reading room. The titles of the archive bundles suggest to me that there is something to find. In particular, I notice "individual files". One of them might concern my spy. Unfortunately, I count nearly fifteen boxes bearing this promising yet terse description. The contents of these "individual files" are very interesting, and after a few hours of searching, going through one file after another, a pale blue folder catches my eye, with the name "Georgel, Jane" inscribed on it in pink grease pencil. Inside the folder are some thirty documents. They concern Jeanne Georgel's imprisonment<sup>1</sup>. They include letters from her requesting various services from the consul, lists of French prisoners (including her) held in Barcelona's prisons, and even letters from one of her friends wanting to send her money. After a detailed study of the contents of my discovery, there is nothing to allow me to go further in my investigation. I can, however, document this passage of her life with precision and cross-check certain information.

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<sup>1</sup> Archives diplomatique, Nantes, 72 PO 2/56, Dossiers de Français arrêtés pendant la guerre d'Espagne (1936-1939).

I then turn to the Paris Police Headquarters. I'm well acquainted with the department's archive holdings, and in particular the immense series of intelligence files. Chances are that Jeanne Georgel has a file there in her name. I made a request by e-mail, and a few days later received a reply:

"By email dated March 29, 2018, you requested information about Jeanne Constance Georgel.

I would like to inform you that the archives of the Préfecture de Police hold a thin file containing 2 files concerning her, listed in series 77 W 4246 - n° 487.695 (archives from the Direction des Renseignements Généraux). I therefore invite you to consult these documents in the reading room".

Bingo, Jeanne was well known to the *Renseignements Généraux* (General Information), a good sign. To save me a trip to Paris for two cards, the archivists at the "PP" (préfecture de Police- Police HQ) were kind enough to send me a scanned copy of the document. These few sentences, typed out, were to prove decisive. Indeed, on the second card I read:

"cited in the above-mentioned file as an agent of the SRA, sentenced to death on March 6, 1946 by the Tunis military tribunal for undermining the external security of the State (sentence commuted to life imprisonment with hard labor). "2

This information is crucial: Jeanne Georgel was arrested at the end of the Second World War, obviously in Tunisia, and sentenced to death for spying for the German secret service! But what happened? How did she get there? It raises a number of additional questions, but it also assures me that the answers do exist. Indeed, if there was a trial, there are archives. So, I turn to the department in charge of preserving these legal archives. As this is a military justice judgment, you don't need to look in the traditional judicial archives kept at the *Archives départementales* (departmental Archives). In this case, the documents are held by the *Service historique de la défense* (Defense Historical Service). This service is located all over France, on several sites, each preserving a part of this memory, representing almost 500 km of archives. The site I'm interested in, the *Dépôt central des archives de la justice militaire* (DCAJM- Central Archives Depot of the military justice), is located in Le Blanc, in the Indre region, at the heart of a national gendarmerie operational base. Some of the archives held here are freely accessible. It is therefore possible to request access to Jeanne's file. After contacting them by e-mail, the Gendarmerie archivists confirmed the existence of the legal proceedings file... but more importantly, they informed me that the file actually contained two proceedings dating from 1946 and 1942. The 1942 proceedings were, however, partly incinerated. All that remains are a few of the most essential documents.

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<sup>2</sup> Archives de Préfecture de police de Paris (APPP), 77 W 4246, Georgel, Jeanne Constance dite Vera Danichewsky.

This precision surprises me. So, Jeanne Georgel had been convicted four years earlier?

So, full of hope, I decided to go to Le Blanc. A quick round trip by car: Épinal-Le Blanc, Le Blanc-Épinal during the day. Departure in the middle of the night, arrival in the early hours of the morning in this small sub-prefecture of just 6,000 inhabitants. I climb to the top of the village and arrive at the gates of the *Gendarmerie Nationale's* (National police force) operational support command (COMPSOPGN). After the usual checks, I'm directed to the building housing the DCAJM. As someone who is used to traditional archive services, I was a little taken aback. There is no reading room or checkrooms here. You come in, knock on the door, and introduce yourself: "Hello, I've come to consult a military justice file". "Very well, come in, we've been waiting for you.

Usually there's a reception desk, and you must go through the administrative formalities, make your reader's card, sign the rules and regulations, and so on. Here it's different. You walk straight into the office and are offered a cup of coffee or tea. The welcome is warm. Fortunately for DCAJM staff, it's not crowded. Today, I'm the only reader. A uniformed agent accompanies me to a small room used as a consultation area, where Jeanne Georgel's file is waiting for me<sup>3</sup>.

Reading these numerous procedural documents teaches me a great deal. Among all the documents, one in particular catches my eye: Benno Wundshammer. This is the name of a German lieutenant, Jeanne's lover. It's the key to an extraordinary discovery.

Benno Wundshammer was born in Cologne on April 11, 1913. He became a sports journalist and, above all, a photographer. As part of the Luftwaffe's propaganda enterprise, he gained a small reputation. Between 1942 and 1943, he was on the editorial board of *Signal* and took part in the major battles of the war as a reporter. After the terrible episode at Stalingrad, Benno Wundshammer was sent to Tunis to cover operations in North Africa. It was here that his path crossed that of Jeanne.

In researching his background, I learn that Benno Wundshammer became a famous post-war photographer. I also learn that his archive has been deposited with the photo agency of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (BPK Bildagentur). As a matter of conscience, I ask if Jeanne Georgel's name appears in the inventories of her archives. A few days later, a reply arrived in my mailbox. The reply was unexpected:

"Good morning,  
there actually exists a notebook written by Benno Wundshammer in 1943 concerning Jeanne Georgel. In this notebook enclosed are also some contact sheets with portraits of Mrs Georgel. Unfortunately, the notes are written on very thin and delicate paper, which is too damageable to be scanned."

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<sup>3</sup> Dépôt central d'archives de la justice militaire, Le Blanc, CA 2102, Affaires Jeanne Georgel.

To get a better idea, I was sent some photographs of the notebook and contact sheets. I discover the first page of the document, which begins as follows:

"The odyssey of Jeanne Georgel (born September 9, 1911, in Saint-Dié-des-Vosges, Lorraine), allegedly registered with the French Second Bureau as "Vera 19" dite La Sirène. Narrated by herself and Lieutenant Benno Wundshammer at 16, rue d'Athènes, in February 1943.

What is in this precious notebook? The story we gradually discover is broadly in line with what I had learned a few weeks earlier in *Le Blanc*. But Benno's notebook is more precise, more intimate, and seems to contain a story closer to reality. The narrative is written in the first person, in a rounded, fluid style. It appears to be Benno Wundshammer's hand that held the pen in 1943. The small notebook is accompanied by a few photographs of Jeanne in Tunis. We see her smiling, coquettish and finer than in 1937.

The story looks back at the early years of her life and recounts, with striking precision, the series of events that made her a spy. The story ends in May 1943 in Tunis.

I began to check the existence of the characters mentioned, the addresses, everything that could be cross-checked. Although she made a few inaccuracies, it seems plausible. The passages relating to her private life, in the tone of a confession, strike me as sincere. Benno's notebook is the ultimate missing source. It forms the basis of the story of Jeanne's life up to May 1943.

### *Youth in the provinces*

She was born on September 9, 1911, in Saint-Dié-des-Vosges. She was the family's first child. Her parents both came from modest families in the east of the department.

His father, Édouard Georgel, came from Sainte-Marguerite, a small village near Saint-Dié-des-Vosges. He belongs to a working-class family, whose mother Louise Bühler opted for French nationality after the 1870 war. Jeanne's mother, Marie Eugénie Elisa Boilot, was born in Remiremont in 1892, into a rather poor family. She was one of thirteen siblings, of whom only seven survived their first months. The Boilot family moved to Saint-Dié-des-Vosges around 1900. Like the Georgels, the Boilots were all workers in the textile industry. So it was at the factory that Jeanne's parents met. Both worked at the Vaxenaire factory, "Chez Kempf", in one of Saint-Dié-des-Vosges' working-class neighborhoods. In the spring of 1911, Marie became pregnant, and the couple decided to marry. On April 15, Marie Boilot married Édouard Georgel, and on September 9, she gave birth to their daughter Jeanne, middle name Constance.

In January 1913, Jeanne's father was the victim of a knife attack in his factory. It was probably this event that prompted the family to move a few kilometers north of Saint-Dié, to the Nancy suburb of Saint-Nicolas-de-Port. Shortly after their arrival, in March 1914, a second child, named Édouard after his father, joined the family. Édouard, the father, had found work at the Solvay plant. This company is a flagship of the European chemical industry, a behemoth of red brick and white smoke. The workers extracted salt and were nicknamed the "*becs salés*" (salted beaks). But at the beginning of August 1914, the father of the family had no time to settle in. He has to join his regiment: the general mobilization order has just been posted on the walls of the town hall.

Marie finds herself alone with her two young children. Saint-Nicolas-de-Port, like many towns close to the front, suffered severely from the war. Part of the population was evacuated and transported further afield. Regular bombardments kept the population on constant alert.

For his part, Édouard probably didn't leave his wife and two young children on the station platform. The mobilization train headed for Épinal, and Édouard joined the 170<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment. His war was a long and difficult one. He was wounded twice and took part in the biggest battles: in 1915 he was at Les Éparges and in Artois, in 1916 at Notre-Dame-de-Lorette and Verdun, and finally in 1918 in Champagne.

Édouard was reunited with his family in April 1919. He was able to pick up where he'd left off almost five years earlier. In the land of salt, the war had slowed down the factories. As the men returned from the front, things gradually picked up again. People find their places behind the machines, enveloped in Solvay's opaque acres of smoke.

In the heart of this small working-class country, the Communist Party, just born from the split of the Tours Congress, registers its first memberships. In the bistro, discussions flare up about politics, the bosses, and the bourgeoisie. Drunken workers harangued each other, fomenting plans for union action, all in an atmosphere of tobacco and alcohol. Édouard is certainly one of them. He has just returned from a horrifying war experience. For him, the pacifist and humanist fights of the Communist Party are a just reason to get involved. He and his comrades set out to fight the Solvay empire, with its brand-new housing estates, theater, and casino. Before the war, Ernest Solvay, the Belgian chemist, and inventor of the eponymous industrial process, had imposed an innovative style in social matters and offered workers numerous infrastructures typical of paternalistic policies. In 1922, on the boss's death, his successors set aside social policies. An unprecedented wave of modernity swept through the salt country. The canal was widened, railroads were built, and an aerial ferry was installed to link the various production sites. Technical innovations accelerated the pace.



Cement and metal beams gradually replaced the pre-war landscape. The company's results were dazzling, but working conditions deteriorated, workers became tense, and tension mounted.

For her part, Jeanne is already ten years old and feels she has a happy life. She has only one younger brother, and her parents seem less needy than the others. She attends the local school, probably with great joy. Indeed, at the age of thirteen, she passed her primary school certificate and went on to study at the *Ecole Supérieure de Jeunes Filles* (Superior School for Young Girls) in Nancy. In Nancy, she continued to learn and to open up to the world. Far from the grimy, ochre-gray world of her childhood salt pond, we can imagine her with a passion for fashion and clothes. The young girl's character asserts itself and stands out, at once impertinent and intelligent, she must surely annoy her classmates. The school is just a stone's throw from Nancy station, at the foot of Saint-Léon church. Jeanne took the train back and forth, morning and evening. In January 1925, she obtained her "*brevet supérieur*" (diploma), the prerequisite for attending the teacher training college. But this was clearly not her dream. She would like, for example, to be able to afford the dresses and clothes she sees in the shop windows of rue des Dominicains, at Vaxelaire or at La Belle Jardinière. She fantasized about a life of adventure, of being a free and independent woman. But at school, that's not exactly what she's taught.

