

## UNEXPECTED DEFEAT, SUDDEN COLLAPSE

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**BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

Marcus A. Templar joined the United States Army in 1982 as a Cryptologic Linguist. He studied Czech, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, and Turkish at the Defense Language Institute, French at Dawson College in Montreal, and Russian at Berlitz. In addition, he speaks Bulgarian and Greek. As an intelligence officer he was appointed to various assignments in Balkan and Middle Eastern affairs. Now retired from the U.S. Army, Mr. Templar presently works as an advisor to the U.S. government on global intelligence issues. He holds a Bachelor's degree from Western Illinois University in history and foreign languages, a Master's degree from Northeastern Illinois University in Human Resource Development specializing in instructional design, and a second Master's degree in Strategic Intelligence from the National Defense Intelligence College. He is a recognized Balkan expert.

France partly met the intelligence requirements of the national military strategy it adopted during the period 1935-1940, which were to gather information on German military Order of Battle. The implementation of the requirements was confusing and occasionally resulted in intelligence services working against each other. Although French intelligence was very successful at meeting collection requirements, it was unsuccessful in exploiting raw data and in addition, the French intelligence failed to prognosticate the German attack on France through the Ardennes.

In the years between the two World Wars, the relationship of the *Service des Renseignements Français*,<sup>1</sup> or the French Information Service, and the *Deuxième Bureau de l'État-major général*,<sup>2</sup> or the Second Bureau, was in a state of a constant friction. In principal, the civilian *Service des Renseignements Français* fell under the Military *Deuxième Bureau*. In practice, however, it largely functioned autonomously. The agents of the Intelligence Service were left largely free to do what they wanted, but simultaneously this set up greatly limited the impact of their reports. The situation was too cumbersome, and often confusing. The structure of the French

intelligence community remained the same until France's defeat by the German war machine.

In his article on "The Birth on Economic Intelligence of France," Lieutenant-Colonel (Armor) Frédéric Guéltou of the French Army explains this awkward arrangement and he presents the organization of the Second Bureau as having the French Intelligence Service of one of its sections (see Appendix).<sup>3</sup> Poor organization within the French Intelligence resulted from the Dreyfus Affair in which the French Intelligence Service had allegedly participated.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French Artillery officer of Jewish descent was convicted to life imprisonment in the penal colony at Devil's Island for allegedly passing French secrets to the German Embassy in Paris. Although the real perpetrator was found, Dreyfus instead of being exonerated was further accused based on false documents prepared by the French counter-intelligence in order re-confirm his conviction. At the end and after strong intervention and public outcry the Court re-opened the case. During his new trial,

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<sup>1</sup> The French Information Service. "Des renseignements" renders "intelligence" and "information" and "des informations" renders "the news."

<sup>2</sup> Second Bureau of the General Staff

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<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel (T.A.) Frédéric Guéltou, Armée française, "La naissance du renseignement économique en France pendant la Première Guerre mondiale" (The Birth of the Economic Intelligence of France during the First World War), *Revue historique des armées*, 225, 2001. URL: <[http://www.servicehistorique.sga.defense.gouv.fr/04histoire/articles/articles\\_rha/re\\_nseign.htm](http://www.servicehistorique.sga.defense.gouv.fr/04histoire/articles/articles_rha/re_nseign.htm)> accessed 17 August 2007. Translation is mine.

Dreyfus found not guilty and he was reinstated to the rank of Major retiring after the WWI as Lieutenant Colonel.

The birth of economic intelligence of France during WWI compelled the government to re-organize the Second Bureau. As of 17 February 1917, the Commanding Officers of the Fourth Section or Section of Intelligence, the Fifth Section or Section of Centralization of Intelligence, and the Sixth Section or Inter-allied Section all reported directly to the Chief of the Second Bureau. “Its counterespionage functions were assigned to the Sureté Générale of the Interior Ministry, while its foreign intelligence role was reduced.”<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Interior outsourced its espionage to various civilians from all occupations and lifestyles who were willing to volunteer information for money or favors.

