New Rivals

Police services generally like to have a monopoly on policing. So what effect would the Occupation of Marseille have on the Police? The arrival of the Germans in the Southern zone had brought with it new rivals in the Police domain. None were more dreaded than the security service which took over the spacious villa at 425 rue Paradis and its pleasant garden, in the process ousting the Jewish aid agency HICEM from the premises.¹ So-called ‘Paradise Street’ was amongst Marseille’s most sought-after real estate but after November 1942 this address sent shivers down the spine. Known popularly as the ‘Gestapo’, the ominous presence of this service is referred to in almost all the memoirs relative to the Second World War in France. Technically speaking what is wrongly referred to as the ‘Gestapo’ was in fact just one branch within the German security Police or Sipo-SD (Sicherheitspolizei-Sicherheitsdienst). But the methods of the organism now installed in the rue Paradis mirrored too closely the tactics used by the real Gestapo in Germany in the 1930’s for many French people to pay heed to such technical distinctions.²

One of 6 SD Einsatzkommandos (‘special units’) in the newly occupied zone, the Marseille office also controlled Sipo-SD stations in Avignon, Digne, Gap, Nimes and Nice. For much of the Occupation it was commanded by SS-Stürmführer Rolf Mühler, a broad-shouldered potbelly man in his late thirties. He had been a Professor of French literature in civilian life and, before arriving in Marseille, had previously been a member of the German Police delegation in Vichy and had presided over the SD in the Normandy town of Rouen. Five sections existed within the Marseille bureau but it was section IV, the ‘Gestapo’, which became the most important. This section organised arrests, interrogations and general security operations, targeting particularly Jews, Resisters and German deserters. It was here that the infamous Ernst Dunker-Delage earned himself a reputation as Marseille’s equivalent to ‘the butcher of Lyon’, Klaus Barbie.³

³ AD BDR 58W 20, Note de Renseignementd, Surveillance du Teritoire, 30 July 1945; Paul Jankowski, Communism and collaboration, New Haven, 1989, pp 105-106; Madeleine Baudoin,
Born in Halle in 1912, Dunker came to Marseille in February 1943, initially as an interpreter. A well-travelled man before the war he had worked in bars in St Raphael and New York and been employed as a ship’s steward, offering him the opportunity to speak English, French and Italian fluently. His French was said to be near perfect. He arrived in Marseille under something of a cloud. He had been stripped of his previous assignment at SD headquarters in the rue des Saussaies in Paris when an involvement in the black market for his own enrichment earned him the second prison sentence of his 31 year existence. Dunker was now keen to impress his bosses. His gift for languages helped him in this respect as it made him useful in interrogations. His ambition, unscrupulousness and resourcefulness did the rest and it was not long before he himself was organising the arrest and torture of Resisters with his own network of collaborators.

The 50 or 60 German officials within the local Sipo-SD would have been insufficient without the support of several hundred French auxiliaries and Dunker was no exception in making use of the indigenous help available. The most casual of these auxiliaries were the informers who denounced their compatriots. They informed on complete strangers; they informed on business associates; they informed on friends and members of their families. Those denounced were accused of listening to illegal BBC radio broadcasts, expressing pro-Resistance sentiments, harbouring outcasts, criticising the Germans or participating in various anti-social or illegal activities. The denouncers’ actions were inspired by malice, greed, jealousy or zealotry. Some of the most chilling cases concerned those who acted in the heat of a family dispute. In the Eastern suburb of La Valentine, a 21 year old barmaid denounced her Father to the SD. He had reproached her for having turned his bar into a brothel for German soldiers. He never returned from the deportation which resulted from her accusations against him. Although denunciations were probably less widespread than some would have us believe, the threat of turning someone in was nevertheless a very real weapon. Shortly after joining the fascistic movement the PPF, a former prostitute threatened to denounce to the Germans anyone in

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