She had to face the facts: she had to earn money to make her dreams come true. So, she decides to enroll at Pigier, a private school offering courses in shorthand, typing and business correspondence. For a small fee, she could obtain a diploma and begin a career in the offices of a major firm. In September, she began her apprenticeship and, at the end of February 1926, obtained a diploma in business correspondence. She began working and earning her own money. A few months later, in the spring of 1927, Jeanne, who was only 15, met a sergeant-pilot at the Essey-lès-Nancy air base. Base 121, a few kilometers from Nancy, is home to several soldiers belonging to the 21<sup>st</sup> aviation regiment. Jeanne's relationship with the sergeant-pilot was not to her parents' liking. Faced with their reaction, Jeanne left the family home and went to stay with an acquaintance in Nancy. On Sunday July 17, 1927, she finally decided to return. She certainly hoped to show them that she could live alone in Nancy, that she had met someone and that everything was going well for her. But Jeanne also knows that meeting the young sergeant from base 121 has had consequences she won't be able to hide in a few months' time, as she's pregnant. So, when she reappears and tries to explain why she ran away, her parents see the sky - and the pilot - fall on their heads. Their reaction was probably violent. So violent, in fact, that Jeanne made a radical decision that evening. At 10 p.m., as darkness began to fall, she headed for the lane behind the house. She walked along the canal as far as the metal footbridge leading to the Varangéville, the neighboring town.

She climbs the steel steps and stops halfway above the water. She straddles the railing and lets herself fall.

A few dozen meters away, Charles Thomas and Baptiste Muller, two young sportsmen from the local swimming team, sitting on the terrace of a café, managed to save the young girl<sup>4</sup>. After this dramatic episode, Jeanne returned to work in Nancy. But life with her parents, already impossible before, is no less so after jumping off a bridge, especially when you're rescued. Sometime later, a bailiff on rue de la Faïencerie, Maître Durant, was looking for a secretary. She worked there for a few months. She lived with Madame Andrée, a family friend. The year was September 1927.

Life, which was slowly returning to normal, suddenly took a cruel turn. In October, Jeanne's lover flees for good, transferred to Bourges. Jeanne is now alone. She has neither the courage nor the desire to return to her parents. In any case, the scandal of showing up pregnant at home is unthinkable. She decided to give birth in Paris. There, as an anonymous provincial girl, she could give birth to her child and avoid scandal.

### *Parisian splendors*

Jeanne Georgel, pregnant, decided to go to Paris to give birth. She gave birth to Pierre Georgel at the Hôpital de Port-Royal on February 12, 1928. Twelve days later, the infant died. Jeanne contracted jaundice. She was taken to a nursing home in Le Vésinet. Jeanne was not yet seventeen.

From April 1928, she found a position with Pierre Debiesse, a wine broker with offices at 50 boulevard Magenta in the 10<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. This work experience, her first in the capital, was a failure. Her boss saw in his young secretary an easy prey to satisfy his libidinous urges. Jeanne Georgel quit her job in June 1928.

She then met an Italian industrialist, Césaire Céna, aged 36, she tells us. She became his mistress and lived with him on rue de Turin until the end of 1928. It was at this time that she recalls meeting a certain Alda de Souza Coutinha, wife of a deputy director of the Shell company in Lisbon. This young Portuguese woman, who had come to Paris to try her luck as an actress, was due to return to Portugal in the company of a famous racing driver, Miguel da Palma. She asked Jeanne Georgel to accompany them. Jeanne accepted and set off on an adventure across the Iberian Peninsula for several months. She is finally forced to return to France after an encounter with the Portuguese police.

Returning to Paris in September 1929, Jeanne took up a new position as a secretary-typist at Pigache et Meilhan, a carpentry firm with offices at 40 rue Jouffroy in the 17<sup>th</sup> arrondissement.

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<sup>4</sup> "Une jeune désespérée se nie : deux sportmens la sauvent", *Le Télégramme des Vosges*, July 21, 1927.

Once again, the experience was a disaster for the young girl, who was clearly a victim of her bosses' covetousness.

At the time, Jeanne was living alone in a small furnished apartment on rue Fromentin in the Montmartre district. The area was renowned for its wild parties and cabarets, frequented by a segment of the idle white Russian diaspora. It was at this time that Jeanne made the acquaintance of Count Bernard d'Avaray, an important figure in her story. He belongs to a very old family with whiter-than-white blood. The d'Avarays had distinguished themselves at the side of Louis XIV and XV, and the family had always been among the noblest in the kingdom. When his uncle, the Duc d'Avaray, died in 1930, Bernard inherited the title. He was the sole survivor of the line. An only child and a bachelor, he didn't exactly follow the path expected of him. And so, the ancient lineage dies out. This catastrophe didn't shake him too much. By 1930, he was already 46 and still living with his sister at 7 rue d'Anjou, in a bourgeois apartment in a sumptuous building in the Madeleine district. He acts as usher at the Shéhérazade and mixes with the remnants of the Russian nobility at forbidden hours. When he meets Jeanne, he takes her under his wing and introduces her to the cream of the political and artistic crop. He gives her a little dog, a Bichon, which Jeanne takes everywhere with her.

Jeanne met Russian artists living in Paris: actors Nicola Rimsky and Sandra Milovanow, and the famous dancer Iwan Mosjukin. She also befriended the brother of Princess Mary Vachnadze, wife of aviator Dieudonné Costes. In short, the life of a socialite in its purest form. It seems she earned her living as a dancer in a cabaret, and to fit in with the mood of the times, chose to pass herself off as an exiled Russian. From then on, she called herself Vera Danichewsky.

Of all the rare birds of the Montmartre nights, Nikolai Arsène Karageorgevitch is certainly the most scabrous she's ever known. It was because of him that her life turned upside down. She met him in 1930. He was not at the height of his fame. Nikolai is a real-fake prince of Yugoslavia, living a dissolute life.

The son of Aurore Demidoff di San Donato, a Russian princess who married Prince Arsène of Yugoslavia in 1892, everyone in Parisian circles knew that Nikolai was his mother's son, but not his father's. The princess had a notorious relationship with a Baron von Manteuffel. She gave birth to 3 children: Paul in 1893 and twins Nikolai and Sergei in 1895. Faced with doubts about the offspring's parentage, the prince filed for divorce. Paul, who appeared to be of royal blood, was raised by his uncle Pierre, the pretender to the Serbian throne. As for the twins, they were raised by their mother until her death in 1904, and then by their maternal grandmother in Russia.

Nikolai served in the Russian army as an officer in the First World War. After the Revolution, like many Russian aristocrats, he moved to Paris, where he squandered the rest of the family fortune on gambling, substances, and alcohol. In 1927, in Paris, he married an American poetess, Lady Cochrane. But their marriage did not last long. His wife returned across the Atlantic to write her poems, and Nikolai remained in Paris in the company of other exiled white Russians of his ilk.

When Jeanne met him in 1929, he had - a few months earlier - been picked up, completely drunk on a bench, by a cab driver. He had been taken to hospital, where a doctor, without looking too closely, had concluded that he had died of congestion. Except that, the next morning, the prince came to his senses. He was astonished to find himself lying on the glazed earthenware of a hospital morgue, wrapped in a body bag surrounded by corpses. He wandered the hospital corridors, draped in his shroud as a prince from beyond the grave, frightening those who crossed his path. He then had the rare privilege of reading, in the newspapers of the day, his own obituary notice<sup>5</sup>. After his first death, he continued to dilute his existence in the exotic, chemical soirees of the Russian Paris of the Roaring Twenties. He even became an actor, but the advent of talking pictures, combined with his picturesque but ungainly Russian accent, prevented him from making a career for himself in France.

Does Jeanne know about his antics? However, he's an interesting catch for the young woman: he buys her a room in a plush apartment building in the Ternes district, and she can have all the fun she wants with her new Russian friends. Her red hair, blue eyes and opaline complexion make her look like a young Slavic princess.

Towards the end of 1930, Jeanne was arrested for theft, caught with her hand in the purse of the Guillemin lady. This event, which earned Jeanne Georgel a fine of sixteen francs and a month's suspended prison sentence, is not mentioned in her notebook. Not glorious indeed, but not disgraceful either. The information gathered by the investigators on her account seems to paint a picture of a young girl with no history. In the judgment handed down by the Seine criminal court, Jeanne states that she lives at Maisons-Laffite, 2 rue du Gros-Murger, an address she has never mentioned before. Was this a ruse to cover her tracks?

Jeanne left Montmartre in November and moved into what was to become "her nest", at 14 rue de Berne. The building was occupied by a strange character. A Burmese fakir lived on the second floor; he claimed to be clairvoyant and telepathic, and advertised in all the newspapers. As a result, he receives a considerable amount of mail, which is processed daily by an army of typists stationed on the premises. The fakir also receives his customers at home, and here he spares no expense.

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<sup>5</sup> "Did Nicolas Karageorgevitch die by accident?", *La Liberté*, June 4, 1933.

He greets them in the middle of the main room (the others are occupied by the secretaries in charge of mail) dressed in a gandoura and white turban. He sits cross-legged on a carved oak throne, and in front of him is an aquarium containing half a dozen dwarf crocodiles, all in a subdued atmosphere of exotic scents. In reality, the Burmese fakir's name is Charles Fossez, he's from Auvergne and is no more Burmese than the average Parisian. He just sniffed out a good deal and went to the extreme to make his fortune, and - given the amount of mail he receives every day - it's working like a charm!

This is when the young girl's life takes a sharp turn towards adventure. It was already unusual, but it's about to become insane.

### *Recruitment*

It's early 1931 and Jeanne has already made quite a few friends in White Russian circles. Her friend, Prince Karageorgevitch, is said to have connections with German intelligence, even serving as a recruiter. One evening, he arranges a meeting with a man of German origin, named Buhler. Jeanne describes him as just under 40, with a big belly, a heavy bald spot, blue eyes, a small moustache, and an Alsatian accent. The man was said to live in Strasbourg and to be staying at the Hôtel Napoléon (avenue Friedland) when he was in Paris. Nothing is known of this first meeting, which was probably quite informal. But it was Buhler who introduced Jeanne to another character by the name of Van Kuhl. Van Kuhl is a little older, very tall, elegant, but with a chillingly hard expression. His face is broad and clean-shaven. Strangely enough, he speaks with a very slight German accent and seems completely at ease in Russian. He would have been a staff officer during the war. Buhler reports to him.

During this first interview, Buhler asks Jeanne to go to Metz and approach a certain André Massoni. Born in 1899 in Castellare-di-Casinca, Haute-Corse in the northeast of the island<sup>6</sup>, he volunteered in 1918 and began his career in the infantry. He took part in the occupation of the Rhineland in 1919. He then joined Metz's No. 11 airfield, before becoming a non-commissioned officer in 1930. Jeanne met him in February 1931. Buhler already seemed to have spotted him as a target. Massoni had a reputation as a womanizer, and he didn't resist Jeanne's charms for long. They spent three weeks together. The apprentice spy managed to arrange a meeting between Buhler and Massoni, and according to Jeanne, Massoni became Buhler's paid agent. Buhler gave her the sum of 4,000 francs that she had been instructed to hand over to him. A few weeks later, she witnessed a 15,000-franc transaction between the two.

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<sup>6</sup> Archives départementales de Corse-du-Sud, Ajaccio, 9 Num 60/2008, André Massoni's personal details and services.

The information provided by Massoni was to concern new types of aircraft. This mission, which led to the recruitment of a non-commissioned officer from the Metz air park, was a success.

Following this successful mission, Jeanne recalls her encounter with the mysterious "Sommer". In Metz, in a café not far from the Porte des Allemands, she is approached by an enigmatic figure. He is wrapped in a dark coat and wears a bowler hat with a large, pointed nose. He's a rather tall, skinny man with big blue eyes. He introduces himself as "Sommer" and strikes up a conversation with the young woman. He claims to be from Metz and turns the discussion to politics. Jeanne tells him about her aversion to communists and her misadventures with her father. He makes her a proposition:

- Why don't you spy on the Communists in Paris?

Jeanne is beautiful, intelligent, and already speaks Russian. She frequents Russian parties in Paris, and the German agent knows that many Communist spies have infiltrated them.

Who is "Sommer"? It's undoubtedly an alias, just as Buhler seems to be one too. A way of covering his tracks and keeping his case officer in the dark. Buhler and Sommer are certainly one and the same. In Benno's notebook, Jeanne notes that Sommer was wearing a bowler hat, a seemingly insignificant detail that proves decisive in identifying Jeanne's case officer.

