

# Voices of War Life Story

Juan Pujol Garcia  
1912 - 1988





**Name:** Juan Pujol Garcia

**Other names/aliases:** Alaric, Bovril, GARBO

**Date of Birth:** 14th February 1912

**Place of birth:** Barcelona, Spain

**Nationality:** Spanish, Venezuelan

**Date of Death:** :10th October 1988

**Place of death:**

**Burial or memorials:**

**Unit(s):** MI5

**Networks:** ARABAL - name given by the Germans to the fictional network he created.

**Service No:**

**Rank:** Lieutenant

**Medals and Awards:** MBE (UK), Iron Cross, Second Class

**Education:** Maristes Valldemia College, Mataró, Catalonia.

**Clubs and Affiliations:**



## Life Story

Juan Pujol García was a spy and a double agent working for the British against the Germans. He was given the codename Garbo by the British; their German counterparts codenamed him Alaric and referred to his non-existent spy network as "Arabal". He had an interesting youth, working in many different trades including chicken farmer and he studied agriculture at college near Madrid.

It was his experiences in the Civil War that left him with a deep hatred of communism and fascism which was later to extend to the Nazi regime. In 1940, seeing what was happening in Europe he decided to volunteer to help the British as at the time, they were the only nation with a proper stand against Hitler. He approached the British Embassy in Madrid 3 times, even using his wife as a connection, but he was rebuffed at every attempt. Undeterred, he decided to become a German agent first to first demonstrate his worth.



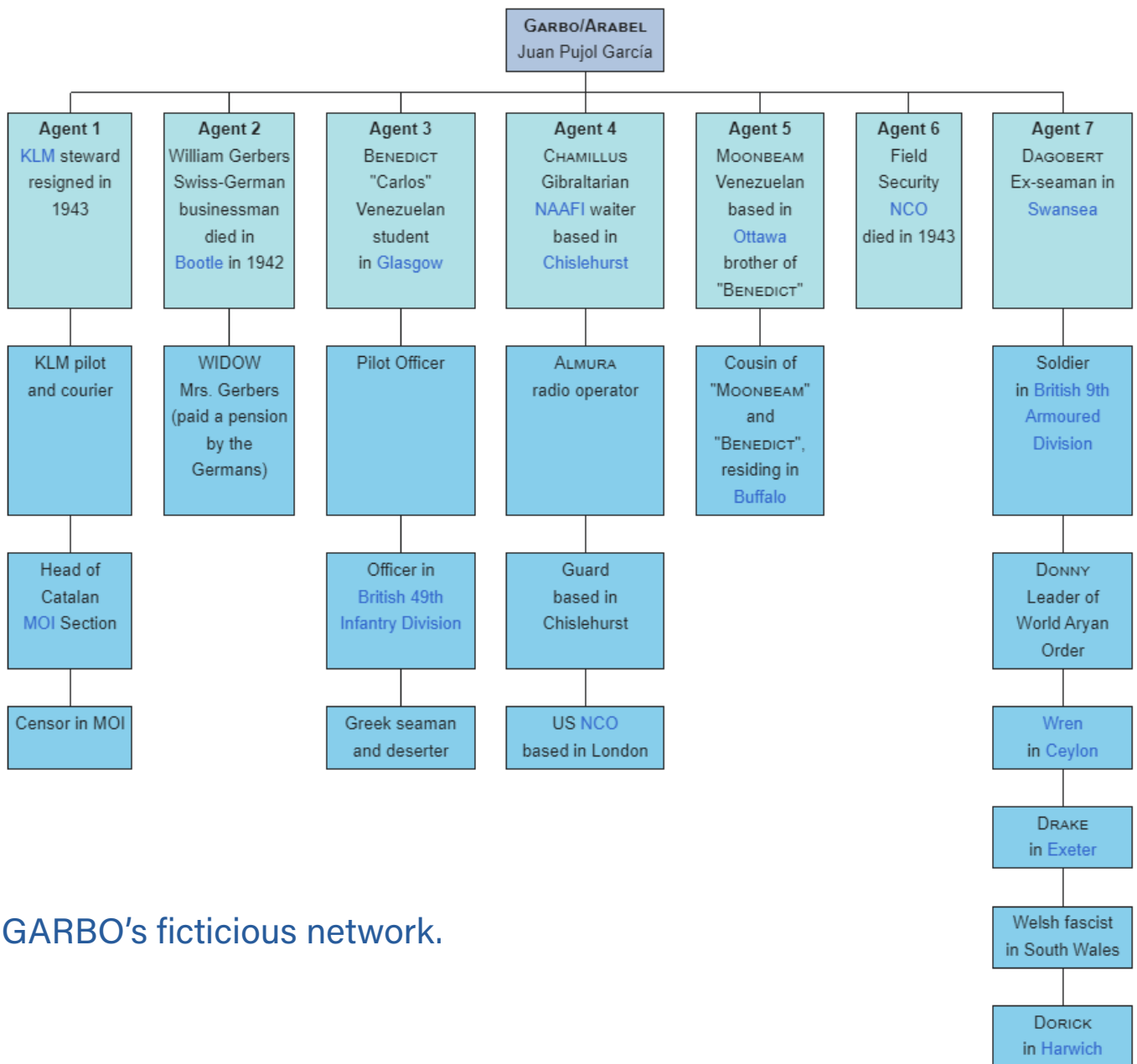
Pujol was a master of invention, and his numerous jobs during his youth no doubt gave him a varied base of information to create new identities. He settled on the role as a pro-Nazi Spanish government agent and managed to obtain a fake Spanish diplomatic passport by convincing a printer he was actually an official. Having established his back story, he made contact with an Abwehr agent in Madrid Friedrich Knappe Ratey (codename Frederico). He was welcomed as an agent and after some speedy training was sent to Britain with a codebook, £600 in his pocket and instructions to create a network of agents willing to betray their home country. Instead he moved to Lisbon and created bogus reports about Britain from a variety of public sources, including a tourist guide to Britain, train timetables to calculate his faked journeys, cinema newsreels and magazine adverts. Pujol's unfamiliarity with British currency used in Britain could have caused an issue - Britain's unit of currency (pound sterling), was subdivided into 20 shillings, each having twelve pence. Pujol was unable to calculate his expenses using this system so just listed them, saying he would send a total later.