Bleak relations in the Office of the Chief of Staff, marked with blame and shame since the scandal of the Dreyfus Affair to the day just before the war, have rediscovered certain effectiveness trying to be successful – to no avail – as if they were a surreptitious avenger.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey T., Richelson, “A Century of Spies, 1996,” *Washington Post*, online ed., 1996, URL: <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/a\\_centur.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/a_centur.htm)> accessed 17 August 2007

<sup>5</sup> Guélon, *The Birth of Economic Intelligence*

The Deuxième Bureau had bestowed on military officers the responsibility of gathering information on the German civilian sector. The exchange of information between the Quai D’Orsay<sup>6</sup> and the Second Bureau was cumbersome and counterproductive. The Quai D’Orsay had no regard for military intelligence. Often military personnel were tasked to obtain information from civilians, politicians, diplomats, etc., in an environment aberrant to the military. Counter-espionage functions such as wiretapping, extortions, mail tampering, illicit border crossings, cloak and dagger demeanor, and other nefarious means were in full implementation.<sup>7</sup>

Lieutenant-Colonel Guélon states that in August 1914, the structure of the Second Bureau included six sections. “Three national sections: German, English, Russian (a section of the East in March 1915 was added to raise the number of sections to seven); the Section of Current Activities; the Section of Intelligence; the Section of Central Intelligence.”<sup>8</sup> The structure as presented by Lieutenant Colonel Guélon suggests that the Sections of Intelligence, Centralization of Intelligence, and Inter-Allied Affairs were working against each other while the rest of the sections were reporting directly to the Ministry of Interior.

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of External Affairs

<sup>7</sup> Robert J. Young, “French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938 – 1939,” *Intelligence and Foreign Policy*, 1984, 276.

<sup>8</sup> Guélon, *The Birth of Economic Intelligence*

France's defeat by the Germans was the result of corruption of the French politicians, perhaps even the decadence of the French society as a whole. Political discontent, disagreements, and the constant battles between the right and left that cared more about making points and fighting for their political ideology than in trying to save the Third Republic were fundamental contributing factors in France's defeat.

Elizabeth Kier argues that the reason for the defeat was more a matter of the highly defensive of the French Army, which was incapable of breaking the German Assault, because civilians have no much influence on how the military runs itself and that the military doctrine is a matter solely for the military.<sup>9</sup>

The civil upheaval that was taking place in the country between the socialists, headed by Blum, and the conservatives, mostly the military establishment, created problems. Colossal divisions and political uncertainty saturated French society and government. Besides the leftist regimes that governed the country and their constant friction with the military, foreign services manipulated pro-fascist organizations.

Poor military planning on behalf of the High Command, disorganization of its

intelligence apparatus, and the near absence of analysis and dissemination of collected data decisively contributed to the collapse of the country. Indeed, France was so confident of certain victory against a German attack that its military did not prepare alternative plans to avert a possible catastrophe. The French High Command ignored intelligence that went against its beliefs and the "lessons" of the Great War.

Military line officers disliked military intelligence officers believing them as inferior. In addition, intelligence officers had to fight an uphill battle with the civilians of the Information Service who disliked the French military. Military personnel were paid much less than their civilian counterparts creating discontent and demoralization among the troops.<sup>10</sup> Political and military establishments were at odds due to opposing ideologies and political polarization. Both the high military establishment and politicians of successive governments refused to rely on received intelligence. The military rejected any information that stood against their preconceived beliefs about the Germans and the politicians routinely rejected pertinent information because they mistrusted anything that came out of the Second Bureau.

The role Belgium played in the defeat of France was crucial. Until 1936, Belgium

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Kier, *Culture and French Military Doctrine Before World War II* in Peter J. Katzenstein, "The Culture of National Security," Social Science Research Council (U.S.), 188-9.