Around the same time, in 1931, French agent Joseph Doudot attempted to infiltrate the Abwehr. Under a false identity and after settling in Metz, he sent a proposal for service via a Cologne newspaper. A few weeks later, a first meeting was arranged in Luxembourg, followed by a second meeting in Saarbrücken. These initial interviews enabled the German agents to verify the new recruit's motivations. Clearly, Doudot has made a good impression. A third meeting was to take place, again in Saarbrücken, but this time with the real Abwehr representative. Each time, the French services had organized discreet surveillance around Doudot. For this third meeting, surveillance was stepped up. When he introduced himself, Doudot gave the following physical description:

"Two weeks later, in Saarbrücken, the real Abwehr representative took the stage. After the introductions, policeman Clövers [the first person Doudot had already met twice] slipped away. Tall, elegant, friendly, and ironic, aged around forty, the newcomer had the typical look of an officer steeped in Prussian military traditions. He called himself Steinbauer. (...) throughout his stay, he was never out of sight. The fact that he always wore a superb bowler hat, not very common in Germany at the time, made it much easier for those who were spying on him. Even in the crowd it was easy to keep an eye on him, especially as his tall stature meant he couldn't "disappear" into the crowd."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Henri Koch-Kent, *Doudot, figure légendaire du contre-espionnage français*, Paris, Casterman, 1976, p. 34.

Reading the physical description of this "Steinbauer" one can only think of "Sommer". Several details suggest that it could be the same person, starting with the famous bowler hat, which, if Doudot is to be believed, is quite unusual in Germany. As it happens, "Steinbauer" is identified by the team accompanying Doudot on his infiltration. A few indiscretions on his part enable us to trace his identity. During his meeting with Doudot, he ventured into the realm of sentiment and spoke of the daughter of a shopkeeper from Metz. The next day, Doudot and a French agent visit the shop in question and show a photo of "Steinbauer". A young girl behind the cash register exclaims: "My God, not a word to my husband! It's Rudolph!"

After a brief search of the German military directory, the French agents learned that the name was Friedrich-Wilhelm Rudolph, born in 1892 in Goslar, Lower Saxony. Rudolph joined the Abwehr in 1924 after a career marked, like many others, by the First World War. His first job was with Abwehr III, dedicated to counterespionage, particularly within the army. During these early years, he became a Rittmeister (cavalry officer). In 1929, he moved to Abwehr I (espionage) at the Abwehrstelle in Münster. It was here that he is said to have met Jeanne in Paris.

#### *Lehmann and Amatogui*

In the winter of 1931, Jeanne returned to Paris. We don't really know what Jeanne's occupation was at the time, but it seems that she was a dancer in these clubs. Dancer and probably a little more than that. Rudolph (a.k.a. Sommer, a.k.a. Buhler) has entrusted her with a new mission: to find and seduce a man named Robert Lehmann, the so-called secretary of the Cartel des Gauches. This man is believed to have a sensitive file concerning French possessions in Indochina. At the same time, Jeanne is asked to escort a Japanese embassy attaché named Yehuso Amatogui during his stay in Paris, who is very interested in the Lehmann file.

This mission is being carried out in collaboration with a woman whose path has not yet crossed that of Jeanne. She is Alexandra "Schura" Kwill. She is Russian, born in St. Petersburg on August 24, 1897, to Ilias and Rosalie Ratner. She was educated to the equivalent of the French baccalauréat, and later qualified as a nurse. In 1919, she left Russia for Finland and the secretariat of the General Staff of an English general. In 1921, she married an embassy secretary: don Fransisco de Muns y Andreu. She followed her husband on his various postings: to Venezuela, Budapest, Spain, and Warsaw until 1930. Her husband, it is said, was completely bewitched. From his side, she lived her life without worrying about him.

Schura then found herself in Paris in early 1931, where she met Jeanne. Both were part of a group of German intelligence spies who had infiltrated the Parisian White Russians. The group was led by Friedrich Rudolph.

Shura was given a special assignment by Yehuso Amatogui, who was to meet some French officers on their way to Indochina. The situation in Indochina was indeed tense. Emperor Khải Định, who died in 1925, had left the throne to his 12-year-old son Bảo Đại. After a period of regency, Bảo Đại undertook a series of major constitutional reforms from 1932 onwards. The situation as a French protectorate was not put in default, but mentalities were noticeably evolving towards a growing sovereignty of the people. The Japanese spy's mission was probably to meet and recruit the new French civil servants who would be sent to Indochina. Amatogui lived in Paris under the auspices of the Maison Franco-Japonaise, located at 31 avenue Pierre-Ier-de-Serbie. The institution's usual function was to promote Japanese arts in France, but it also housed spies.

A search for Robert Lehmann, as mentioned in Benno's notebook, is inconclusive. A search for a "Lehmann" with possible links to the left at the time brings up Marcel Lehmann. The archetypal competent but visibly sinister civil servant, he was wounded and decorated during the First World War, when he lost the use of his right arm. A lean build and vacant stare complete his portrait. Founder of the *Union fédérale des associations de mutilés et anciens combattants* (Federal Union of Disabled and Veterans' Associations) twelve years earlier, he was a brilliant battler and defender of the rights of war wounded. His hard work in the cabinet of André Maginot's Minister of Pensions earned him the recognition of all former poilus. He was a left-wing idealist, but his influence tended to wane over the years. By 1931, he had fallen out with his old friends, and his wife had just left him. The RGs (general enquiries) of the Préfecture de Police investigated him after he allegedly made derogatory remarks about Aristide Briant<sup>8</sup>. He was said to be a big spender, and some of his friends frequently saw him at Montmartre's interloping parties.

Lehmann probably frequented the nightclubs described by Joseph Kessel in *Nuits de princes*. According to Jeanne Georgel, one of the places he frequented was "Rasvet", a clandestine nightclub run by a certain Madame Nicolaieff. It was she, the owner, who introduced Lehmann to Jeanne.

During these wild Russian evenings, Jeanne also met several politicians, including the eminent President of the Chamber of Deputies, Fernand Bouisson. The president is always accompanied by his wife. The latter was already an old woman, but her tastes were modern and unusual. Madame Bouisson was fascinated by Russian artists.

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<sup>8</sup> APPP, 77 W 731-255149.



An avid collector, she insisted on hanging a few works by Chagall in the Hôtel de Lassay, their sumptuous Parisian home. Modern paintings rub shoulders with her husband's more classical tastes. The collection is a reflection of the couple: original.

Jeanne lets her ears wander everywhere, and whatever she can hear, she tells Rudolph. The information she obtains is first-hand. Jeanne learns a lot about political life. Rudolph, who arranged to meet Jeanne at a different hotel each time, is pleased with his young recruit's work. He is particularly impressed by her ability to retain so much information. Jeanne seems to be doing a good job. During one of these evenings, Lehmann and Jeanne end up spending a night together. While she slept, she managed to steal two sheets of paper on which she saw the words "Tonkin" and "Indochina" recurring. The next day, she contacts Rudolph and gives him the slips.

We don't know if it was this story that broke Lehmann, but he shot himself in the head at his desk in the Ministry of Pensions in July 1932<sup>9</sup>. Only a few months after crossing paths with Jeanne. The newspapers were a little agitated but found no good reason for him to have pulled the trigger. In the world of politics, suicides are always viewed with bewilderment. Was Jeanne the cause of her act? There's no need to establish a link between the two episodes, but it's disturbing... In the series, we can also add the sudden death of Nicolai, Prince Karageorgevitch. Jeanne had finally lost sight of the false prince who had recruited her. In the summer of 1933, he was found lifeless in a hotel room in Nice, clutching a syringe of morphine.

### *The decisive years: 1932-1933*

After that, Jeanne was sent across France in the company of another female SRA agent like herself, Raymonde Sanvoisin. She was a little older than Jeanne, probably born around 1900 in the Doubs region. She lives in Paris, Hôtel Vichy, rue Aristide-Bruant, number 1, and was a trainer for two years in Tunis between 1928 and 1929 at the "Le Grand-Écart" dance hall. She then worked at the Novelty in Orléans. She's six feet tall, very plump, very strong hips, thick wrists and ankles, limp in appearance, lymphatic, very fair-skinned. She has small, very light blue eyes, a very "medium" forehead, a "slightly bourbon and fatty" nose, a small mouth with thin lips, and a small, receding chin. These are the exact words of the description sent out to search for this agent. Neither the police at the time, nor the historian today, were able to track her down. She simply disappeared.

Jeanne and Raymonde must find diplomatic and military figures and steal documents from them. The targets seem to have been identified upstream.

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<sup>9</sup> "Un inspecteur général des pensions se tue au ministère", *Le Peuple*, July 6, 1932.

They were only responsible for the theft. During the interrogations in May 1941, Jeanne mentioned a trip to the west of France, to Saint-Malo and Brest, in February 1932.

In Saint-Malo, their mission is to steal documents concerning defense works along the German-Swiss border from the pocket of a Swiss man. In Brest, they acted as pickpockets for a woman named Rosalie Gauthier, known as Rosa, who received the men while Jeanne and Raymonde picked their pockets. In the same place, just three years later, a new SRA spy would come to Brest. But she would be arrested by the 2<sup>nd</sup> bureau. Lydia Oswald was a young Swiss woman born in St. Gallen on September 13, 1906, recruited by the SRA to carry out the same kind of missions as Jeanne and Raymonde. She arrived in Le Havre in 1935, where she met a naval lieutenant, Jean de Forceville, who became her lover. Through her contact with him, she obtains information that she is about to pass on to the SRA when national security agents arrest her. In her suitcase, they found a questionnaire about the warships under construction in Brest. During the investigation, the investigators also found a number of letters exchanged with her attending officer, thanking her for asking for clarification. The investigators also found in her belongings the sum of 5,000 francs, probably remuneration for her activities. During the investigation, the police travelled to Saint-Malo, where Lydia and Jean de Forceville had been staying for some time with a naval officer. In Saint-Malo, the investigation focused on a dancer-trainer with a Germanic-sounding name. She was said to have followed the couple to Brest, but she seemed especially suspicious because she sent parcels to a resident of Metz whose name was also of German origin. In the end, the latter was cleared of any wrongdoing: she was only sending jars of jam and stockings to her mother. But it all sounds very similar to what Jeanne was doing in Brest and Saint-Malo. Lydia Oswald was in fact one of Jeanne's many replacements, the only one to make a name for herself, as she was taken<sup>10</sup>.

In April 1932, Jeanne was sent on a mission to Belgium. She was placed under the control of an agent more expert than herself, Charline Drouin, who called herself "Esperanza" and passed for Spanish. She was a tall, light-skinned brunette with a small mouth, very fleshy and beautiful. She was born around 1912, probably of Normandy origin. Later, between 1936 and 1939, she changed her cover and passed herself off as an American named "Betty". In Belgium, Jeanne and Charline were asked to contact a Belgian air officer with information about fortifications on the Franco-Belgian border. As with Raymonde Sanvoisin, Charline is completely untraceable in the archives.

In September 1932, Rudolph sent Jeanne on a mission to Nancy to meet the head of the Pantz company, Robert Pantz, born in Pont-à-Mousson in 1892. He ran the company founded by his father, manufacturing steel structures.

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<sup>10</sup> See Fabien Lostec's article in this issue.

According to Jeanne, the company was in difficulty and Robert Pantz was always short of money. He sometimes used drugs and seemed to be an easy prey for the German SR. Jeanne claims to have managed to steal some documents from his office relating to spare parts manufactured for the French army. This fact is contradicted by Robert Pantz's deposition taken in January 1946 by the DST on the post-war Georgel affair<sup>11</sup>. Pantz told investigators that he had never worked for the army and that no documents had been stolen that year. When presented with Jeanne's photo, he concedes that he may have met her in Nancy but does not recognize her. For her part, our spy maintains that she stole the documents and passed on the information to Rudolph towards the end of October 1932.

In February 1933, Jeanne was offered a new mission. Accompanied by a certain "Line Morin", she was to travel to Marseille and obtain false passports for two German agents trying to join the Foreign Legion. From Marseille, Jeanne then travels to Algeria, where she is supposed to make contact with a German agent named "Wilmer", to whom she is to bring military intelligence gathered by another agent named "Medad" or "Medah".

