



Nowadays General de Gaulle rides in armored sedan with police escort.



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In today's France, where murderous conspiracy has become an accepted part of politics, the question is not whether Le Grand Charles can stay in power but whether he can stay alive



By GEOFFREY BOCCA

THE PLOT TO KILL DE GAULLE

WHEN GENERAL Charles de Gaulle lunched with Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, he was protected by a security cordon such as Western Europe had never seen in peacetime, not even for Khrushchev.

Thousands of French and Dutch police guarded him. His time and place of arrival were changed at the very last moment and so was the luncheon rendezvous.

So anxious were the Dutch to keep de Gaulle from being murdered on Dutch soil that they even cheated on their royal obligations and flew the royal standard from a palace other than the one where the Queen was in residence.

Why, among Western leaders, should only de Gaulle live in such constant fear of his life? Why, with the conspiratorial O.A.S. all but broken, should he consider himself closer to assassination than ever before?

The answer lies in the character of the country: France, so urbane, civilized, and prosperous, has become more than ever a land of murderous conspiracies.

If the O.A.S. (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète) is indeed broken, there are plenty of other conspirators ready to take over its apparatus for murder, even as the O.A.S. itself took over from an organization called the Red Hand.

The Red Hand was a group of Algerian Frenchmen dedicated to killing agents who supplied arms to the Algerian rebels. Their most extraordinary murder was that of a Swiss arms dealer, Marcel Léopold, in 1959.

Léopold's wife answered the doorbell of their apartment in an elegant quarter of Geneva—and looked into the contorted face of her husband. He had time only to say to her: "I have been poi-

soned," before he dropped dead at her feet.

But he died under an illusion; he had, in fact, been killed by a tiny arrow that penetrated his heart. The arrow was propelled from the tube of a bicycle pump concealed inside the assassin's sleeve between elbow and wrist. Triggered by an explosive, it made no more noise than a sigh. "It was the invention of a ballistics genius," said the Geneva police. The murderer was never caught.

The apparatus of the Red Hand was taken over by the O.A.S. when the French generals in Algeria rebelled against de Gaulle in 1960. To counter the O.A.S., de Gaulle surrounded himself with a secret corps of killers who have become famous as the *barbouzes* (which means "the bearded ones"). Most of these men are ex-officers and former intelligence men from de Gaulle's wartime Free French forces. They work alone; other French security organizations know almost nothing about them.

Terror in Algeria

After de Gaulle decided to grant Algerian independence, he sent the *barbouzes* into Algeria to smash the O.A.S. Mercilessly, the two groups set about killing each other. The O.A.S. blew up four *barbouze* headquarters in succession. In three months, 70 *barbouzes* were killed by bazookas, plastic bombs, and machine guns. Once a gang of O.A.S. men opened fire on a car carrying four bandaged *barbouzes* to an Algiers hospital. Then without waiting to see whether they were dead or alive, they threw gasoline over the car and set it on fire.

Sometimes the fight between a *barbouze* and an O.A.S. man took the form of a personal duel, since the two may well have been old comrades-in-arms in Indochina or during the early fighting in Algeria. They had a word for it: *punctualité*. They would set out to keep a "punctuality" secretly;



In old days before assassination attempts, de Gaulle pushed into mobs, supremely confident that no Frenchman wished him harm.

and at the end of it, one of them would be lying dead in an Algiers gutter.

With Algerian independence, the O.A.S. faded away into Spain and Germany—and the *barbouzes* followed them. By now, many of France's finest soldiers were desperate outlaws with only one aim: to kill de Gaulle.

Two events point up the viciousness of the continuing struggle between the O.A.S. and the *barbouzes*. The first was a near triumph for the O.A.S., and the second was a brilliant victory for the *barbouzes*.

De Gaulle Outwits an Ambush

On Aug. 22 of last year, de Gaulle was being driven from Paris to Villacoublay Airport. Behind his automobile was a single security car and two motorcycle policemen. As the little convoy slowed down in the village of Petit Clamart, a man jumped from the back of a van and opened fire with a machine gun.

But the would-be assassins forgot that de Gaulle was one of the best soldiers France has produced in this century. The President instantly recognized the classic military concept of the ambush and ordered his chauffeur to continue straight ahead at full speed. The car roared into another blast of machine-gun fire which riddled the windows and blew out two tires. But the car's speed took the second echelon of gunmen by surprise, and de Gaulle was saved.

Ten bullets had hit the car, one missing de Gaulle's head by inches. He remained calm and even jocular, but the incident persuaded him that a helicopter is the best way to travel relatively short distances. Because of the incident, de Gaulle also has given up his old habit of plunging into crowds to shake people's hands.

Within a month, the gunmen were caught. The ringleader, Jean-Marie Bastien-Thiry, was a

young man of 35 and as handsome as a movie star. A former test pilot, he was a graduate of the Polytechnic, France's finest school, which traditionally produces the nation's top leaders.

At his trial, Bastien-Thiry created a sensation. He said he had planned the ambush only after receiving the blessing of the Church, which sanctions killing tyrants under certain conditions—conditions which, Bastien-Thiry believed, were amply fulfilled in France. The Army, the Polytechnic, the Church—de Gaulle's list of enemies seemed to be endlessly multiplying.

The second incident, the arrest last February of another Polytechnic graduate, Colonel Argoud, was a great coup for the *barbouzes*. Three Frenchmen called on Argoud at his hideout in Germany and showed him police cards. Argoud believed that they were detectives and decided the game was up. He got into a van with them. All at once, he realized they were *barbouzes* and, certain that they were about to kill him, began to resist. He was given a brutal beating.

Somehow they smuggled Argoud out of Germany and into the heart of Paris. Here they acted in a manner that defies explanation, except to show that *barbouzes* are not required to behave like other people. Leaving Argoud gagged and trussed in the van in a busy street, they went into a café to telephone the police. Without making any attempt at secrecy, they informed the police that Argoud was waiting for them in the van. Several people at the bar heard them. The *barbouzes* hung around until they saw the police cars approaching; then they vanished.

How has such a situation come to pass in France? The unhappy answer is that France has never recovered psychologically from its defeat in 1940.

Let us examine briefly the career of a French military man in his middle 30s. When he was 15,

France was overrun by the Nazis. The boy went underground and joined the *Résistance*. Along with unforgettable experiences of heroism and bravery, he also witnessed assassination, arson, sabotage, and torture.

After the war, he fought for nine years in Indochina and saw his comrades die while political bickering in Paris allowed the Communists to become strong. After Indochina, he went to Algeria. Here the French decisively defeated the rebels and drove them into hiding. But de Gaulle granted independence to Algeria, and the young Frenchman watched in impotent rage while hundreds of thousands of Algerians who had eagerly supported France were delivered to the mercy of the rebels.

The Gunslinger Generation

All his life he has known nothing but fighting and frustration. He does not have to be a member of the O.A.S., but he cannot turn to parliament. Under the Third Republic, he despised it; under de Gaulle's Fourth, it scarcely exists. But he is an expert with a machine gun and plastic bombs. He can booby-trap a car and plot a clever ambush. Above all, he has access to innumerable groups whose politics is plotting.

Conspiracy in France has a long tradition. The fight between the O.A.S. and the *barbouzes* is really a continuation of the fight between Frenchmen who supported Marshal Henri Pétain during World War II and those who supported de Gaulle's Free French. The bitterness has grown stronger with the passing years.

De Gaulle has the majority of Frenchmen on his side. His real strength is that there is no alternative to him. But his enemies argue that the best way to create an alternative is to kill de Gaulle. The crisis may well last his lifetime, however long or short that may be.