"...little were the Germans to know that the small meek young Spaniard who then approached them volunteering to go to London to engage in espionage on their behalf would turn out to be a British agent. Still less were they to discover that the network which they instructed him to build up in the UK was to be composed of 27 characters who were nothing more than a figment of the imagination."

**Thomas Harris, MI5 case officer**

Although the information would not have withstood close examination, Pujol soon established himself as trustworthy. He began inventing fictitious sub-agents who could be blamed for false information and mistakes. Because he had never actually been to the UK, he made several mistakes, such as claiming





## GARBO's fictitious network.

that his alleged contact in Glasgow “would do anything for a litre of wine”, unaware the UK did not use the metric system. His reports were intercepted by the British Ultra communications interceptions programme, and seemed so credible that MI5 launched a full-scale hunt for the spy.

In February 1942, either he or his wife (accounts differ) approached the United States after it had entered the war, contacting U.S. Navy Lieutenant Patrick Demorest in the naval attache’s office in Lisbon, who recognised



Pujol's potential. Demorest contacted his British counterparts. When they realised it was Pujol who was responsible for the Germans expending considerable resources hunting down a non-existent convoy Pujol, MI5 finally realised his worth.

Pujol was sent to Britain on 24th April 1942 and given the code name "Bovril", after the drink concentrate. However, after he passed the security check conducted by MI6 Officer Desmond Bristow, Bristow suggested that he be accompanied by MI5 officer Tomás Harris, selected as he was fluent in Spanish. Together, Harris and Pujol wrote 315 letters with an average of 2,000 words. Pujol's wife and child were to join him later in the UK.

He was placed in an ordinary suburb in North London. From here he worked his network which consisted of 27 sub-agents including a waiter, travelling salesmen, students and a secretary who was also a mistress. One agent died in 1943 and was replaced by his wife. Another was found to be a double agent and was eliminated. There was also a strong network of fascists in Wales, the Brotherhood of Aryan. What united all the agents in this network was that they were entirely fictional, inventions of Garbo's active imagination. This false network spanned the country feeding back information that supported the main premise. The effort in keeping up with this was enormous. On occasion, Pujol had to invent reasons why his agents had failed to report information. For example, he reported that his Liverpool agent had fallen ill just before a major fleet movement from the port, and so was unable to report the event. This agent then conveniently died, with an obituary placed in the local newspaper as further evidence to convince the Germans. The Germans were even persuaded to pay a





pension to the agent's widow.