Jeanne Georgel's life is still long and full of elements to verify, cross-check and understand. Here, in a few lines, is the continuation of her adventure. She then left for Morocco, where she had to make contact with members of the young nationalist revolution. She then found herself in Spain, in contact with the nobility intriguing against the Republic within the *La Renovacion espanola* movement. There she met a young aristocrat who became her lover. When hostilities broke out in 1936, she was forced to return to France while her lover went off to fight. When she learns that he has been taken prisoner, she does her utmost to find him and manages, somewhat by chance, to infiltrate the Republican intelligence services in Barcelona. She was soon spotted and sentenced to twenty years in prison. In January 1939, she regained her freedom when Franco came to power in Spain. She returned to work for the German services in France and North Africa. She was arrested for the first time in April 1940 by the DST. She was tried in July 1942 and transferred to Tunisia in November. Following the Allied-led Operation Torch, which led to the invasion of Tunisia by German forces, Jeanne Georgel was released like all the other prisoners in the country. She once again found herself working for Germany and the collaborationist French police. She was finally arrested in May 1943 at the end of the German occupation of Tunisia. She was condemned to death, but her sentence was commuted, and she was able to regain her freedom in 1957.

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<sup>11</sup> Archives nationales, La Courneuve, Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2018/50 MI 1, police judiciaire n° 1 390 018. Hearing of Robert Pantz, January 22, 1946.

She ended her life in a small village in the Lot region and died in 1992.

All the archives gathered on her have enabled us to reconstruct her career with edifying and fascinating precision. It gives us a precise glimpse of the itinerary of a small-scale spy. This research gives us an insider's view of the workings of the German intelligence service, and enables us to study the role, attitude, and motivations behind the commitment of a spy who remained anonymous and whose life was not mythologized *after the event*.

**Simon Rémy**

## Research notebook

Cédric Neveu, CNAM PhD student, "Intelligence Studies" Department, **French intelligence during the Occupation the Lyon services (P4, TR 114, Technica) against Ast Dijon, 1940-1944**

June 1940, the French army is defeated. But for French special services officers, the war goes on. The enemy remains Germany. After discussions throughout the summer, at the beginning of September 1940, a double structure was put in place in line with the clauses of the armistice agreement: one official (against England, the USSR, the Gaullists) and the other unofficial (against Italy and above all Germany), all under the authority of Colonel Rivet. What the Marshal couldn't do officially - prepare for revenge against Germany - the army's clandestine special services, a pillar of the regime, had to do.

Under the leadership of Commandant Paul Lombard, the most important post of the intelligence service (SR) against Germany was set up in Lyon. Heir to the pre-war post in Belfort, the Lyon service - or Poste 4 (P4) - quickly developed a network of branches in Saint-Etienne, Lons-le-Saunier, Bourg-en-Bresse and Mâcon. The aim of the post was to collect, in a geographical area stretching from the Jura to the North, all information on the German army (forces, nature of troops, billeting, equipment, officers, etc.), the state of mind of the occupied populations, the situation in the annexed zones and in the Reich. To achieve this, from 1940 onwards, the officers commanding the P4 branches developed networks by recruiting agents to set up organizations themselves. From the summer of 1940, patriots from all walks of life and of all ages were approached because of their feelings or their professional situation (railway workers, lawyers, civil servants, gendarmes, etc.). Some are reactivated agents. Foreigners were also approached, notably Austrian Jews who had taken refuge in France. Registered and given an alias, they were tasked with writing intelligence reports - according to strict instructions - to be transmitted across the demarcation line. Most of them work on a voluntary basis. Some agents are particularly well-established, such as the source "Casino" operated in Besançon, transmitting original documents from German headquarters in the area. A study of the archives of the period provides a better understanding of the recruitment, processing, and follow-up process for an "honorable correspondent" or "intelligence agent". Based on a database of 600 people recruited by the French special services it would be possible to ask them about their age, social background, political conviction, professional situation, etc.

*Operational intelligence*

The SR organized channels to get reports across the demarcation line, as well as escaped prisoners of war and Alsatians-Mosellans fleeing the annexation regime. The latter were debriefed on the situation in Germany, and the SR encouraged them to join the armistice army. These networks soon covered occupied Lorraine, annexed Moselle and Alsace, Alsace, Franche-Comté and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Gradually, structures were organized in the Paris region, Normandy, and Brittany. The information collected by P4 was transmitted to Vichy, which centralized the information sent by the various SR posts. A counterespionage post, TR (Travaux ruraux - rural works) 114, was set up in Lyon to combat German spies and their French agents. To this end, it set up networks in occupied France and attempted to infiltrate German services, notably the *Abwehr* (Defense) in Dijon.

Intelligence only becomes usable if it is exploited and analyzed. The large amount of material accumulated in Vichy from the various SR posts was sent back to Lyon, where a camouflaged department of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Bureau de l'État-major* (General Staff's Office)- in charge of intelligence exploitation - operated under the name of the "Technica" chemical company. This clandestine office drew up summaries and brochures for the Vichy regime's highest military and civilian officials, on the organization and establishment of the German army in France, its equipment, the Reich's economic situation, and prospects on the various fronts, particularly the Eastern Front. The officers in this office kept an impressive file of senior German officers. These reports, some of which have been preserved, did not influence Vichy policy. While the initiatives of the SR and the 2<sup>nd</sup> bureau were verbally encouraged, with the implicit support of Marshal Pétain, there were no official orders from the French head of state or ministers. Only the Chiefs of Staff intervened. Vichy developments complicated the task of the special services officers, who were first encouraged and then curbed by Admiral Darlan, and finally by Laval, who wanted to bring them under their control. As soon as their activities called into question the policy of collaboration, the officers were left to "fend for themselves".

Contacts were also made with the British and Americans via Switzerland, as well as with Henri Frenay, founder of the *Mouvement de Libération Nationale* (National Movement of Liberation) and later Combat. We thus find ourselves in an early form of "proto-Resistance", combining officers obeying Vichy spy orders targeting the German victor, but who interpreted these orders in a very broad sense, and Frenchmen in resistance from 1940, without always knowing that they were working for the French special services. This situation calls into question the notion of Resistance in the early months of the Occupation, were the officers of the special services Resistance fighters acting within a singular framework, or were they simply civil servants doing their duty, excluded from the Resistance?

In the end, aren't we somewhere between the two? A more provocative question: were the Vichy special services behind the first intelligence networks set up in occupied France?

*German services in ambush*

The *Abwehr* in Dijon, the organization's most important regional post, recognized the SR's activities as early as 1941 - many German officers were confronted by French officers they had confronted in the interwar period - and set about dismantling the intelligence networks. As early as the summer of 1941, organized networks in Lorraine, Alsace and Belfort were dealt a brutal blow following the capture of liaison officers who had been turned over to the German services. These arrests shed light on German counterespionage techniques: recruiting a V-Mann, penetrating a network, identifying agents and officers, meeting places and mailboxes in preparation for a repressive operation, an *Aktion*. Dozens of people are arrested, deported, or shot. In reality, this intelligence war was far from the image of a "war of honor" between intelligence officers. Low blows, betrayals, blackmail, greed, cowardice, and imprudence rub shoulders with abnegation, commitment and selflessness. The study of an *Abwehr* post would mirror the study of the French services. It would also involve understanding relations with other German services, which are far removed from the antiphon of noble German military counter-espionage services opposed to the brutal police of the Sipo-SD.

While the *Abwehr*, the main player in the fight against the Resistance from 1940 to 1942, wreaked havoc with the P4 networks, it was unable to get its hands on the officers who manipulated these networks, safe in the free zone. The invasion of the free zone in November 1942 changed all that. From soldiers obeying orders from Vichy in 1940, the officers became resistance fighters after November 1942, the special services having been officially disbanded by Vichy at the behest of the Germans. Many took refuge in North Africa to continue the fight. Those who remained in France continued their patient and dangerous intelligence gathering, this time for the Giraudist and then Gaullist services. Contacts with the domestic Resistance - Combat, then the Secret Army, the Army Resistance Organization - began to take shape.

Taking advantage of new betrayals - in particular by a French police commissioner - *Abwehr* sleuths, working closely with the Sipo-SD, destroyed first the Technica company in February 1943, then the P4 station the following May. The few surviving officers and their agents are mercilessly hunted down. The few spared continued their work in Gaullist structures until the Liberation.

*Studying intelligence*

Studying an intelligence cluster - research with P4, counterespionage with TR 114 and operations with Technica - its men, its techniques, the evolution of its methods and its objectives is only possible through the use of particularly valuable archives from the period. Our main archival resource is located in Vincennes. In addition to the 7 NN funds (personal files of honorable correspondents, P4 reports, etc.), the personal files of intelligence officers (8 YE), the personal files of members of intelligence networks (16 P), we have the archives of the special services on the German services (28 P 7 and 28 P 9) and on their agents, both French and German. Above all, we have discovered the substantial file compiled by the *Abwehr* in Dijon against the P4 and Technica services. Hundreds of pages covering the period 1941-1944 (interrogation reports by the GFP, *Abwehr*, Sipo-SD, confrontation reports, tailing reports, seized French special services archives, photographs of French officers, exchanges between the various German services on the progress of cases, V-Mann files, etc.) enable us to follow the ruthless battle waged by Ast Dijon against the Lyonnais services at every stage. The military justice trials held at Le Blanc (the Indre region), in particular the trial of Commissaire Merlen, involved in the dismantling of P4 and Technica, are particularly valuable. The archives of the "*épuration*" (purge) complete these extremely rich archives: the trials of the *Abwehr* of Dijon kept in the departmental archives of the ducal capital, or the proceedings brought before the Court of Justice of Besançon against the turned agents Wilser and Chetelat, responsible for the destruction of the networks of Captain Kleinmann of Lons-le-Saulnier. To complete this rapid inventory, we were able to make use of the personal files of those arrested (21 P) and the archives of German camps and prisons at the DAVCC in Caen.



## The interview

### Chloé Aeberhardt, **Cold War spies**

Chloé Aeberhardt, author of *Espionnes racontent*, a book published by Robert Laffont in 2017<sup>1</sup>, sheds light on the role played by these agents during the Cold War. The fruit of five years' work, this book focuses on nine women, belonging to the Security Service (MI5), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the *HaMossad leModi'in uleTafkidim Meyuhadim* (Institute for Intelligence and Special Affairs, Mossad), the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (MfS, Stasi- Ministry for State Security), the *Direction de la Surveillance du territoire* (DST- Territorial Surveillance Department), and the late *Комитет государственной безопасности* (Committee for State Security, KGB). Most of them are well known today, like the Englishwoman Stella Rimington, the Americans Jonna Mendez and Martha Duncan, the Israeli Yola Reitman and the German Gabriele Gast; less well known are those who wished to remain completely anonymous, like the Frenchwoman Geneviève or the ex-Soviets Tatiana and Ludmila; at the time, Reitman and Duncan were still unknown to the general public and the former insisted on remaining so, asking that her surname not be mentioned. Finally, there's Madeleine Ferrant, the "Marguerite" of the Vetrov Affair, the DST's great success at the end of the Cold War<sup>2</sup>. This exposure led some of these women to take the plunge into the media. While Rimington and Mendez, freshly retired from their services (1996 and 1993 respectively), as well as Gast (arrested in 1994 and released from prison in 1998) were already authors<sup>3</sup>, Ms. Reitman shot to fame thanks to the declassification of archives concerning the operation, which gave her a place in Chloé Aeberhardt's book<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In paperback from Harper Collins and in comics from Steinkis/Arte in 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Sergueï Kostine, Éric Raynaud, *Adieu Farewell. La vérité sur la taupe qui a modifié le cours de l'histoire*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2011; Raymond Nart, Jacky Debain, Yvonnick Denoël, *L'affaire Farewell vue de l'intérieur*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2013; Patrick Ferrant (dir.), *Farewell. Conséquences géopolitiques d'une grande opération d'espionnage*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Joanna Mendez, with Tony Mendez, Bruce Henderson, *Spy Dust. Two Masters of Disguise Reveal the Tools and Operations that Helped Win the Cold War*, New York, Atria Books, 2003; Stella Rimington, *Open Secret. The Autobiography of the Former Director-General of MI5*, London, Hutchinson, 2001; Gabriele Gast, *Kundschafterin des Friedens: 17 Jahre Topspionin der DDR beim BND*, Frankfurt am Main, Eichborn, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Shraga Simmons, *Operation Brothers: The Mossad's Red Sea Diving Resort*, Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/operation-brothers-the-mossad-s-red-sea-diving-resort>; Suyin Haynes, "The True Story Behind Netflix's The Red Sea Diving Resort," *Time Magazine*, August 1<sup>st</sup> 2019, about Gideon Raff's film for Netflix, *The Red Sea Diving Resort*



*Les Espionnes racontent* offers a fairly complete picture of the sociological evolution of service during the Cold War. They also offer a fairly complete panorama of their operating methods. Some worked as analysts, some were analysts, others were field officers, another was just an agent, with all the vicissitudes that go with that, while others simply followed their husbands, who were real intelligence officers.

