

## **REVIEWS AND NOTES**

**Etienne Augris, *Philippe Rondot maître espion. Biographie*  
(*Philippe Rondot master spy. Biography*),  
Nouveau Monde Editions, Paris, 2023, 329 p.,**

**presented by Mihaela TEODOR\***

*Philippe Rondot master spy. Biography* is the title of the book published at the Nouveau Monde Publishing House from Paris, France, in February 2023. The book, signed by the French historian Etienne Augris<sup>1</sup>, is the first biography of General Philippe Rondot, a legend of foreign and domestic French intelligence services. The book is considered by experts and reviewers an “unprecedented and rich in detail dive into the career of an essential cog in the wheel of French counterintelligence” or “a form of tribute for the spy Rondot as he was, during his lifetime, an essential cog in the French secret services”.

The content is structured as follows: an introductory chapter, *Prologue: Ombre et lumiere* (*Prologue: Shadow and Light*), an *Epilogue: Beyrouth-Chanaud* (*Epilogue: Beirut-Chanaud*) and 12 chapters: *L'héritage familial, de la Lorraine a Beyrouth* (*Family heritage, from Lorraine to Beirut*); *Au nom du père* (*In the name of the Father*); *De 'Ginette' a Saint-Cyr* (*From 'Ginette' to Saint-Cyr*); *L'expérience algérienne* (*The Algerian experience*); *L'entrée au SDECE* (*Entry to the SDECE*); *Piège a Bucarest pour Rotin* (*Piege in Bucharest for Rotin*); *L'expert e le*

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<sup>1</sup> Étienne Augris is a talented professor of history and geography at the Jeanne-d'Arc High School in Nancy, and a regular contributor to the general culture magazine L'Éléphant.

'consultant' (*The expert and the 'consultant'*); *Face au terrorisme et a Abou Nidal* (*Faced with terrorism and Abou Nidal*); *La traque Carlos* (*The Carlos Hunt*); *Libérations d'otage et opérations secrètes* (*Hostage releases and covert operations*); *Missions K et M en ex-Yougoslavie* (*K and M missions in the former Yugoslavia*); *Clearstream, Hubris et Nemesis* (*Clearstream, Hubris and Nemesis*). As a well written scientific research, the book does not miss the *acknowledgements*, the selective bibliography, and the notes.

Philippe Rondot, a French general and a graduate of Saint-Cyr, died in 2017 at the age of 81. Coming from a military family, General Philippe Rondot, was an iconoclastic figure within the French intelligence community, a man of action and also the author of several books: *La Syrie*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1978; *L'Irak*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1979; *La Jordanie*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1980; *Les projets de paix arabo-israéliens*, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 1980 (thèse universitaire); *Le Proche-Orient à la recherche de la paix, 1973-1982*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1982 etc.

The General was involved for five decades in high-profile cases such as the arrest of the terrorist Carlos alias "The Jackal" or the search for war criminals from former Yugoslavia. We can read in the book about the past and the adventure in intelligence of the famous General.

What Romanian readers could be interested in is General Rondot's first mission abroad at his first post as deputy of the French military attaché which was in Romania. He worked there for almost two years (May 1966 - February 1968), being sent by the SDECE (Foreign and Counterintelligence Documentation Service). In the '70s, Philippe Rondot came to the attention of the Romanian Security. In General Rondot's file, which Etienne Augris was able to research at CNSAS, the General had code names as "Rotin", "Radu" and "Racu". In the chapter *Piege in Bucharest for Rotin*, the author of the biography stresses out that it is not very clear

whether or not Rondot fell victim to a compromising operation with a woman. However, he even staged an accident with a car driven by a female driver, not far from Bucharest. More than two decades after his Romanian adventure, in 1992, Philippe Rondot, who had meanwhile become a senior official of the French Internal Secret Services (DST) and coordinator of the military intelligence services, returned to Bucharest. He met with the heads of domestic and foreign Romanian intelligence services, and later he accessed his own Securitate file containing all the spin reports concerning Lieutenant Rondot from 1966-1968.

General Philippe Rondot found himself exposed to the general public in 2004, when the *Clearstream 2* affair<sup>2</sup> broke out and he became “famous”. Rondot’s famous notebooks, in which the spy diligently noted his smallest actions and gestures since a misadventure which had forced him to leave the action service of the SDECE, published during the investigation were feeding many fantasies and triggered a form of collective madness. However, the justice will eventually recognize his innocence.

The author traces the life of General Philippe Rondot in a well-documented book based on testimonies and original sources. Thus, he acknowledges that the research work took place in various archives and libraries in France such as the Kurdish Institute in Paris, the Historical Service of Defence, the National Archives and Diplomatic Archives, the university libraries of Lorraine and Nancy; and in Romania such as Archive of the National Council for Studying the Archives of the Security. What can be simply said on the book is that it is an excellent biography written by the talented French historian Étienne Augris. The great importance of the book resides in the mysteries of French espionage and counter-espionage of the last century.

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<sup>2</sup> See more on Clearstream 2 at <https://www.france24.com/en/20090918-how-finance-trial-turned-major-political-scandal->