

## Ken Follett

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To: Dan Starer (E-mail)  
Subject: Telephone sabotage

Thanks for your five emails with notes from many correspondents. Stan Swihart's notes are the most wide-ranging and comprehensive, and you may want to forward this email to him, if he is willing to give us more of his time. You may also want to forward it to Bernard Green.

Some of the comments are easily dealt with, for the reasons given below; but some are quite crucial, and I've asked a number of supplementary questions.

1. The BUILDING attacked must be large, because I have six characters who enter disguised as cleaners. But the telephone system does not need to occupy the whole building. It can be quite small--provided it is important.

2. There will be no civilian deaths. The saboteurs can carry only small amounts of explosive. Their object is to destroy the telephone equipment, not the building. One of them is a telephone engineer who determines exactly where to place a small quantity of explosive to do maximum damage. I may also have all civilians evacuated from the building at the last minute.

3. I realize that the Germans would be able to communicate by radio if the phone system were out of action. That's part of the object of the exercise. Radio messages were intercepted by the Allies and decoded at Bletchley. Telephone and teleprinter messages could not be intercepted. We wanted to force them to switch to radio.

4. I realise there was in fact no large telephone installation in the Reims area. That's intentional. The building attacked in my story is a fictional building. However, I need to satisfy myself that there MIGHT have been such an installation in that neighbourhood. See queries below.

5. I realise that telephone sabotage can be repaired. This attack takes place a day or two before D-Day. Its purpose will be accomplished if the phone system is inoperable for a few days. Damage that can be repaired within, say, two weeks, would be ideal (because, as SS points out, the Allies will want to use the phones when they have retaken France). But cutting cables is insufficient. As several of our correspondents note, cut cables can be repaired in hours.

6. The largest problem raised by all correspondents is that no single telephone installation is so central to the system that its destruction would prevent communications between Berlin and northern France. Several approaches to a solution are suggested by various correspondents, and I'd like comments from SS and anyone else on the following:

a. Bernard Green says "There were at least three routes over land for switched telephones from major towns in France to Berlin". If there were only three or four, I could have a scenario in which all but one have already been destroyed, say by bombing, so that the remaining one is essential in the way I require for the plot. But BG also says the Germans used direct land lines for both speech and telegrams. But surely teleprinter messages passed through exchanges? If not, did they pass through amplification stations? And could such stations be located in a regular telephone exchange? The Laxou material mentions a "transit exchange"--what's that?

b. I'm confused about whether the Germans did or did not have their own military phone system in France separate from the French civilian system. The translated material about the Laxou blockhouse suggest they repaired and used an existing French military telephone exchange. If there was a separate military system, might it be easier to disrupt than the French civilian system?

c. I'm very interested in the Reichsbahn's PBX. Even tanks were transported by rail, on special bogies. What is a main switching node? Might it be located in the same building as a regular telephone exchange? How would its destruction affect trains? Could the saboteurs ensure that the damage would take at least a week or two to repair?

d. I'm also unclear about what an automatic exchange is. The French government report says the Resistance attacked 26 out of 211 automatic exchanges and 67 out of 222 "manual multipliers". I presume a manual multiplier consists of switchboard girls plugging leads into sockets. If our exchange were automatic, who would work there? Could it be partly automatic?

e. SS says the Germans decided, in the thirties, not to instal direct-dial systems in Germany, on the grounds that manual operators would be better at re-routing when lines were busy, AND because a direct-dial system would be easier to disrupt. But we know that the French phone system was partly converted to automatic exchanges. Maybe a partial destruction of the system would serve my purpose. And wouldn't teleprinter messages normally go through automatic exchanges? It's hard to imagine how they would work through a manual exchange.

Dan, please give my private email address to both SS and BG and suggest that, if they are kind enough to help me with these questions, they could email me directly rather than send everything via you. I see that BG lives less than an hour from my home in Stevenage, so if we continue to exchange ideas no doubt we will talk on the phone or meet in person.

Many thanks and best regards,  
Ken.