As with all of the double-cross agents, the information supplied was a mixture of complete fiction, genuine military information of little value, and valuable military intelligence artificially delayed, just enough to keep the belief in his abilities high. In November 1942, just before the Operation Torch, Garbo's fake agent on the River Clyde reported that a convoy of troopships and warships had left port, painted in Mediterranean camouflage. While the letter was sent by airmail and postmarked before the landings, it was deliberately delayed by British Intelligence in order to arrive too late to be useful. Pujol received a reply from his German handlers stating *"we are sorry they arrived too late but your last reports were magnificent."*

Pujol was using a fictitious courier, a Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM) pilot to carry his messages to the Germans. This meant that message deliveries were limited to the KLM flight schedule and anything important could therefore be delayed. In 1943 the Germans requested a speedier method so Pujol and Harris had to invent a radio operator. From August 1943 radio became the preferred method of communication. The advantage of this was that the code-breakers at Bletchley Park then had access to both the original text and the Enigma-encoded intercept of it, the code-breakers had the best possible source material for a chosen-plaintext attack on the Germans' Enigma key.

## Operation Fortitude

In January 1944, the Germans told Pujol that they believed a large-scale invasion in Europe was imminent and requested updates. This invasion



was the first inkling of the D-Day invasion planned for later that year, and Pujol played a leading role in Operation Fortitude, the deception campaign to conceal Overlord. He sent over 500 radio messages between January and June that year, at times more than twenty messages per day. His aim was to persuade them that the attack was coming via Calais instead.

To back this objective the Security Service agents and their case officers were carefully prepared to communicate information, frequently in unimportant scraps, with each scrap would contribute to a bigger picture.

At the heart of the deception plan was a whole “ghost” army, the First US Army Group (FUSAG). This comprised 11 non-existent divisions (150,000 men) beneath the command of General George S. Patton. This was also a fictitious appointment, carefully chosen as Hitler admired the American General. The FUSAG was apparently located in Kent and Essex, poised to join any invasion of France, far away from the genuine attack to the west. Other agents were used to substantiate this deception plan and as a whole, the operation was so successful that German Intelligence, and the German High Command believed the false story completely.

In order to maintain his credibility, it was decided that Garbo (or one of his agents) should forewarn the Germans of the timing and some details of the actual invasion of Normandy, although sending it too late for it to be effective action. Special arrangements were made with the German radio operators to be listening to Garbo through the night of 5/6 June 1944, using the story that a sub-agent was about to arrive with important information. However, when the call was made at 3 AM, no reply was received from the German





operators until 8 AM. This enabled Garbo to add more, genuine but now out-of-date, operational details to the message when finally received, and thus increase his standing with the Germans. Garbo told his German contacts of his anger that his message was missed, saying *“I cannot accept excuses or negligence. Were it not for my ideals I would abandon the work.”*

On June 9, D-Day +3, GARBO sent perhaps his most important message of all. It was very long and reported a meeting that he had with his agents that day. GARBO asked that it be conveyed urgently to the German High Command. Pointing out that the First US Army Group under Patton had not yet moved from South East England, GARBO reported authoritatively that the purpose of the “diversionary” Normandy landings was to help ensure the success of the forthcoming assault on the Pas de Calais.

The Germans accepted this claim, the culmination of Operation FORTITUDE, as accurate. It deceived them so completely that throughout July and August, they kept two armoured divisions and 19 infantry divisions in the Pas de Calais in anticipation of an invasion. This gave the Allies precious time to establish their bridgehead.

The German Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, was one of those taken in, even to the extent of overruling a proposal from General Erwin Rommel that his divisions should move from the Pas de Calais to assist the defence in Normandy. As the Official History of British Intelligence in WW2 comments, their “intervention in the Normandy battle really might have tipped the balance”.





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Ironically, GARBO's reputation among the Germans was enhanced by the whole D-Day affair. On 29 July 1944 he was informed that he had been awarded the Iron Cross by the Führer himself, for his "extraordinary services" to Germany. By return message Pujol and Harris expressed GARBO's "humble thanks" for such an honour, for which he was truly "unworthy". HE was the only agent to be awarded honoured from the British and Germans for their service.

**Right:** With his wife Araceli.



**Left:** Photo of GARBO in his MI5 file in the British Archives



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