RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

A Train in Winter

Caroline Moorehead

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About the Book

On an icy dawn morning in Paris in January 1943, a group of 230 French women resisters were rounded up from the Gestapo detention camps and sent on a train to Auschwitz – the only train, in the four years of German occupation, to take women of the resistance to a death camp. The youngest was a schoolgirl of 15, the eldest a farmer's wife of 68; there were among them teachers, biochemists, sales girls, secretaries, housewives and university lecturers.

The women turned to one another, finding solace and strength in friendship and shared experience. They supported and cared for one another, worked together, and faced the horror together. Friendship, almost as much as luck, dictated survival. Forty-nine of them came home.

Caroline Moorehead's breathtaking new book is the story of these women – the first time it has been told. It is about who they were, how and why they joined the resistance, how they were captured by the French police and the Gestapo, their journey to Auschwitz and their daily life in the death camps – and about what it was like for the survivors when they returned to France. *A Train in Winter* covers a harrowing part of our history but is, ultimately, a portrait of ordinary people, of bravery and endurance, and of friendship.

About the Author

Caroline Moorehead is the biographer of Bertrand Russell, Freya Stark, Iris Origo and Martha Gellhorn. Well known for her work in human rights, she has published a history of the Red Cross and a book about refugees, *Human Cargo*. Her most recent book, *Dancing to the Precipice*, a biography of Lucie de la Tour du Pin, was shortlisted for the Costa Biography Award in 2009. Caroline lives in London.

ALSO BY CAROLINE MOOREHEAD

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0 100 200 miles
0 100 200 300 km
SWEDEN
(Neutral)
DENMARK
(Occupied)
Copenhagen
Malmo
Baltic Sea
North Sea
Kiel
Rostock
Danzig
Marienburg
GERMANY
Neuengammen
Hamburg
(Tazel)
Ravensbrück
Stettin
ENGLAND
London
Amsterdam
NETHERLANDS
(Occupied)
Bremen
R. Elbe
Berlin
R. Vistula
Warsaw
Posen
Hanover
Münster
Beendorf
Magdeburg
R. Oder
Lodz
R. Rhine
Halle
POLAND
(Occupied)
Calais
Lille
Brussels
Cologne
Erfurt
Leipzig
Dresden
Breslau
BELGIUM
(Occupied)
Cracow
Frankfurt
Oswycim
(Auschwitz)
R. Seine
Compiègne
Prague
Würzburg
Pilsen
Paris
(Romainville)
Metz
Nuremberg
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
(Occupied)
Regensburg
Châlons-
sur-Maine
Strasbourg
Stuttgart
R. Danube
R. Danube
Mauthausen
Bratislava
Orleans
FRANCE
(Occupied)
Munich
Linz
Vienna
Tours
Salzburg
Budapest
R. Loire
Dijon
Basle
AUSTRIA
(united with Germany in 1938)
HUNGARY
(Occupied)
R. Saône
SWITZERLAND
(Neutral)


Where the principal characters came from
PARIS-ÎLE DE FRANCE
Danielle Casanova
Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier
Charlotte Delbo
Betty Langlois
Cécile Charua
Mai Politzer
Georgette Rostaing
Simone Sampaix
ROUEN
Madeleine Dissoubray
Germaine Pican
Claudine Guérin
RENNES
Poupette & Marie Alizon
STRASBOURG
Adelaide Hautval
Rouen
Rennes
Paris
Strasbourg
OCCUPIED
ZONE
Tours
TOURS
Raymonde Sergent
La Rochelle
Royan
Bordeaux
VICHY 'FREE' ZONE
UNTIL NOV. 1942
CHARENTE-MARITIME
Emma & Hélène Bolleau
Annette Epaud
GIRONDE
Madeleine Zani
Aminthe & Yvette Guillon
Andrée & Gilberte Tamisé
Germaine Renaudin
N

To Leo

A TRAIN IN WINTER

A Story of Resistance, Friendship and Survival in Auschwitz

CAROLINE MOOREHEAD

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Preface

On 5 January 1942, a French police inspector named Rondeaux, stationed in the 10th arrondissement of Paris, caught sight of a man he believed to be a wanted member of the French Resistance. André Pican was a teacher, and he was indeed the head of the Front National of the Resistance in the Seine-Inférieure; there was a price of 30,000 francs on his head for the derailing of a train carrying requisitioned goods and war materiel to Germany.

