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WASHINGTON TIMES
27 September 1985

L'affaire Rainbow Warrior deepens

By Curtis Cate
SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

PARIS — The ambivalent attitude of the French toward the Greenpeace scandal is highlighted by two results of a public opinion poll published yesterday.

More than half of those questioned responded they believed that President Francois Mitterrand and his government were aware of the

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operation that led to the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior from its beginnings. The president and his prime minister have consistently denied that the knowledge extended further than the defense minister and the chief of intelligence, both forced to resign over the affair.

Only 29 percent of those polled believe the government's claim that the two leaders were fooled by the secret intelligence service, while 52 percent believe that they were involved from the beginning.

Despite this heavily skeptical view of their political leadership, a modest 9 percent of the polled saw the Greenpeace affair as having any significant effect on next March's parliamentary elections, while 54 percent believe it will have no effect whatsoever.

These findings confirm what a professor of political science recently said to me: "We French are not like you Americans, who have an

almost puritanical notion of how politicians should behave. You expect your politicians to tell the truth, or at least to make the effort. We, on the other hand, expect our politicians to lie, and if they lie a little more than usual — as in this Greenpeace affair — well, we shrug our shoulders and say, 'What after all can one expect?'"

Continuing its investigation of the episode, the government announced yesterday that five military men have been charged with threatening national defense through leaks to the press about the Greenpeace matter. The affair began on July 10 when the ship, which was about to lead a flotilla protesting French nuclear testing in the South Pacific, was sunk in the harbor of Auckland, New Zealand, killing one man.

The newsmagazine l'Express reported in today's edition that documents related to the Greenpeace scandal, reported by the government to have been destroyed, are still in existence. Yann de l'Ecotais, the editor of L'Express, said in a radio broadcast that his information came "from very good sources."

The report contradicts statements by Defense Minister Paul Quiles, who took office Friday after the resignation of his predecessor, Charles Hernu. Mr. Quiles has said that important documents on the July 10 sinking had been destroyed. The contents of the documents have not been made known.

Four of those charged yesterday were identified as Col. Joseph Fourrier, 57; Capt. Alain Borrass, 34; Warrant Officer Richard Guillet, 32; and Master Sgt. Bernard Davier, 27, all current or former members of the

General Directorate for External Security, the spy agency involved in the sinking.

The fifth man, who was charged later in the day, was national police Capt. Paul Barril, 39, believed to have acted as an intermediary between the press and the four secret service men. The national police are a branch of the military.

All five formally were charged with "revealing information of a nature to harm national defense . . . without intention of treason or espionage," a charge that carries a maximum sentence of five years in jail.

The case of Capt. Barril may have larger political implications.

He is described by French sources as a gifted gendarmerie officer who helped make the French GIGN — a special-operations anti-hijacking group — into one of the world's finest anti-terrorist commando forces. An expert skier, parachutist, karate fighter, rapid-fire marksman and frogman, Capt. Barril and two of his non-commissioned officers in November 1979 were sent to Mecca at the specific request of the Saudi Arabian minister of inte-

rior to help regain control of the sacred mosque that had been seized by Islamic terrorists.

When the Socialists came to power in 1981, Charles Hernu convinced Mr. Mitterrand that a special GIGN unit be assigned to take over security functions at the Elysee Palace. This angered the police unit traditionally entrusted with the job of guarding the French president, as well as a number of influential police chiefs in other branches, who were jealous of the GIGN's growing prestige.

In September 1982, Capt. Barril and his GIGN men, acting on a tip, arrested an Irishman named Michael Plunkett, who was suspected of planning a bombing in

Paris' eastern suburbs. Although Plunkett was wanted by the British because of his suspected involvement in the assassination of British Member of Parliament P Airey Neave, a personal friend of Margaret Thatcher, Capt. Barril's enemies in the Paris police force mounted a furious press campaign against him and his "GIGN cowboys." As a result, the case was taken out of his hands, most of the incriminating evidence — pistols, guns, sticks of dynamite — were carelessly lost, and Plunkett and two of his IRA accomplices were allowed to go scot-free because of "insufficient evidence."

Suspended from further service in the GIGN for a period of five years, Paul Barril wrote a book of reminiscences that provoked an angry clash between Pierre Joxe, the minister of the interior, who wanted to have book banned, and Charles Hernu, the recently fired defense minister who is an unabashed admirer of Capt. Barril and his crack GIGN unit.

Mr. Hernu won out, the book was released, and has since sold 170,000 copies — making Capt. Barril many friends and a few unforgiving enemies. The foremost of these enemies today is Pierre Joxe, an avowed Marxist who, now that his enemy Charles Hernu has been fired, is seen by some political analysts as out to get Capt. Barril's scalp as well.

The prime minister's office also remains in the spotlight. French newspapers have recently been

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focusing on the way in which secret funds — at least 1.7 million francs (or roughly 200,000 dollars) — were disbursed for the anti-Rainbow Warrior operation. Among other things, each disbursement needed the signature of the head of Mr. Fabius' own secretariat, Jacques Fournier.

France took the offensive as its best defense at the United Nations yesterday, vowing to press its own claims against New Zealand.

This analysis is based in part on wire service reports.