*Have women always been employed by intelligence services? How did they get in?*

For a long time, intelligence was a male preserve, as were all so-called "serious" activities involving the international politics of governments and the security of states. In France, Great Britain or America of the 1960s-1970s, women's place was at home or, when they were part of a secret service, behind the typewriter. They were often recruited by co-optation, via their husbands - wives being considered a priori as trustworthy people, their hiring required only a light security clearance. And once integrated, they had a better understanding of their husbands' late hours and absences, which, it was thought, contributed to household peace. In my book *Les Espionnes racontent*, this is the case of Ludmila, who joined the KGB to follow her husband, who had been sent abroad as a "clandestine", or Geneviève, who was in charge of listing Soviet spies on French soil for the DST. It wasn't until several decades later that the secret services realized that it was in their interest to train women in analysis and fieldwork.



*Following your survey, what place(s) were reserved for women during the Cold War?*

It's one of the few things all the women I met had in common: whether they worked for the KGB, MI5, Mossad, or the CIA, they all had to deal with sexism, which could take the form of inappropriate remarks and gestures, or reluctance to promote them and send them into the field.

*What did women bring to the intelligence services at the time?*

New ideas. As Stella Rimington, the former Director General of British Counterintelligence (MI5), put it when I visited her at her English cottage: "What the secret services need is diversity. Both sexes are needed to bring that element of surprise to the methods of approach." Martha Duncan gave an illuminating example in 1989.



Fig. 1 - Chloé

On the left,  
Aeberhardt.

Illustration, like the one on p. 174, taken from *Les Espionnes racontent* and supplied by the author.

Right, Fig. 2 - *Red Sea Diving Resort* advertisement, supporting the Yola operation.

After the U.S. army invaded Panama, dictator Manuel Noriega vanished into thin air. As a young intelligence officer for the DIA, Martha is part of the team tasked with finding him. To do so, she manipulates his official mistress, who convinces him to surrender to the U.S. military. Not sure a man would have had this idea, nor that the mistress would have given her the trust she has granted to Martha.

*Do you see being a woman as an advantage?*

I've often been told (by men, mostly) that women made good intelligence officers because they had more intuition than men. Personally, I don't think that women, because they are women, have a natural predisposition for this profession - men are also capable of subtlety, and some women clearly lack finesse. I'd rather say that, paradoxically, women benefit from their under-representation in the profession: as long as the profession is predominantly male, as long as, in the collective imagination, a spy is a man, women will have an advantage over their male colleagues: they will be less suspected. That's what Yola, the Israeli, used to tell me.

*Arous. A wonderful world apart, with so much to see and do.*

Arous on the Red Sea - experienced divers say it has some of the best, clearest water in the world. And the most magnificent coral reefs. It was here, a few kilometers to the southeast, that Cousteau performed his famous Conshelf experiments.

**Natural beauty**  
Rarely has nature been so generous or so varied. Large fish of many kinds swim by their brilliant hues enhanced by the exceptional clarity of the water. Here, too, are turtles, manatees, bottle-nosed dolphins, graceful calichee and, in the depths, various species of sharks, Gomorans, crabs, starfishes, sponges and pelicans using their way

**Comfortable, modern accommodations**  
Guests are lodged in attractive, air conditioned bungalows with fully-equipped bathrooms. Each room has two single beds.

**Natural highlights and local fauna**  
Red Sea reefs. Made famous by Jacques-Yves Cousteau and others. An abundance of marine life, of many varieties, are found in the exceptionally clear waters. March is the mating season for dolphins and manatees.

**Adventure à la carte**  
There's so much to see and do in Arous, scuba divers in the coral reefs, or get out to sea to explore the famous reefs of Sargasso and Shark. Here and the reefs of the "Tobara" and the "Shakel" Swam, swayed water etc., visitant in the Arous lagoon. Take a fascinating, scuba-free cruise and enjoy the under-water life through a "Suba-view". The breathtaking in Arous lagoon is a remarkable sea fishing, take a hunting trip. Visit the Arous oasis in the Red Sea mountains, and the ghost town of the ancient Venetian port.

**Relaxed comfort**  
At the end of an action day, relax in the friendly atmosphere of the games room. Have a refreshing drink, a game of darts and then an excellent meal in the Arous restaurant, where fresh fish is served daily.

**Complete facilities**  
• Living, dining, kitchen and other equipment available for divers on site.  
• Two dives daily, or more by special arrangement.  
• Living, dining, kitchen and other equipment available for divers on site.  
• Two dives daily, or more by special arrangement.

**Other faunas**  
In the surrounding living desert and Red Sea mountains there are gazelles and the famous, very rare Sultan ibex.

Arous on the Red Sea. Unique in all the world.

For three years in the 1980s, she managed a real-fake hotel in Sudan, on the shores of the Red Sea, which served as a Mossad transit base for exfiltrating Falacha Jews to Israel. Because the establishment was run by a young, friendly woman, well-liked by the locals and far removed from the James Bond spy stereotype, her activities aroused little suspicion.

*What specific features do they offer in terms of human intelligence?*

Having women on staff enables services to broaden their source recruitment possibilities. Depending on the target profile (gender, age, nationality, interests), it may be strategic to choose a female officer to carry out the approach or recruitment. If, for example, you are hoping to obtain information from a Muslim mother whose son you suspect of planning an Islamist attack, you may have a better chance of success by sending a woman.

*What's your take on these Cold War intelligence officers and fictional female spies (from Greta Garbo, personifying a mythical - and mistaken - Mata Hari, through James Bond's Girls, to Chloe O'Brian - from 24 Hours Chrono - and Maya - in Zero Dark Thirty)?*

The women I interviewed are all exasperated by the way female spies have been, and sometimes still are, portrayed in fiction. In fact, I think it's in order to "put things right" that most of them have agreed to talk to me.

For decades, novels and films have portrayed female spies as schemers, whose primary mission was to compromise targets through sex, or gather pillow talk - a role none of them played, and which, they told me, was reserved for prostitutes, not intelligence professionals. In the James Bond saga, female spies are also used as stooges for the hero. Scenarios have evolved with society, and more and more spy fiction feature female intelligence officers. Some are portrayed realistically (Marina Loiseau in *The Office of Legends*, Maya in *Zero Dark Thirty*); others give in to the fantasy of a female James Bond (the character played by Charlize Theron in *Atomic Blonde* or, to a lesser extent, the all-too-bright Carrie Mathison in *Homeland*).

## Yesterday's news

Pr. Bertrand Warusfel, **Defense secretary and public archives. The exemplary conflict of a system in need of better control**

### ABSTRACT

Although an essential principle for the proper functioning of intelligence services in the context of national defense and security, defense secrecy remains little known both in its legal framework and in its practical subtleties. Bertrand Warusfeld, professor of law at the University of Paris- VIII, member of the Paris Court and vice-president of the French Association of Security and Defence Law, discusses the subtleties - and sometimes the dysfunctions - surrounding this key principle through the example of the treatment of classified documents by comparing the texts (including the most recent ones) surrounding the management of public archives with those surrounding the protection of national defense secrets.

**Key words:** National defense secret - Protection of secrecy - Public archives - Classified documents – Inter-ministerial Instruction 1300 - Fundamental rights - Constitution - Liberty/security dialectic

National defense secrecy is a permanent legal mechanism implemented by the State as part of its regalian national security functions. Originating from a simple administrative practice that was deemed necessary to provide a legal framework on the eve of the Second World War, this legally protected secret has a dual purpose: to require its holder to comply with preventive protective measures, but also to dissuade by means of significant criminal sanctions, and even – when compromise is proven- to enable its repression.

However, while contemporary legislation does provide a genuine framework for the regulation of secrecy, in practice it reveals a number of structural shortcomings that can become veritable pathologies. From this point of view, the lively controversy and recent reform of access to classified public archives are a good example of the intrinsic difficulty of reconciling the imperatives of national security (particularly in intelligence activities) with the necessary respect for fundamental freedoms.

### *The principles of defense secrecy protection*

The basic principle of defense secrecy protection is that its implementation is a totally discretionary prerogative of the State and its administrative authorities. The current inter-ministerial instruction 1300 (which organizes the protection of this secrecy in regulatory terms) affirms that this prerogative rests on several constitutional foundations, namely articles 5, 20 and 21 of the Constitution<sup>1</sup>.

This concept of a secret as a "privilege of the executive" (to use a related Anglo-Saxon notion) has numerous consequences for its operation, as well as for the potential malfunctions we will discuss below. First and foremost, it is reflected in broad and imprecise textual definitions: such a secret covers information or documents "the disclosure of which, or access to which, is likely to harm national defense or could lead to the discovery of a national defense secret"<sup>2</sup>. Whereas the Defense Code specifies that "the Secret level is reserved for information and media whose disclosure or to which access is likely to harm defense and national security" while the "Top Secret level is reserved for information and media whose disclosure or to which access would have exceptionally serious consequences for Defense and national security"<sup>3</sup>.

The considerable leeway given to the administration when deciding to "classify" (i.e., to place information in secret) does not, therefore, make downstream legal and political control of these decisions easy. Indeed, while the decision to classify is indeed an administrative act theoretically subject to review by the administrative courts, we shall see that in practice the possibility for judges to oversee this discretionary power of the State has remained ineffective, which is problematic in a state governed by the rule of law.

Moreover, the administrative prerogative is not limited to the initial classification decision, but follows the classified document until it is declassified, pursuant to Article R. 2311-4 of the French Defense Code, which stipulates that "any change in the classification level, declassification, modification or deletion of a particular protection statement for classified information or media is decided by the authority under whose responsibility the classification was made".

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<sup>1</sup> Instruction générale interministérielle (IGI) n° 1300 sur la protection du secret de la Défense nationale (approved by arrêté du 9 août 2021, JORF, 11 août 2021), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Article 413-9 of the French penal code.

<sup>3</sup> Article R2311-1 of the French Defense Code. This article is one of those amended by Decree no. 2019-1271 of December 2, 2019 to replace the traditional three-level classification (Confidential, Secret, Top Secret) with a tighter two-level system, more compatible with the way our allies (notably within NATO) manage their own secrets.



The classification as a defense secret by an "issuing authority" means that classified items will be subject to strict security rules "designed to restrict their distribution or access"<sup>4</sup>.

Without going into all the details described in Inter-ministerial Instruction 1300, it can be summarized as follows: protection is based on a combination of three elements:

- A set of administrative rules imposing the marking of classified media as well as the material and administrative conditions for their storage and use;

- Clearance (after a security investigation) of persons (internal or external to the administration) who are deemed suitable for access to media of a given classification level,

- the administration's assessment of an authorized person's "need to know", so that only people who can justify this can have access to classified information directly related to their duties or missions<sup>5</sup>.

In particular, all these procedures are implemented and observed on a permanent basis within the intelligence services, whose activities and techniques are fully covered by national defense secrecy<sup>6</sup>.

However, when it comes to defense secrecy, it is the penal provisions - and not those of the Defense Code - that draw the consequences of the classified nature of an item of information or a document in order to punish infringements.

In accordance with article 413-10 of the French Penal Code, anyone who compromises secrecy when he or she is legitimately in possession of it, either by function or by mission, is liable to seven years' imprisonment (or only three in the case of negligence), while anyone who is not empowered or who has no need to know about it is liable to a maximum penalty of five years (article 513-11 CPen).