Rondeaux's superior, a zealous anti-communist Frenchman and active collaborator of the Gestapo called Lucien Rottée, thought that Pican might lead them to other members of the Resistance. Eleven inspectors were detailed to follow, but not to arrest, him.

Over the next two weeks[1], they searched the streets of Paris in vain. Then, on 21 January, an inspector carrying out a surveillance of the Café du Rond-Point near the Porte d'Orléans thought he saw a man answering to Pican's description. He followed him and watched as he stopped to talk to a thickset man in his thirties, with a bony face and a large moustache. Rottée's men stayed close. On 11 February, Pican was seen standing outside a shop window, then, at '15.50' entering a shop in the company of a woman '28–30 years of age, 1.70m high, slender, with brown hair curling at the ends'; she was wearing a 'Prussian blue coat, with a black belt and light grey woollen stockings, *sans élégance*'. The policeman, not knowing who she was,

christened her ‘Femme Buisson-St-Louis’ after a nearby métro station; Pican became ‘Buisson’. After watching a film in Le Palais des Glaces cinema, Pican and Femme Buisson were seen to buy biscuits and oysters before parting on the rue Saint-Maur.

In the following days, Pican met ‘Motte Piquet’, ‘Porte Souleau’ and ‘Femme No. 1 de Balard’. Not knowing who they were, the police officers gave them the names of the places where they were first seen.

On 12 February, Femme Buisson was seen to enter the Café au Balcon, where she was handed a small suitcase by ‘Merilmontant’ – a short woman in her mid-thirties, ‘c. 1.55m, dark brown hair in a net, black coat, chic fauve leather bag, red belt’. By now, Pican had also met and exchanged packets with ‘Femme Brunet St Lazare’ (‘34, 1.60m, very dark, pointed nose, beige coat, hood lined in a patterned red, yellow and green material’), and with ‘Femme Claude Tillier’ (‘1.65m, 33, dark, somewhat corpulent, bulky cardigan and woollen socks’). ‘Femme Vincennes’ (‘1.60m, 32, fair hair, glasses, brown sheepskin fur coat, beige wool stockings’) was seen talking to ‘Femme Jenna’ and ‘Femme Dorian’. One of the French police officers, Inspector Deprez, was particularly meticulous in his descriptions of the women he followed, noting on the buff rectangular report cards which each inspector filled out every evening that ‘Femme République’ had a small red mark on her right nostril and that her grey dress was made of angora wool.

By the middle of February, Pican and his contacts had become visibly nervous, constantly looking over their shoulders to see if they were being followed. Rottée began to fear that they might be planning to flee. The police inspectors themselves had also become uneasy, for by the spring of 1942 Paris was full of posters put up by the Resistance saying that the French police were no better than the German Gestapo, and should be shot in legitimate

self-defence. On 14 February, Pican and Femme Brunet were seen buying tickets at the Gare Montparnasse for a train the following morning to Le Mans, and then arranging for three large suitcases to travel with them in the goods wagon. Rottée decided that the moment had come to move. At three o'clock on the morning of 15 February, sixty police inspectors set out across Paris to make their arrests.

Over the next forty-eight hours they banged on doors, forced their way into houses, shops, offices and storerooms, searched cellars and attics, pigsties and garden sheds, larders and cupboards. They came away with notebooks, addresses, false IDs, explosives, revolvers, tracts, expertly forged ration books and birth certificates, typewriters, blueprints for attacks on trains and dozens of torn postcards, train timetables and tickets, the missing halves destined to act as passwords when matched with those held by people whose names were in the notebooks. When Pican was picked up, he tried to swallow a piece of paper with a list of names; in his shoes were found addresses, an anti-German flyer and 5,000 francs. Others, when confronted by Rottée's men, shouted for help, struggled, and tried to run off; two women bit the inspectors.

