

## **Tribute to Georges Villain (1881-1938), professor at the Dental School of Paris, during the Great War**

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### *A student globe-trotter*

Georges was born in Paris on May 31, 1881. Coming from a modest family and losing his father at an early age, he became the mechanic apprentice of a Parisian dentist called Georges Viau. As soon as he finished his apprenticeship, he went abroad to study dentistry in England with a dentist who soon became his private tutor. During his stay, he acquired a good knowledge of English. In 1902, when he returned to Paris, he attended the Dental School in Paris. In 1902, he became an assistant in the class of orthodontics of the Dental School of Paris and then a demonstrator in 1904. In 1903, he was qualified dental surgeon from the Faculty of Medicine in Paris. In 1905, Charles Godon, founder and head of the Dental School of Paris since 1880, had a premonition about the excellence of the young man and encouraged him to undertake a trip in the United States to study in that school. Upon his arrival, he enlisted at the University of Pennsylvania. He received his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree in 1906 [22].

### *His career as a teacher*

Back to Paris, he became the assistant of Isaac Davenport, an American dentist settled in the French capital and he resumed his position among the teaching staff of the Dental School in Paris. In 1907, he was the successful candidate of the competitive examination of Prosthetics Clinical Director, that of Clinical Director of Dental Crowns and Bridges and then that of Orthodontics in 1908. In 1909, he was appointed professor of theoretical lectures relating to Prosthetics, Dental Bridges and Orthodontics, a position to which he devoted his life. Displaying remarkable educational qualities, he left among his students a deep impression and a grateful memory. He was considered to be an enthusiastic man who was affable with his students [22].

In 1907, he joined the board of directors of the school. There, he held the position of general secretary from 1910 to 1919. On that year, he was appointed teaching director. The programmes were revised under his authority. He played a major role in the developing of teaching on shop dummies and in the teaching of clinical prosthesis and of laboratory. In 1920, he was appointed assistant director and then in 1926, he became the new head of the Dental School of Paris. He remained so until his death [18].

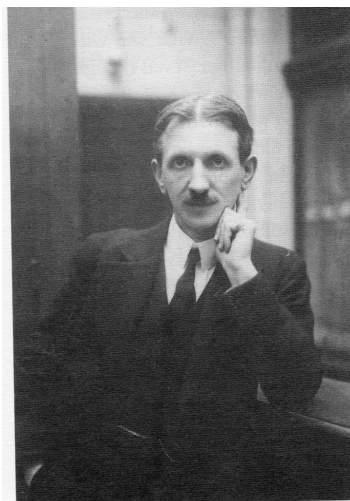


FIG. 1 – Professor Georges Villain [5].

### *Successor of Charles Godon (1854-1923)*

The worthy successor of Charles Godon, he focused his efforts on the maintaining of the worldwide reputation of the title « Graduated from the Dental School of Paris ». Besides, when Godon retired, he

entrusted Georges Villain and Léon Frey with the management of the Dental Surgeon's library that he had founded [17].

Villain was the author of numerous communications at the Odontological Society of Paris. He became its vice-president in 1913 and then its president in 1920. On that same year, he also took the vice-presidency of the odontological section of the French Association for the Advancement of Sciences that he would eventually run in 1921 [18; 22].

#### *A tireless worker*

Bringing unequalled ardour and generosity in the circulation of his ideas which were based on the widespread knowledge of all the fields of Odontology, Villain produced significant works. He also was the member of the editorial board of the newspaper entitled *L'Odontologie* and had remained so for thirty years [22].

« *In February 1923, Georges Villain introduced a new process of teeth immobilization developing what will be commonly called « the contention stellite* ». At the end of his career, he was particularly interested in the occlusal pressures applied on teeth [23].

#### *An orthodontic specialist*

A master of orthodontics, he carried out one of his most persevering works of dispersion aiming at the disease prevention of dento-maxillary anomalies and deformities which brought him to take the chair of the Maxillofacial Orthopedics Annual Congress from 1924 to 1933. Meanwhile, he ran the European Orthodontological Society in 1932 and chaired its meeting the year after. From 1934 to 1937, he was the chairman of the International College of Dentists [22].

#### *The French dental surgeon at the beginning of the First World War*

The war broke out in 1914. It's a stammering profession that started the conflict. Indeed, the Brouardel law from the professor in medicine of the same name just gave dentists a legitimate status in 1892. Besides, they only held subordinate functions at the outbreak of the war. They were mainly stretcher-bearers and male nurses. Like many others, those soldiers distinguished themselves by their bravery often at the cost of their lives. Jean Piel Melcion d'Arc, who belonged to a regiment of the first French regiments of Zouaves, « *was heroically killed on November 13 1914 by repelling a German attack which attempted to cross a bridge during the Yser battle*. » His regiment honoured him [15; 16].