The level of these penalties could conceal the fact that they only apply insofar as the compromise in question does not reveal a genuine espionage operation. In fact, if someone provides or attempts to provide to a foreign country (whether a State, a company, or a foreign organization) data likely to affect the fundamental interests of the Nation (within the meaning of article 410-1 CPen), the penalties are criminal (and no longer tortious) and can range from ten to fifteen years' imprisonment (articles 411-5 to 411-8 CPen).

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<sup>4</sup> Art. 413-9 CPen, 1<sup>ST</sup> paragraph.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. article R2311-7 CDef. This "need to know" concept was imported into France from Anglo-Saxon examples in the aftermath of the Second World War.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. IGI 13000, p. 24. Also note article 6 of the decree creating the DGSI: "All public officials are required to maintain secrecy about the activities and organization of the Directorate General of Internal Security" (decree no. 2014-445 of April 30, 2014, on the missions and organization of the Directorate General of Internal Security).

However, the protection of national defense secrecy is not just a mechanism for deterring and punishing breaches of national security confidentiality. It is also a mechanism whose practice has long since revealed malfunctions, given that this secrecy challenges the freedoms guaranteed by the rule of law, and that its over-use, or even misuse, is not yet countered by sufficiently effective checks and balances.

### *Gaps and pathologies in classified information management*

The first and most shocking feature of the protection of national defense secrets is that their use by administrative authorities is almost totally unregulated, both internally and externally.

Instruction 1300 does indeed mention the possibility of controls on several occasions, but it is clear from reading it that this is primarily a theoretical invocation of the role of each minister and the SGDSN in this area<sup>7</sup>. For the rest, there is only provision for "inspections, controls or audits" carried out periodically "by the competent senior defense and security official", i.e., in reality by the administrative authority which is also responsible for protecting secrecy<sup>8</sup>. We are therefore dealing with endogenous mechanisms, far removed from genuine internal controls and audits, which - to be effective and detect any malfunctions - should be carried out by inspection bodies independent of the administrative authorities being audited.

But the gap is all the greater in that there is virtually no jurisdictional control. This is something I have been concerned about since my first work on the subject<sup>9</sup>, denouncing "the relative powerlessness of the criminal judge", but also the "too limited control by the administrative judge"<sup>10</sup>. In reality, although the criminal court remains - in principle - the sole judge of the consistency of the defense secret whose compromise it must judge, it cannot effectively exercise this essential prerogative, since the State systematically denies it direct access to the secret in question. Except in cases where the so-called secret has been made public, thus enabling the criminal court to know the elements constituting the offence, the judge pronounces his verdict without having been able to verify whether the document in question had indeed been classified, and whether the measure of secrecy was in fact justified<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* p. 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> See IGI 1300, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> Bertrand Warusfel, *Le secret de la défense nationale - Protection des intérêts de la nation et libertés publiques dans une société d'information*, Université Paris V-René Descartes, 1994; then: Bertrand Warusfel, *Contre-espionnage et protection du secret - Histoire, droit et organisation de la sécurité nationale en France*, Lavauzelle, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. B. Warusfel, 2000, pp. 361-380.

<sup>11</sup> This practice is contrary to what the legislator had intended to put in place when adopting the new penal code and its article 413-9 Cpen (see statement by Mr. Sapin, Minister Delegate for Justice, Assemblée nationale, 2nd session of October 7, 1991).

However, the same applies to the administrative courts, which are competent to rule on the legality of an administrative act, such as the classification of a document, or the authorization and decision to grant or deny a person access to defense secrets. Applying a long-standing case law dating back to 1955<sup>12</sup>, the administrative courts refuse to rule on classified information, and even to impose a duty to give reasons on the administration in such matters<sup>13</sup>.

Whatever the arguments periodically put forward by the State to justify and perpetuate such a "blind spot" in our rule of law<sup>14</sup>, everyone understands that accepting the State's discretionary exercise of a prerogative exorbitant from common law, without controls, amounts to eliminating any form of proportionality, and therefore any possibility of reconciling national security and fundamental freedoms.

Aware of this discrepancy in principle, the legislator has introduced two partial mitigations to this situation. The first was the creation in 1998 of an independent administrative authority, the current *Commission du secret de la défense nationale* (CSDN-National Defense Confidentiality Commission), which has access to classified information or documents potentially useful to a court and issues an opinion on whether or not to maintain its classification<sup>15</sup>.

More recently, the law of July 24, 2015, on intelligence created a specialized panel of the Conseil d'État (State Council) which, in the specific fields of classified files and the implementation of intelligence techniques, became the first French jurisdiction to be able to have free access to classified documents<sup>16</sup>. But these two innovations are presented only as exceptions, IGI 1300 recalling that "the constitutional principle of the separation of powers prohibits judicial and administrative magistrates and members of the Conseil d'État acting within the scope of their jurisdictional prerogatives from accessing information and media covered by the secrecy of national defense"<sup>17</sup>.

The risk of over-classification is a second flaw in the current system of secrecy protection. This is a perverse effect of the lack of effective control over classification decisions.

We don't need to go into great detail to understand that the administrative authority, knowing that it is safe from any form of control and therefore from any sanction, will naturally tend to abuse classification. A number of mechanisms combine to achieve this: the fear of being accused of a lack of security, the use of secrecy as a means of escaping control and evaluation of one's actions, or simply routine, which encourages the application of a uniform procedure rather than discriminating on a case-by-case basis between appropriate rules for dissemination and protection.

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<sup>12</sup> CE, Ass. of March 11, 1955, *Secretary of State for War v. Coulon*, no. 34036, p. 149.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. in particular, CE, 13 juin 1997, *Ministère de la Défense c/ M. Pourbagher*, note Warusfel, *Droit & Défense*, 98/2 p.56.

<sup>14</sup> In the words of the Conseil d'État rapporteur in *Études et documents du Conseil d'État - Rapport public 1996*, La documentation française, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> See articles L2312-1 et seq. of the French Defense Code.

<sup>16</sup> Article L. 311-4-1 of the French Code of Administrative Justice.

<sup>17</sup> IGI 1300, op. cit., p. 20.

This phenomenon of over-classification, well known and documented in the United States in particular, is recognized in France not only by the few works on the subject<sup>18</sup> but also by the inter-ministerial texts themselves. Thus, the new IGI warns that "abused, classification harms, through the protective measures it imposes, the requirement for reactivity and agility of public action. It results in a devaluation of national defense secrecy and a progressive erosion of respect for the associated rules"<sup>19</sup>.

But more generally, the practice of national defense secrecy is, by its very nature, a strong obstacle to the exercise of certain fundamental freedoms. The recent controversy surrounding the conditions of access to classified public archives is a case in point, which particularly concerns the intelligence services.

Under the provisions of the French Defense Code, national defense secrecy is a permanent legal mechanism for national security, i.e., a constraint which, at all times (even outside times of crisis), imposes restrictions on the exercise by citizens of some of the public freedoms they enjoy in a democracy, for reasons relating to national security<sup>20</sup>.

When it comes to the prohibition on communicating and disseminating information, the first thing that naturally comes to mind is the severe restriction on the freedom of expression of the holder of a defense secret, even though such freedom is protected by the Constitution and by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. A particular aspect of this restriction on freedom of expression also concerns the exercise of freedom of the press<sup>21</sup>. But other fundamental rights may also be affected, such as the right to a fair trial (when secrecy prevents a judge from effectively resolving a dispute), or the protective provisions of employment law (when, for example, an employee or public official may suffer as a result of a decision to refuse authorization).

But freedom of access to public archives (which now has constitutional status<sup>22</sup>) is also likely to be severely restricted by the protection of defense secrecy, should a still-classified administrative document be transferred to an archive (as is frequently the case with transfers from government ministries or intelligence services).

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. our comments on this subject in B. Warusfel, 2000, pp. 321-333.

<sup>19</sup> IGI, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>20</sup> As defined by article L. 1111-1 Cdéf., 1<sup>er</sup> paragraph.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. in particular Laurence Gay, "La liberté d'information à l'épreuve du secret défense", *Légipresse*, July 1<sup>er</sup> 2019, No. 372.

<sup>22</sup> Since the Constitutional Council decision: Cons. Const. decision no. 2017-655 QPC of September 15, 2017.

This is why the two major successive laws organizing public archives in France<sup>23</sup> have set special deadlines postponing the date on which researchers and the general public can access classified documents or documents involving the security of the State: this deadline, which was sixty years in 1979, has been reduced to fifty years for the majority of classified documents since 2008<sup>24</sup>.

It could therefore be considered that the legislator (who alone is empowered by the Constitution to regulate public freedoms) had established a balance between the constitutional freedom of access to archives and the constitutional objective of protecting the fundamental interests of the Nation (to which defense secrecy contributes)<sup>25</sup>. But in November 2020, the SGDSN attempted to explicitly impose the need to obtain manual administrative declassification of every archive document exceeding the communicability deadlines set out in the French Heritage Code. The result was a major mobilization of historians, archivists, and legal experts, which forced the government to change its plans and hastily initiate a legislative reform, adopted at the end of July.

*The 2021 reform and its foreseeable impact on intelligence archives*

Article 25 of the Act of July 30, 2021, on the prevention of terrorist acts and intelligence has therefore modified the balance established by the French Heritage Code with regard to the communicability of public archives and its relationship with the rules governing the protection of defense secrets.

But if this reform, decided in a hurry in the face of an outcry from the circles concerned, has brought an essential confirmation to the declassification of archives, it has unfortunately accompanied it with a certain number of new restrictions which again risk making the articulation between public archive law and the imperatives of national security conflictual.

The main progress brought about by the 2021 reform is enshrined in the new wording of article 213-2 of the French Heritage Code, which now stipulates that "any classification measure mentioned in article 413-9 of the French Criminal Code automatically ends on the date on which the document to which it relates becomes communicable as of right in application of this chapter"<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Law no. 79-18 of January 3, 1979, succeeded by Law no. 2008-696 of July 15, 2008, now codified in the French Heritage Code.

<sup>24</sup> There is, however, a time limit of one hundred years for classified documents (or those that have already been classified) whose disclosure could "jeopardize the security of named or easily identifiable persons".

<sup>25</sup> This is a deliberate use of the wording used by the French Constitutional Council in its decision no. 2011-192 QPC of November 10, 2011, in which it censured certain provisions relating to national defense secrecy, deeming them to be "unbalanced".

<sup>26</sup> Section III of article L. 213-2 CPatrim.

This statement puts an end to the attempt by SGDSN to circumvent legal deadlines, by including in the November 2020 version of IGI 1300 the obligation to declassify documents that have reached the communicability deadline, which meant that the administration could postpone for a long time - or even forever - the communication of a document to which access was nevertheless authorized by law. As we had announced, this regulatory restriction was tainted by "a redhibitory legal flaw, since the Prime Minister cannot violate the hierarchy of legal norms by giving precedence to an instruction over a law that has already organized the reconciliation between the right to archives and the protection of defense secrecy, both of which are legitimate and necessary"<sup>27</sup>. This was indeed the conclusion reached by the Conseil d'État, which annulled these provisions, ruling that archives reaching the legal deadlines "are communicable as of right ... even though they have not been declassified" and that, consequently, the regulatory provision "subordinating the communication of classified archives to their prior declassification, after the expiry of these deadlines" was illegal<sup>28</sup>.

But the scope of this provision is much broader. It also confirms that - as is necessary in a state governed by the rule of law - the prerogative of national security (in this case, secrecy) must remain the exception to the exercise of public freedoms (in this case, access to archives), and that this exception must be strictly proportionate to the security reason that justifies it. In this respect, the principles asserted in 2015 with regard to intelligence, according to which the public authorities may only interfere with a fundamental freedom "in cases of necessity in the public interest provided for by law, within the limits set by the law and in compliance with the principle of proportionality"<sup>29</sup>, can be applied. It is therefore logical that the time limit set by the law for freedom of access to archives should prevail, whatever happens, over any administrative practice, whereas the administration wanted the applicability of archive law to depend on the material decision to declassify.

But the practical scope of this consecration could be greatly reduced by an extensive application of new exceptions introduced at the same time in the same article L.213-2 of the Heritage Code.

As drafted in the 2008 law on public archives, there were already a small number of exceptions allowing the administration to refuse access to certain classified archives beyond the fifty-year time limit, either by applying a longer time limit (the aforementioned one of one hundred years), or by shifting the starting point of the fifty-year time limit, specifically in the case of documents relating to "places of detention", for which the period of incommunicability did not begin until the end of their assignment.