As the days passed, each arrest led to others. The police picked up journalists and university lecturers, farmers and shopkeepers, concierges and electricians, chemists and postmen and teachers and secretaries. From Paris, the net widened, to take in Cherbourg, Tours, Nantes, Evreux, Saintes, Poitiers, Ruffec and Angoulême. Rottée's inspectors pulled in Pican's wife, Germaine, also a teacher and the mother of two small daughters; she was the liaison officer for the Communist Party in Rouen. They arrested Georges Politzer, a distinguished Hungarian philosopher who taught at the Sorbonne, and his wife Maï, 'Vincennes', a strikingly pretty midwife, who had dyed her blond hair black as a disguise for her work as courier and typist for the Underground, and not long afterwards, Charlotte

Delbo, assistant to the well-known actor-manager Louis Jouvet.

Then there was Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier, 'Femme Tricanet', niece of the creator of the Babar stories and contributor to the clandestine edition of *L'Humanité*, and Danielle Casanova, 'Femme No. 1 de Balard', a dental surgeon from Corsica, a robust, forceful woman in her thirties, with bushy black eyebrows and a strong chin. Maï, Marie-Claude and Danielle were old friends.

When taken to Paris's central Prefecture and questioned, some of those arrested refused to speak, others were defiant, others scornful. They told their interrogators that they had no interest in politics, that they knew nothing about the Resistance, that they had been given packets and parcels by total strangers. Husbands said that they had no idea what their wives did all day, mothers that they had not seen their sons in months.

Day after day, Rottée and his men questioned the prisoners, brought them together in ones and twos, wrote their reports and then set out to arrest others. What they did not put down on paper was that the little they were able to discover was often the result of torture, of slapping around, punching, kicking, beating about the head and ears, and threats to families, particularly children. The detainees should be treated, read one note written in the margin of a report, *avec égard*, with consideration. The words were followed by a series of exclamation marks. Torture had become a joke.

When, towards the end of March, what was now known as *l'affaire Pican* was closed down, Rottée announced that the French police had dealt a 'decisive' blow to the Resistance. Their haul included three million anti-German and anti-Vichy tracts, three tons of paper, two typewriters, eight roneo machines, 1,000 stencils, 100 kilos of ink and 300,000 francs. One hundred and thirteen people were in detention, thirty-five of them women. The youngest of these

was a 16-year-old schoolgirl called Rosa Floch, who was picked up as she was writing ‘Vive les Anglais!’ on the walls of her *lycée*. The eldest was a 44-year-old farmer’s wife, Madeleine Normand, who told the police that the 39,500 francs in her handbag were there because she had recently sold a horse.

Nine months later on the snowy morning of 24 January 1943, thirty of these women joined two hundred others, arrested like them from all parts of occupied France, on the only train, during the entire four years of German occupation, to take women from the French Resistance to the Nazi death camps.

* * *

In the early 1960s[2], Charlotte Delbo, who had been one of the women on the train, sat down to write a play. She thought of herself as a messenger, bearing the story of her former companions. Twenty-three women, dressed in identical striped dresses, are talking about life in a Nazi camp. They are barely distinguishable one from another, all equally grey in their ragged and shapeless clothes, their hair and features purposefully unmemorable. ‘The faces,’ Delbo wrote in her stage instructions, ‘do not count’; what counted was their common experience. As in a Greek tragedy, the violence is reported but not seen.

‘There must be one of us who returns,’ says one of the women. ‘You or another, it doesn’t matter. We have to fight, to stay alive, because we are fighters … Those who return will have won.’ A second woman speaks up. ‘What of those we’ll leave behind?’ Another replies: ‘We won’t leave them. We’ll take them away with us.’ And then someone asks: ‘Why should you believe these stories of ghosts, ghosts who come back and who are not able to explain how?’