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<sup>10</sup> Young, 298

allied with France, but when German troops entered the Rhineland, Belgium declared neutrality. It caused a problem in the defensive coordination between France and Belgium once an attack was imminent. Elizabeth Kier's view differs in a sense that "French war plans were explicitly designed to draw Germany into Belgium in order to threaten the security of the British Isles."<sup>11</sup>

France's military capabilities were superior to Germany's both in numbers and in firepower. Only in the air did the Germans have clear superiority. The allied forces (France, U.K., Belgium, and the Netherlands) amassed 3,740,000 soldiers (including 2,240,000 French troops) versus 2,760,000 Germans. The French armor included 3,254 tanks against Germany's 2,574, the difference being that the French used the tanks to support their infantry whereas the Germans used them as an independent attack force.<sup>12</sup>

The French High Command established that the Germans would hit the Maginot line and France was ready for such an attack, posting their best troops to defend the line. Simultaneously, they left the Ardennes undefended assuming

that they constituted an impenetrable bulge for the Germans. They further decided to commence their defensive line from the Dutch town of Breda near the River Meuse (Maas) to the source of the river Dyle (Dijle) at the Ardennes. Originally, the Allied forces under Gen. Gamelin had adopted the Escaut Plan under which they would start from the borders of France with Belgium and push inwards to Central Belgium meeting the Dutch in Breda. However, Gen. Gamelin changed his mind and adopted the Dyle Plan. The Germans also changed their plans of attack a few times and in the end they adopted General Von Manstein's plan as modified by Hitler and chose the wooded hills of the Ardennes as the point of attack.<sup>13</sup>

France's generals, especially those of the War Ministry or L'Ecole supérieure de la guerre (War College), who kept comparing fresh intelligence against their views of "right" and "wrong," based on their lessons of the Great War (WW I), were more responsible for the reduction of France than they were willing to admit. As part of the military establishment, they refused to consider modern ideas on military strategy, maintaining outdated war-fighting views without having the flexibility to draw on alternate plans. Despite overt and covert inventions and improvements occurring in the German military industry and

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Kier, *Culture and French Military Doctrine Before World War II* in Peter J. Katzenstein, "The Culture of National Security," Social Science Research Council (U.S.), 191.

<sup>12</sup> Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, "Military Misfortunes: the Anatomy of Failure in War," Anchor Books, 1990, 201

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<sup>13</sup> Cohen and Gooch, 202.

society in general, French politicians refused to accept any scenarios other than those they had learned about 20 years before.

French military plans derived from lessons learned in the Great War followed the tactics of a static entrenched defense. Based on erroneous perceptions of German maneuverability and a flawed understanding of German strategy and capabilities, the French generals expected to defend France with synchronized, methodical, and organized warfare having as their objective the deflection of Wehrmacht beyond the Rhein (or Rheine) River into Germany. Since there was no question in their minds that victory was a sure thing, the French never prepared contingency plans. They were too rigid to allow any maneuvers even when they realized defeat was inevitable, because alternative plans were non-existent, or because they had never practiced them.

Rigid military philosophy prohibited officers of superior rank from asking junior officers' opinions and junior officers would not dare question their superiors' judgment. As a result, officers trained on outdated tactics and scorned by their superiors for any opposing views, implemented outdated static tactics against an outstandingly coordinated and modern German military, which followed its national military strategy by implementing the continually invigorated national security

strategy of the Third Reich. Failure to learn from experience and adapt those lessons to reality led to France's defeat.

The most important indicator of German aggression and an imminent attack was the occupation of the Rhineland on March 7, 1936 in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles. In the year before the attack, the allies realized that the Germans had increased intelligence activities in Holland and Belgium.<sup>14</sup> A few months before the German invasion, a Luftwaffe airplane landed in Belgium due to engine failure. Two German officers emerged from the plane, one of which had a briefcase with documents that he tried unsuccessfully to burn. Belgian border patrol took the documents from the captured officers and gave the documents to the Belgian High Command. The allies authenticated the documents realizing that the documents were plans for the invasion of France from northern Belgium and not from the Maginot line.<sup>15</sup> Normally, such acts should have raised a red flag, but the parties involved chose to ignore them.

The French High Command's overconfidence in the established military training from the "lessons" of the Great War, the refusal of the French High Command to accept relevant and

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<sup>14</sup> Young, 288.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald E. Powaski, "Cut of the Sickle," *World War II*, November 2003.

accurate intelligence, the domestic political strife, and the determination of the Germans to prevail caused the unexpected defeat and the collapse of the French defenses. On the intelligence side, the French High Command shelved facts that would contradict their own views or what they could not comprehend. Although there was demand for intelligence, the Deuxième Bureau did not satisfy the requirements thus leading the country to an unforeseen disaster.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas Porch, "French Intelligence and the Fall of France, 1930-40," *Intelligence and National Security*, January 1989, 4, 1, 43

## Appendix

This appendix is the result of translation of mine from the General Secretarial for Administration, Archives, Ministry of Defense, French Republic.