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<sup>27</sup> Olivier Forcade, Sébastien-Yves Laurent & Bertrand Warusfel, "Archives 'secret-défense' : un règlement absurde entrave la recherche sur le passé", *Le Monde*, January 27, 2021, p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> CE, July 2, 2021, Association des archivistes français et autres, n° 444865,448763.

<sup>29</sup> Article L.801-1 of the French Internal Security Code.

The reform has taken these loopholes and widened them considerably, since the legal time limit of fifty years is now extended not only to documents concerning prisons, but also to various other sensitive archives concerning:

- military and civil nuclear facilities, and those concerning "dams", as well as diplomatic and consular missions,
- the "technical design" and "operating procedures" of war material used by the armed forces,
- the organization, implementation, and protection of nuclear deterrence resources,
- the operational procedures and technical capabilities of the main intelligence services (those in the first circle as well as some of those designated in article L.811-4 CSI).

However, most of these grounds for derogation and their application will be left to the discretion of government departments. Take, for example, the case of requests for access to archives concerning nuclear testing in the Sahara or Polynesia by people who may have been contaminated by these tests. Could some of these requests be rejected in the future, as is still the case today? Is it a question of the "organization" or "implementation" of nuclear deterrence? Added to this difficulty in interpreting the grounds for refusal is the fact that setting the starting point for these rolling deadlines often depends on the "loss of operational value" of the archive content concerned, which is not easy to determine, and once again gives the departments concerned a considerable degree of discretion.

Finally, as the senators had pointed out in their referral to the Constitutional Council, the reform did not "make this extension conditional on the existence of a threat or danger arising from the disclosure of the documents", which would have been in line with the principle of proportionality already mentioned. But the Constitutional Council did not sanction this legal shortcoming.

Major producers of classified documents, as we have already seen, the intelligence services (and more particularly those of the "first circle" of the intelligence community) obtained the adoption of two provisions protecting both their sources and their methods.

As far as sources are concerned, the special 100-year time limit now applies to documents involving the security of identified or identifiable persons "involved in intelligence activities" (i.e., mainly the services' human sources). While protecting the security of people who have collaborated in French intelligence is legitimate in principle, the services concerned must not interpret this exception too broadly to postpone the opening of certain funds concerning them for a further fifty years. In particular, they will have to rigorously apply the criterion laid down by the law, which is not simply that a document makes it possible to identify a person, but more specifically that it is likely to affect that person's security.

If, for example, a document reveals that a certain leftist activist had been secretly used as an informer by the RG or DST just after May 1968, this should not be enough to cause fear for his or her safety more than fifty years later. Conversely, the identification of a former source still living today in a non-democratic foreign country will justify maintaining incommunicability.

Careful application will also be required, given that the new wording of article L. 213-2 CPatrim, 5<sup>th</sup>, means that the one hundred-year time limit can apply not only to classified documents (or documents which have been classified), but also to documents which have never been classified. If care were not taken, this facility would enable a public document never covered by any secrecy to be invoked fifty years after its production to justify a form of retroactive secrecy. Here again, only a specific security argument could justify, without risk of abuse, such incommunicability.

With regard to the means and methods used by intelligence services, the new exception already mentioned, protecting documents that "reveal the operational procedures or technical capabilities of certain intelligence services", will also have to be applied with a certain moderation to avoid hindering any serious research into intelligence and its history.

While it may be thought that - barring a few exceptions - the speed of technological obsolescence should make the retention of documents evoking technical capabilities more than fifty years old hardly credible, the matter will be more delicate when it comes to "operational procedures". First of all, it would be advisable for the services and bodies of the intelligence community (perhaps including national coordination or the Intelligence Academy) to agree on an interpretation of this notion which does not have the effect of overflowing from the method to the results of its implementation. Indeed, such a motive should not be allowed to block communication of the working files themselves, on the grounds that their processing and content could indirectly reveal working methods.

Lastly, it should be noted that Parliament has agreed not to apply the exception to all the services in the second circle (referred to in article L. 811-4 CSI), but only to those "whose main mission is to provide intelligence", a restrictive list of which will be drawn up by regulation. Once again, we will need to be vigilant to ensure that the services selected meet this criterion.

But beyond these provisions specific to intelligence archives, it should not be forgotten that the new inter-ministerial instruction 1300 has also timidly launched an effort to better control classification times. At this stage, these provisions are inadequate, but could be strengthened, thereby reducing the volumes of classified archives, and thus the tensions between public archives and secrecy.



In our view, this is the way out of the crisis that has pitted the academic and archival communities head-on against the regal heart of the State.

*For reasoned, controlled control of classification*

Several provisions of the new inter-ministerial instruction 1300 are to be welcomed in principle:

- That of requiring the author of classified information to seek the "useful duration of classification" in order to "guarantee the derogatory nature of recourse to national defense secrecy and limit the cumbersome nature of managing classified information"<sup>30</sup>,
- the recommendation to mention in advance on each support "the classification deadline"<sup>31</sup>, so that automatic declassification can be triggered on the scheduled date<sup>32</sup>,
- the organization of annual inventories to re-examine the relevance of the classification at every stage in the life of a classified document<sup>33</sup>,
- and finally, to provide for a systematic examination of the classification at the time of deposit in the archives<sup>34</sup>.

However, they are subject to derogations, and none of them are intended to be strictly controlled or sanctioned by issuing authorities in the event of non-compliance.

This is why, with my colleagues Olivier Forcade and Sébastien- Yves Laurent, we proposed, even before the July 31, 2021 law was passed, that these prescriptions should become imperative, and that in the event of non-compliance "declassification would be automatic after a security period (of a few years, no doubt) enabling the issuing department to correct the shortcoming"<sup>35</sup>. Administrative sanctions should also be applied, "up to and including withdrawal of clearance, i.e., the ability to classify or consult classified documents"<sup>36</sup>. All of this would be guaranteed by an external audit (in the same spirit as the control practiced in the United States by the *Information Security Oversight Office* - ISOO - attached to the federal archives), and this mission could be entrusted to the CSDN, which would submit a classified report on this subject to the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister every year, as well as a public report to Parliament.

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<sup>30</sup> IGI 1300, p. 126.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16 and p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> IGI 1300, p. 123.

<sup>35</sup> Olivier Forcade, Sébastien-Yves Laurent, Bertrand Warusfel, "Archives et politiques du secret: Ramener l'État à la raison démocratique", *Esprit*, 2021/6, June 2021.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

The crisis surrounding classified archives has had a revealing effect, bringing to light the contradictions and pathologies of an endogenous classification system whose excesses cost the community unnecessarily and unjustifiably restrict citizens' access to information in major fields<sup>37</sup> while preventing the development of genuine social science research into national security issues, and intelligence in particular.

To ensure that the reform adopted as a matter of urgency in the wake of this mobilization does not remain unbalanced or give rise to more disputes than it has avoided, it is at the heart of the regalian system that we need to introduce, in complete security, the legal and democratic mechanisms that will guarantee citizens that our collective security is not paid for at the price of a permanent regression in our fundamental rights.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. in particular Bertrand Warusfel, "Enjeux et limites de l'ouverture des données en matière de sécurité et de défense", *Revue française d'administration publique*, 2018/3, n° 167.

## Reports

**Guillaume Pollack, *L'armée du silence. Histoire des réseaux de Résistance en France, 1940-1945*, Paris, Tallandier/Ministère des Armées, 2022, 537 p.**

This book, edited and published in 2022, is a lighter version of the thesis directed by Alya Aglan, which the author defended on September 10, 2020, at the Université Paris Panthéon-Sorbonne. It is an essay on the overall history of the 268 networks approved by *France combattante* (fighting France), known from time to time through monographs, but more often than not overshadowed by the major Resistance movements (Combat, Front National, OCM or Libération-Nord). The book is based on an in-depth study of the network archives at the SHD in Vincennes (series 16 P: individual files, 17 P: FFC networks, 28 P 3 and 4: archives of the France Combattante), at the Archives nationales (3AG: BCRA, 72 AJ: Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale) or at the British National Archives in Kew (HS6: SOE).

In his foreword and introduction, the author returns to the difficulty of defining the term network. The word enjoys an aura of mystery, evoking military action, espionage and secrecy, dimensions immortalized by Jean-Pierre Melville's masterpiece *L'Armée des Ombres*. He recalls the definition proposed in 1975 by Claude Bourdet, a member of the Combat resistance movement:

"An organization created for a specific military purpose, essentially the

information, incidentally the sabotage, and frequently the escape of prisoners of war and pilots who have fallen to the enemy. This proposal set the

segmentation of the Resistance into networks, focused on military action, and movements dealing with the political dimension, in particular through propaganda.

Criticizing Bourdet's overly narrow vision, which fails to take account of chronological developments - a network in 1940 is not the same as one in 1943 - and his underestimation of the role of the Free French and Allied services, Guillaume Pollack rightly insists on starting with the agents, most of whom were inexperienced in 1940: it is they who create the network, through the empiricism of encounters or the reactivation of solidarities, and not the other way round. Emphasizing the transnational nature of the networks' action, due to the many foreign networks active in the country and contacts with Allied services, he favors the expression "Resistance in France" rather than "French Resistance". To characterize its cross-border and transnational nature, the historian develops the concept of *Résistance-Monde*, linked to that of *Guerre-Monde* by historian Robert Frank<sup>616</sup>. This resistance in France was a striking sign of the "defeat of the frontiers" set up by the Nazis, which preceded their final downfall.

Empirical formations, evolving according to the chronology and geographical context of their action, networks can be divided into three types: evasion, intelligence, and action. In his study, the author focuses solely on BCRA and allied service networks (IS, SOE, etc.),

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<sup>616</sup> Alya Aglan, Robert Frank, *The World War 1937-1947*, Paris, Gallimard, 2015.

OSS, Belgian, Polish or Czech networks), but makes no mention of the networks operated from 1940 by the armistice army's intelligence services, a choice that is not really justified. The author then outlines the role of networks within the Resistance (chapter I). He recalls their creation in the aftermath of the 1940 defeat, notably by MI6 and MI9, then by BCRA, and returns to the role of the OSS from 1942 onwards. Governments in exile were not left out, such as the Belgians (Fernand Lepage's *Sûreté de l'Etat*) and the Poles (F2). But an exhaustive count of the number of network agents was difficult, as the services in charge were unable to provide precise records. Approval procedures post-war were long and complex, with BCRA seeking to carve out the lion's share. 89,918 agents were FFC-approved, all secret services combined, of which 48.3% were BCRA. It would have been interesting to analyze these figures, to take a more quantitative and serial approach, by means of surveys, to check whether the networks' numbers were inflated after the war.

Guillaume Pollack then discusses the different forms of networks: evasion (Chapter II), intelligence (Chapter III) and BCRA and SOE action (Chapter IV). Chapter III is of particular interest to us in terms of intelligence history. Covering Czech networks (Ryback), Polish networks (F2), MI6 networks (Cartwright, Jade-Fitzroy, Famille-Martin, Georges-France and Alliance), BCRA networks (Saint-Jacques, Nemrod, Confrérie-Notre-Dame) and those operating in the French Empire (eight networks in Indochina), the author details the multiple ramifications around a central point, presents the intelligence cycle (orientation, collection, transmission, exploitation) in the particular circumstances of occupied France. He explains how to contact the relevant intelligence service. The agents, who were often settled, married or useful because of their professional or geographical situation, first fulfilled a defensive mission: preparing for a German landing, positioning troops, locating secret weapon sites, assessing port activity, etc., and so on.