In 2008, I decide to go in search of the women who had left Paris, that freezing January dawn sixty-five years earlier. I wonder if any are still alive, to tell the story of what drew them into the Resistance, of how they came to fall into the hands of Rottée's men, and what battles they and their companions fought to survive, then and later.

Charlotte Delbo, I discover, died of cancer in 1985. But seven of the women are still alive. I find Betty Langlois, at 95 an emaciated but steely woman of immense charm, with the same sharp shining brown eyes that look quizzically out of her early photographs, living in a darkened flat in the centre of Paris, full of potted plants and mahogany furniture. She gives me brightly coloured macaroons to eat and a present of a small stuffed tortoiseshell toy cat, curled up in a brown cardboard box. Though she does not have a cat herself, she loves the way this one looks so lifelike and she gives them as presents to all her friends.

Betty sends me to Cécile Charua, in Guingamp in Brittany, who laughs at my formal French, and teaches me many words of bawdy slang. At 93, Cécile is sturdy, humorous and uncomplaining. I visit them both several times, and on each occasion they talk and talk, recounting scenes and episodes that seem too fresh and real in their minds to have taken place over half a century before. Neither one of them, in all this time, has spoken much about what happened to them. It is Cécile who tells me about Madeleine Dissoubray, 91 and a retired teacher of mathematics, living on her own in a little flat on the edge of Paris, surrounded by books; and later, at the annual gathering of survivors held every 24 January, I hear Madeleine, an angular, upright woman, with a firm, carrying voice, describe to a crowd of onlookers what surviving has meant. She is unsmiling and totally contained.

I have trouble finding Poupette Alizon, who has drifted away from the others and is estranged from her daughters.

But then a lucky turn takes me to Rennes, where I trace her to a silent, elegant, impeccably furnished flat, full of paintings, overlooking a deserted park and some gardens. Poupette, at 83 somewhat younger than the others and in her long flowing lilac coat as elegant as her surroundings, seems troubled and a bit defiant. Poupette, too, talks and talks. She is lonely and life has not worked out well for her.

Lulu Thévenin, Gilberte Tamisé and Geneviève Pakula, all three alive in 2008, I cannot see: they are too frail to welcome visitors. But I meet Lulu's son Paul and her younger sister Christiane.

Betty dies, soon after my third visit, in the summer of 2009. She has had pancreatic cancer for seven years, and no one survives this kind of cancer for so long. The last time I see her, she tells me, in tones of pleasure and pride, that she has mystified all her doctors. Surviving, she says, is something that she is very good at.

Having spent many hours talking to the four surviving women, I decide to go in search of the families of those who did not return from the Nazi camps or who have since died. I find Madeleine Zani's son Pierre in a village near Metz; Germaine Renaudin's son Tony in a comfortable and pretty house in Termes d'Armagnac, not far from Bordeaux; Annette Epaud's son Claude convalescing from an operation in a nursing home in Charente; Raymonde Sergent's daughter Gisèle in Saint-Martin-le-Beau, the village near Tours in which her mother grew up. I meet Aminthe Guillon's grandson in a cafe in Paris. Each tells me their family stories and introduces me to other families. I travel up and down France, to remote farmhouses, retirement homes and apartment blocks, to villages and to the suburbs of France's principal cities. The children, some now in their seventies, produce letters, photographs, diaries. They talk about their mothers with admiration and a slight air of puzzlement, that they had been so brave and

so little vainglorious about their own achievements. It makes these now elderly sons and daughters miss them all the more. When we talk about the past, their eyes sometimes fill with tears.