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First organization of the Second Bureau at the end of the merging of the Second and Fifth offices on February 9, 1917<sup>17</sup>

Chief of the Second Bureau: Lieutenant Colonel Goubet

First Section or Section of **Military Intelligence** (Renseignement militaire - RM):

Commandant Bertaux

- a. Collection, study, and exploitation of all the information on the enemy armies and powers.<sup>18</sup>
- b. Relations with the French and foreign military attaches (except for the information of an economic nature)
- c. Exploitation of the military information daily Bulletin and military studies<sup>19</sup>

Second Section or **Section of the General Intelligence** (Renseignement général - RG):

Commandant Revol,

- a. study and exploitation of the information on the allied and neutral armies and the information of a general nature (other matters than military or economic)
- b. Central section of postal and telegraphic control (operation of the commissions, relations with the commissions, personnel of the commissions, central commission of telephone control service)
- c. Section of study of the foreign press, on 3 street François I<sup>20</sup> [My remark: similar to U.S. Open Source Center]

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<sup>17</sup> This table is prepared by the author starting from documents obtained from files S.H.A.T., 7 N 884 and represents the organization as LTC Goubet wanted at the end of February 1917. This organization differs from that initially envisaged, by the addition of an administrative section which reduces sections RM and RG (which distributed the administrative offices in the preliminary draft) and the separation of the information on the foreign armies, between enemies, allotted the SRM and to friends with the SRG

<sup>18</sup> The initial organization of February 7-9 placed the sections here German, English, Russian, Italian and the East. It is not possible to determine with certainty, in the current state of our research, if [LTC] Goubet preserves a section for foreign armies or not.

<sup>19</sup> One should not exclude the fact that in the Goubet organization anything related to postal control, the postal and telecommunications authorities, and telephony were placed initially in section RG.

Third section or **Economic Section**:

Mr. Tannery

- a. Collection, study and exploitation of the information of an economic nature, industrialists and financial (neutral and enemy)
- b. All questions relating to the Blockade Examination and study of the correspondences of an economic nature
- c. Section of the financial notes

Fourth Section or **Section of Intelligence** (Section des renseignements),

Commandant Huot, directly under the Lieutenant Colonel Chief of the Second Bureau:

- a. Research and collection of intelligence through agents of Special Affairs
- b. Administration of the secret funds

Fifth Section or **Section of Centralization of Intelligence** (Section de centralisation des renseignements - SCR):

Captain Ladoux, directly under the Lieutenant Colonel Chief of the Second Bureau:

- a. Counter-Espionage
- b. Circulation and monitoring of the borders
- c. Suspects
- d. Interior Affairs
- e. Propaganda in the interior of the enemy

Sixth Section or **Inter-allied Section** (Section Interalliés - IF),

Commander Hué, directly under the Lieutenant Colonel Chief of the Second Bureau:

- a. Grouping of the inter-allied missions which deal with information of espionage and counter-espionage and contraband of war

Seventh Section or **Administration Section** (Section administration SA),

Commandant Fauvel-Gall

- a. Foreign Missions: Management of staff of these missions is Commander Poirot)
- b. Courier Service (CPT De Lupel)<sup>21</sup>
- c. Administration of all the personnel attached to the 2nd Office (except for the Missions abroad) managed by CPT Viguié

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<sup>20</sup> One sees one officer for 25 or 50 readers and sometimes even beyond 200 readers, in the evolution of manpower of postal control. President of the Council, Minister of the War, EMA, Second Bureau I, No 3362 SC 2/II of June 10, 1918.

<sup>21</sup> Also called Missionaries in the organization of February 6-9.

- d. Current activities (LT Bernier)
- e. Issues of technical and administrative nature relating to postal control, telegraph, and telephone – PTT (2LT Barat)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> One should not exclude the fact that in the Goubet organization one finds here all relationships to postal control, the postal and telecommunications authorities, telephony were placed initially in section RG.

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