From 1942 onwards, the focus became more offensive, with the emphasis on

knowledge of the enemy's defensive system, to organize bombing operations, for example. Agents acted above all by direct observation. The intelligence gathered was transmitted by radio but given the effectiveness of German goniometry (the Alliance leaders were arrested in November 1942), transmission by air or via the Pyrenees and Switzerland was preferred. Whatever the type of network, the author insists on the creativity of its members, with the leader directing a centrifugal organization rather than a pyramidal structure. These structures are constantly adapting to the needs of referral services or to the threat of repression. Throughout these pages, the author describes the difficulties of the first networks, the imperative need to find contacts to develop activities, the isolation that resistance fighters can experience, and the question of money. Despite these difficulties, intelligence networks expanded from 1942 onwards. MI6 expanded its network, while BCRA reorganized with new networks (Phalanx, Cohors-Asturies entrusted to Jean Cavailles, Eleuthère, Centurie, Phratric). The OSS ran its own structures, and Belgian networks (Zéro-France) were active in France. By 1944, France and Belgium no longer held any secrets for the Allied services. The story of these networks also reveals the violence of German repression, which dismantled many of these organizations. By the end of the war, out of 89918 approved agents, 12704 had been arrested, 5679 of whom died in deportation, under torture or shot, a hecatomb that began as early as 1940.

Giving in to the times, he devotes a fifth chapter to gender and the Resistance, focusing on the gendered division of labor in the networks. While he acknowledges that there were no "specific ways in which men or women were involved", he compares their clandestine histories and concludes that their involvement was in no way different from that of men, whether in terms of the modalities of action or the violence suffered. Guillaume Pollack devotes a lengthy essay to the case of torture presented as sexual violence.

While sparing the reader no detail, the author poses a central question without moral judgment: that of confessions, which very few resistance fighters admit to having made. In his epilogue, the historian discusses the paucity of published testimonies from network agents, with the exception of the collection of testimonies by the *Comité d'histoire de l'occupation et de la libération de la France* (History committee of the occupation and liberation of France) (CHOLF) and the *Comité d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale* (Committee of the history of the Second World War) (CHDGM). It also evokes post-war tensions between former comrades, accusations of betrayal or incompetence, trials and honor juries. Most of them return to normal life after several years of double life. They meet up again and share an "old-timers" sociability within associations and friends. But national memory is selective. If the British women of the SOE are the object of much attention more sustained particularly in the UK, while a few figures emerge such as Honoré d'Estienne-d'Orves, the sacrifice of SOE agents was little honored by the French authorities, who ignored the ceremony at the Valençay monument listing the 104 names of SOE agents who died during the war. The book shows in great detail the great diversity of resistance networks, their multiple and often intertwined activities (intelligence, smuggling, sabotage, radio liaison, exfiltration by plane), the difficulty for those involved to reconcile their double life and the need to adopt strategies of concealment (pseudonym, false papers, codes...)

Their birth is a matter of epidermal reaction to defeat, the will to fight and the search for contacts to organize and develop action. During the initial period, 1940-1941, networks quickly fell into disrepair due to a lack of experience. 1942-1944 saw the development of both network action and repression by the occupying forces, who understood the danger. It is regrettable, however, that this study of networks, the only one since the end of the war, does not deal with those set up in 1940 by the armistice army's intelligence services, although the author does occasionally refer to the porosity that existed between the organizations they dealt with and those set up by the occupying forces.

the services of Colonel Rivet, as shown by the story of Gilbert Renaut alias "Rémy", Pierre Fourcaud, and the beginnings of the Alliance and Marie-Odile networks. Unfortunately, we can only regret that German archives have once again not been exploited, in particular the holdings of the German courts, the Sipo-SD or the *Abwehr* kept at the SHD in Vincennes or Caen. These funds, coming from the enemy fought by the networks, would undoubtedly have shed light on the life of these organizations, their complexity, the Germans' perception of them and the strategies they implemented to wipe out the "Army of Silence".

Cédric Neveu

**Francesco Massimiliano Minniti, *Intelligence e sistema penitenziario. Indagini in una terra di confine*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2012, 236 p.**

Italian intelligence studies, little known and little used in France, have been developing since the 2000s<sup>617</sup>, with the historical field generating the most publications<sup>618</sup>. One specific Italian feature is the relative importance of work on security and justice, with Mario Caligiuri being one of the main academic references in these fields<sup>619</sup>. In 2012, one of his students at the University of Calabria, Penitentiary Police Commissioner Francesco Massimiliano Minniti, published one of the very few books mainly dedicated to prison intelligence.

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<sup>617</sup> Mario Caligiuri, G. Pili, *Intelligence studies. Una analisi comparata tra l'Italia e il mondo anglo-americano*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2020.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*, "Italian intelligence studies literature. Understanding the state of play: a comparative perspective", *The international journal of intelligence, security and public affairs*, 23/3, 2021, pp. 281-309.

<sup>619</sup> Cf Mario Caligiuri (dir), *Intelligence e 'Ndrangheta*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2009; *Ibid.*, *Intelligence e magistrature. Dalla diffidenza reciproca alla collaborazione necessaria*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2017.

While there have certainly been changes in the penitentiary system since then, the generalist and historical nature of this book still makes it relevant to recall and discuss today.

Seven chapters alternate between general summaries and developments on specific services. The author begins by placing the observation of inmates within the field of *criminology* (chapter 1), defined as a multidisciplinary science that can be mobilized to benefit from a broader knowledge of incarcerated profiles. This criminological anchoring is reaffirmed in chapter 6, with the presentation of the Italian DNA database, for which the Central Penitentiary Laboratory is the project manager. Francesco Minniti describes of multi-disciplinary observation in detention in chapter 2, before developing the *specific role of the prison police (PP)* among closed environment professionals in the following chapter. Under the impetus of the head of detention, this expertise helps to prevent criminal connections, serious incidents in prison, or even the preparation of attacks outside, and to generate targeted investigations, as the prison police have judicial police powers<sup>620</sup>.

Chapter 4 focuses on the *legal and organizational genesis of a specialized penitentiary system*. The author looks back at three key reforms in the handling of Mafia-type organized crime: the creation in 2007 of a centralized investigation office, *Nucleo Investigativo Centrale* (Central Investigation Unit) (NIC), within the Italian Department of Penitentiary Administration (DAP); the application of a legislative mechanism that derogates from ordinary law in detention (article 41-Bis of the Penitentiary and Prison Law); and the creation of the *Nucleo Investigativo Centrale (NIC)*.

in particular paragraph 2 introduced in 2009<sup>621</sup>); the use of a team

<sup>620</sup> For a more general discussion of the penitentiary police, in French, see Raffaella Sette, "La police pénitentiaire. L'exemple de l'Italie", Paul Mbanzoulou and François Dieu (dir), *Administration pénitentiaire et Justice. Un siècle de rattachement*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2011, p. 211-222.

<sup>621</sup> For a detailed account of the genesis and

*The Gruppo Operativo Mobile* (The Operative Mobile Group) (GOM), a specialized prison unit set up in 1997, is now mainly dedicated to the surveillance of these 41-bis prisoners.

Chapters 5 and 7 deal directly with the *targets and methods of prison intelligence*. Chapter 5, the most interesting, details the targets of the prison intelligence network. The author clearly illustrates how periods of incarceration are strategic for the major Italian mafias, both for the prestige of incarcerated leaders - whose approval will always be sought from the outside - and for controlling the loyalty of the organization's other inmates. The penitentiary issue is described as strategic, as mafia organizations are so difficult to infiltrate. Other examples of the importance of the fight against the Red Brigades (BR) is another example of the importance of prison intelligence. Several mentors and members of the incarcerated BR were treated as identified sources, which led to the release of the American general Dozier in 2012, who had been kidnapped by the BR. Islamist terrorism is briefly mentioned, the fight against al-Qaeda after September 11, 2001, having led to the creation of the *Comitato di Analisi Strategica Antiterrorismo* (Counter-Terrorism Strategic Analysis Committee) (CASA), an interdepartmental committee in which the Italian DAP participates.

The book benefits from the author's in-depth, first-hand knowledge of the prison environment, and bears witness to the important role played by practitioners in intelligence studies<sup>622</sup>. The specificities of detention, the work of prison guards and intelligence targets are clearly highlighted. The essential added value of the book lies in the numerous examples highlighting the dangerousness of mafia leaders or incarcerated terrorists and the success of investigations to which the PP has contributed

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On the application of 41-bis, see Sebastiano Ardita, *Ricatto allo Stato. Il 41-bis e le stragi mafiose. La trattativa tra Cosa Nostra e le istituzioni*, Milan, Sperling & Kupfer, 2011.

<sup>622</sup> *Gnosis*, the Italian intelligence magazine founded in 2004 by senior civil servant Carlo Mosca, is still under the responsibility of the Director of the Italian Internal Intelligence Agency (AISI).

Among other tragic cases, the author recalls that of the Cosenza prison in the 1980s, where the prison and detention chiefs sought to regain control at the expense of a 'Ndrangheta leader who was incarcerated there. The latter successively ordered the murder of the two prison managers in 1985 and 1986. With regard to the contribution of prison intelligence to sensitive investigations, one of several significant successes involved an incarcerated 'Boss' of the 'Ndrangheta, whose behavior in detention had attracted the attention of prison officers. After lengthy decoding of gestural and verbal codes, and telephone tapping, the investigation revealed his intention to have a member of his organization who had collaborated with the Italian justice system assassinated on the outside.

Communications can take unexpected forms, such as a song heard or not heard on a local radio station controlled by the organization.

The pedagogical approach of demonstrating PP's proactive intelligence action for the enlightened general public, is accompanied by a desire to be useful for practitioners, with several passages resembling developments from professional manuals. What's more, F. Minniti succeeds in highlighting some of the key figures of prison intelligence, such as Angelo Incandela, head of detention at Cuneo prison in the early 1980s, before joining the Italian Intelligence Service. In particular, he draws on his memoirs to revisit several investigations linked to BR<sup>623</sup>.

Contrary to its title, however, the book often remains too general, with lengthy developments on the history of the mafia or the intelligence cycle. Highly descriptive, it repeatedly quotes long extracts from organization charts or articles of law, which

should have been included as appendices-absent. Certain developments contribute to the blurring of the concepts of observation and intelligence, which do not cover the same issues and methods. Open sources and human intelligence are all too briefly mentioned as particularly useful intelligence methods in prisons.

Francesco Minniti relies on a very limited number of scientific references, as evidenced by the few footnotes and a very restricted bibliography. While his work does not aim to be exhaustive, it lacks a long-term historical and cultural anchoring, and does not present the tensions inherent in the valorization of prison intelligence, particularly in terms of different/divergent professional cultures. A bias towards professional valorization sometimes seems to be at work, with the author only skimming the surface of the issue of corruption among prison staff, for example. The emotional register also seems to be used excessively at times, with heartfelt thanks to prison staff, or the description of Judges Falcone and Borsellino as "heroes". Consideration of Francesco Minniti's work demonstrates the value of diversifying the sources of *Intelligence studies*, by not relying exclusively on English-language works. In France, the field of penitentiary studies is dominated by critical authors. With regard to the Italian penitentiary situation, Article 41bis has been decried as a symptom of an "emergency paradigm" demonstrating that "there is no such thing as a good prison"<sup>624</sup>. Prison intelligence is a subject that has yet to be fully explored and has not yet been highlighted by a prison administration practitioner. Symptomatically, the book by one of its former managers makes virtually no mention of it<sup>625</sup>.

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<sup>623</sup> Pino Nicotri, *Agli ordini del generale Dalla Chiesa. Il pentimento di Peci, il caso Moro e altri misteri degli anni '80 nel racconto dell'agente segreto maresciallo Incandela*, Venice, Marsilio, 1994, p.159.

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<sup>624</sup> Jacques Mucchielli, "Article 41-bis et prisons italiennes", Philippe Artieres, Pierre Lascoumes (dir), *Gouverner, enfermer. La prison, un modèle indépassable*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2004.

On the other hand, in recent years, it has come in for excessive criticism, both on its very principle<sup>626</sup> and on its concrete results in very specific areas<sup>627</sup>. There is undoubtedly room for academic research that avoids both positive institutional bias and presuppositions denouncing the paranoid policing of prison administration.

**Aurélien Hassin**

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<sup>625</sup> Cf. Olivier Maurel, *Le taulier. Confessions d'un directeur de prison*, Paris, Fayard, 2010.

<sup>626</sup> Cf. Jean-Marie Delarue, "Le renseignement pénitentiaire", *Après-demain*, 45/1, 2018, pp. 7-9.

<sup>627</sup> David Scheer, Gilles Chantraine, "Intelligence and Radicalization in French Prisons: Sociological Analysis Bottom-Up", *Security Dialogue*, 53/2, 2021, p 112-129.



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