This is a book about friendship between women, and the importance that they attach to intimacy and to looking after each other, and about how, under conditions of acute hardship and danger, such mutual dependency can make the difference between living and dying. It is about courage, facing and surviving the worst that life can offer, with dignity and an unassailable determination not to be destroyed. Those who came back to France in 1945 owed their lives principally to chance, but they owed it too in no small measure to the tenacity with which they clung to one another, though separated by every division of class, age, religion, occupation, politics and education. They did not all, of course, like each other equally: some were far closer friends than others. But each watched out for the others with the same degree of attention and concern and minded every death with anguish. And what they all went through, month after month, lay at the very outer limits of human endurance.

This is their story, that of Cécile, Betty, Poupette, Madeleine and the 226 other women who were with them on what became known as *Le Convoi des 31000*.

Part One

CHAPTER ONE

An enormous toy full of subtleties

WHAT SURPRISED[1] THE Parisians, standing in little groups along the Champs-Elysées to watch the German soldiers take over their city in the early hours of 14 June 1940, was how youthful and healthy they looked. Tall, fair, clean shaven, the young men marching to the sounds of a military band to the Arc de Triomphe were observed to be wearing uniforms of good cloth and gleaming boots made of real leather. The coats of the horses pulling the cannons glowed. It seemed not an invasion but a spectacle. Paris itself was calm and almost totally silent. Other than the steady waves of tanks, motorised infantry and troops, nothing moved. Though it had rained hard on the 13th, the unseasonal great heat of early June had returned.

And when they had stopped staring, the Parisians returned to their homes and waited to see what would happen. A spirit of *attentisme*, of holding on, doing nothing, watching, settled over the city.

The speed of the German victory – the Panzers into Luxembourg on 10 May, the Dutch forces annihilated, the Meuse crossed on 13 May, the French army and airforce proved obsolete, ill-equipped, badly led and fossilised by tradition, the British Expeditionary Force obliged to fall back at Dunkirk, Paris bombed on 3 June – had been shocking. Few had been able to take in the fact that a nation whose military valour was epitomised by the battle

of Verdun in the First World War and whose defences had been guaranteed by the supposedly impregnable Maginot line, had been reduced, in just six weeks, to a stage of vassalage. Just what the consequences would be were impossible to see; but they were not long in coming.

By midday on the 14th, General Sturnitz, military commandant of Paris, had set up his headquarters in the Hotel Crillon. Since Paris had been declared an open city there was no destruction. A German flag was hoisted over the Arc de Triomphe, and swastikas raised over the Hôtel de Ville, the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate and the various ministries. Edith Thomas, a young Marxist historian and novelist, said they made her think of ‘huge spiders,

glutted with blood’. The Grand Palais was turned into a garage for German lorries, the École Polytechnique into a barracks. The Luftwaffe took over the Grand Hotel in the Place de l’Opéra. French signposts came down; German ones went up. French time was advanced by one hour, to bring it into line with Berlin. The German mark was fixed at almost twice its pre-war level. In the hours after the arrival of the occupiers, sixteen people committed suicide, the best known of them Thierry de Martel, inventor in France of neurosurgery, who had fought at Gallipoli.

The first signs of German behaviour were, however, reassuring. All property was to be respected, providing people were obedient to German demands for law and order. Germans were to take control of the telephone exchange and, in due course, of the railways, but the utilities would remain in French hands. The burning of sackfuls of state archives and papers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, carried out as the Germans arrived, was inconvenient, but not excessively so, as much had been salvaged. General von Brauchtisch, commander-in-chief of the German troops, ordered his men to behave with ‘perfect correctness’. When it became apparent that the Parisians were planning no revolt, the curfew, originally set for forty-eight hours, was lifted. The French, who had feared the savagery that had accompanied the invasion of Poland, were relieved. They handed in their weapons, as instructed, accepted that they would henceforth only be able to hunt rabbits with terriers or stoats, and registered their much-loved carrier pigeons. The Germans, for their part, were astonished by the French passivity.

When, over the next days and weeks, those who had fled south in a river of cars, bicycles, hay wagons, furniture vans, ice-cream carts, hearses and horse-drawn drays, dragging behind them prams, wheelbarrows and herds of animals, returned, they were amazed by how civilised the conquerors seemed to be. There was something a little

shaming about this chain reaction of terror, so reminiscent of the *Grand Peur* that had driven the French from their homes in the early days of the revolution of 1797. In 1940 it was not, after all, so very terrible. The French were accustomed to occupation; they had endured it, after all, in 1814, 1870 and 1914, and then there had been chaos and looting. Now they found German soldiers in the newly reopened Galeries Lafayette, buying stockings and shoes and scent for which they scrupulously paid, sightseeing in Notre Dame, giving chocolates to small children and offering their seats to elderly women on the métro.

Soup kitchens had been set up by the Germans in various parts of Paris, and under the flowering chestnut trees in the Jardin des Tuileries, military bands played Beethoven. Paris remained eerily silent, not least because the oily black cloud that had enveloped the city after the bombardment of the huge petrol dumps in the Seine estuary had wiped out most of the bird population. Hitler, who paid[2] a lightning visit on 28 June, was photographed slapping his knee in delight under the Eiffel Tower. As the painter and photographer Jacques Henri Lartigue remarked, the German conquerors were behaving as if they had just been presented with a wonderful new toy[3], 'an enormous toy full of subtleties which they do not suspect'.

On 16 June, Paul Reynaud, the Prime Minister who had presided over the French government's flight from Paris to Tours and then to Bordeaux, resigned, handing power to the much-loved hero of Verdun, Marshal Pétain. At 12.30 on the 17th, Pétain, his thin, crackling voice reminding Arthur Koestler of a 'skeleton with a chill', announced over the radio that he had agreed to head a new government and that he was asking Germany for an armistice. The French people, he said, were to 'cease fighting' and to co-operate with the German authorities. 'Have confidence in the

German soldier!' read posters that soon appeared on every wall.

The terms of the armistice, signed after twenty-seven hours of negotiation in the clearing at Rethondes in the forest of Compiègne in which the German military defeat had been signed at the end of the First World War, twenty-two years before, were brutal. The geography of France was redrawn. Forty-nine of France's eighty-seven mainland departments – three-fifths of the country – were to be occupied by Germany. Alsace and Lorraine were to be annexed. The Germans would control the Atlantic and Channel coasts and all areas of important heavy industry, and have the right to large portions of French raw materials. A heavily guarded 1,200-kilometre demarcation line, cutting France in half and running from close to Geneva in the east, west to near Tours, then south to the Spanish border, was to separate the occupied zone in the north from the 'free zone' in the south, and there would be a 'forbidden zone' in the north and east, ruled by the German High Command in Brussels. An exorbitant daily sum was to be paid over by the French to cover the costs of occupation. Policing of a demilitarised zone along the Italian border was to be given to the Italians – who, not wishing to miss out on the spoils, had declared war on France on 10 June.

The French government came to rest in Vichy, a fashionable spa on the right bank of the river Allier in the Auvergne. Here, Pétain and his chief minister, the appeaser and pro-German Pierre Laval, set about putting in place a new French state. On paper at least, it was not a German puppet but a legal, sovereign state with diplomatic relations. During the rapid German advance, some 100,000 French soldiers had been killed in action, 200,000 wounded and 1.8 million others were now making their way into captivity in prisoner-of-war camps in Austria and Germany, but a new France was to rise out of the ashes of the old.

‘Follow me,’ declared Pétain: ‘keep your faith in *La France Eternelle*’. Pétain was 84 years old. Those who preferred not to follow him scrambled to leave France – over the border into Spain and Switzerland or across the Channel – and began to group together as the Free French with French nationals from the African colonies who had argued against a negotiated surrender to Germany.

In this France envisaged by Pétain and his Catholic, conservative, authoritarian and often anti-Semitic followers, the country would be purged and purified, returned to a mythical golden age before the French revolution introduced perilous ideas about equality. The new French were to respect their superiors and the values of discipline, hard work and sacrifice and they were to shun the decadent individualism that had, together with Jews, Freemasons, trade unionists, immigrants, gypsies and communists, contributed to the military defeat of the country.

Returning from meeting Hitler at Montoire on 24 October, Pétain declared: ‘With honour, and to maintain French unity … I am embarking today on the path of collaboration’. Relieved that they would not have to fight, disgusted by the British bombing of the French fleet at anchor in the Algerian port of Mers-el-Kebir, warmed by the thought of their heroic fatherly leader, most French people were happy to join him. But not, as it soon turned out, all of them.

* * *

Long before they reached Paris[4], the Germans had been preparing for the occupation of France. There would be no gauleiter – as in the newly annexed Alsace-Lorraine – but there would be military rule of a minute and highly bureaucratic kind. Everything from the censorship of the press to the running of the postal services was to be under

tight German control. A thousand railway officials arrived to supervise the running of the trains. France was to be regarded as an enemy kept in *faiblesse inférieure*, a state of dependent weakness, and cut off from the reaches of all Allied forces. It was against this background of collaboration and occupation that the early Resistance began to take shape.

A former scoutmaster and reorganiser of the Luftwaffe, Otto von Stülpnagel, a disciplinarian Prussian with a monocle, was named chief of the Franco-German Armistice Commission. Moving into the Hotel Majestic, he set about organising the civilian administration of occupied France, with the assistance of German civil servants, rapidly drafted in from Berlin. Von Stülpnagel's powers included both the provisioning and security of the German soldiers and the direction of the French economy. Not far away, in the Hotel Crillon in the rue de Rivoli, General von Sturnitz was busy overseeing day to day life in the capital. In requisitioned hotels and town houses, men in gleaming boots were assisted by young German women secretaries, soon known to the French as 'little grey mice'.

There was, however, another side to the occupation, which was neither as straightforward, nor as reasonable; and nor was it as tightly under the German military command as von Stülpnagel and his men would have liked. This was the whole apparatus of the secret service, with its different branches across the military and the police.

After the protests of a number of his generals about the behaviour of the Gestapo in Poland, Hitler had agreed that no SS security police would accompany the invading troops into France. Police powers would be placed in the hands of the military administration alone. However Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, the myopic, thin-lipped 40-year-old Chief of the German Police, who had long dreamt of breeding a master race of Nordic Ayrans, did not wish to see his black-shirted SS excluded. He decided to dispatch

to Paris a bridgehead of his own, which he could later use to send in more of his men. Himmler ordered his deputy, Reinhard Heydrich, the cold-blooded head of the Geheime Staatspolizei or Gestapo, which he had built up into an instrument of terror, to include a small group of twenty men, wearing the uniform of the Abwehr's secret military police, and driving vehicles with military plates.

In charge of this party was a 30-year-old journalist with a doctorate in philosophy, called Helmut Knochen. Knochen was a specialist in Jewish repression and spoke some French. After commandeering a house on the avenue Foch with his team of experts in anti-terrorism and Jewish affairs, he called on the Paris Prefecture, where he demanded to be given the dossiers on all German émigrés, all Jews, and all known anti-Nazis. Asked by the military what he was doing, he said he was conducting research into dissidents.

Knochen and his men soon became extremely skilful at infiltration, the recruitment of informers and as interrogators. Under him, the German secret services would turn into the most feared German organisation in France, permeating every corner of the Nazi system.

Knochen was not, however, alone in his desire to police France. There were also the counter-terrorism men of the Abwehr, who reported back to Admiral Canaris in Berlin; the Einsatzstab Rosenberg which ferreted out Masonic lodges and secret societies and looted valuable art to be sent off to Germany, and Goebbels's propaganda specialists. Von Ribbentrop, the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Berlin, had also persuaded Hitler to let him send one of his own men to Paris, Otto Abetz, a Francophile who had courted the French during the 1930s with plans for Franco-German co-operation. Abetz was 37, a genial, somewhat stout man, who had once been an art master, and though recognised to be charming and to love France, was viewed by both French and Germans with suspicion, not least