The Army also honoured Adrien Audefroy from the 44th battery of the 28th artillery regiment. « *Eventhough he was the target of violent fire for two following days, he kept his head and succeeded in providing both the service of his cannon and that of his telephone, in communicating trust to his men and therefore, in inflicting serious damage on the targets* [2 ; 15]. »

On October 15 1914, a ministerial circular allowed the dental surgeons to be incorporated within the military nursing sections in order to exercise their duty for emergency care on the combatants but still as soldiers and not as doctors. On that same day, in Clermont-en-Argonne, the first dental practice of campaign was founded. Its head was the first class surgical major assistant Armand Lévy. On October 30, numerous petitions were signed for the creation of a status for military dentists by dentists themselves and other dental associations. On November 10, another circular was published. The circular #14 198 C/7 ordained the opening of three centers of Stomatology and of Maxillofacial Prosthetics in Paris, Lyon and Bordeaux. That of Val-de-Grâce in the capital was the first to be created [12; 15]. On December 21, the first dental prosthetic surgeon, recruited in the health detachment or the military units, was appointed to the hospitals of evacuation. His mission consisted in putting special dressings and temporary devices of contention on the casualties affected by facial and jaw mutilations. Moreover, it was advocated that in the front, qualified dentists could give soldiers dental care when needed and notably in the case of dental affections. On December 24, a new circular authorized the « *regional directors of the Health Service to call for the help of volunteers to insure the functioning of garrison dental practices where there were no mobilized dentists* [2 ; 7]. »

On March 10 1915, the Official Journal published the decisions of the Advanced Consultative Assembly of the Health Service but its decisions were not immediately implemented. Dental surgeons were appointed in each regiment of the dental service. Each military units were equipped with a dental car, made up of a dental surgeon and a dental technician [16]. Dental surgeons without appointments were part of the military nursing contingent. On April 14, through an official letter, the Minister of

War Alexandre Millerand agreed with the cooperation of the Dental School of Paris who gave soldiers dental care. On May 10, the same minister approved the cooperation of the Rescue Committee for the maxillary and facial wounds. On June 11, the school had to insure the service of a 200-bed ambulance for the soldiers mutilated on the face. This ambulance was created in the hospital for convalescents in the Lycée Michelet in Vanves. This service was provided with a staff and equipment from the Dental School of Paris. At that particular time, Georges Villain was already present on all fronts [14]. On July 1, Justin Godart became the undersecretary of State in the Health Service. On July 31, he visited the first dental car. On that same day, Godart issued a circular that decided the bracing of toothless soldiers within a range of fifteen to twenty days.

On August 25th, Justin Godart visited the hospital of the Lycée Michelet in Vanves, the local centre of the Dental School of Paris. When confronted to the self-sacrifice of his men, the newspapers were moved by the absence of dentists among the teams of stomatology *Petit Journal* (20/08/1915), *France de demain* (21/08/1915) and *L'Humanité* (29/08/1915) [3].



FIG. 2 – A dentist operates a man on the doorstep of the aid station [15].



FIG. 3 – A dentist on the front near the « Chemin des Dames » - September 1917 [4].

### *Mobilized...*

Let's return to Georges Villain and let's concentrate on his actions at the dawn of the « Der des Der » (meaning « the war to end all wars »). Professor of dental prosthetics in the Dental School of Paris at the beginning of the First World War, Georges Villain was mobilized on August 2 1914 as auxiliary at the depot of the 13th artillery regiment in Vincennes. There, he created a dental service that was in charge of checking and restoring each man's mouth before his departure to the front. On September 1914, he founded the first service devoted to put bracing on toothless soldiers (E. D. P. V. G. 88). Meanwhile, he was the head of the garrison dental service of the Dental School of Paris (D. M. 45) [1].

### *A great organizer*

Since their creation, he ran the service of maxillofacial prosthetics of the V. G. 88 military clinic (1915), of the Michelet hospital (1915), the surgical and maxillofacial prosthetics services within the Canadian hospital of Saint-Cloud (1916), those of the hospital 112 in Saint-Ouen (1917) and of the hospital Edith Cavell (1917) [1; 22].

In 1916, he organized the school of physical therapy for mutilated soldiers within the Dental School of Paris. He was appointed army dental officer as soon as the rank was created. He was in charge of the dental prosthetics branch of the Rachel School, which was entirely devoted to widows and orphans. He implemented dental services in factories. He notably officiated in the Renault and Citroën factories [1]. In 1917, he initiated mobile dental teams that were the result of a wish made during the Inter-allied Dental Congress of 1916. He was also in charge of their implementation in the camp of Mailly

in July 1916. The command sent him congratulations letters concerning the functioning of the various clinics set up in this camp and which allowed to insure the restoration of the mouths and braces of 3,000 men in less than five weeks without delaying their military training. On that same year, he ran the service of dental assistance implemented for the discharged soldiers n°2 of the Dental School of Paris [22].



FIG. 5 – The Dental School of Paris in 1890 [5].

*He campaigned for the rank of army dental officer.*

Secretary of the National Dental Federation (NDF), he worked for the recognition of the status and the rank of army dental officer. On September 9 1915, Villain sent a report ordered by Justin Godart on August 31, Undersecretary of State to the Military Health System from 1915 to 1918, in the name of the NDF, to the Minister of War Gallieni, which demanded the training of dental officers on the front [16]. On September 13, Godart met Villain once again during his visit in the Dental School of Paris. On February 26, following numerous discussions with Blatter and Villain, the minister of War Joseph Gallieni demanded the creation of a dental officer within the army to the President of the French Republic Raymond Poincaré. On that same day, Raymond Poincaré issued a decree creating corps of army dental officers that were only aimed at lasting during the war. This decree appeared in the Official Journal on March 3 [2]. On February 27, Godart added that the soldiers upgraded to the rank of army dental officers were 1,000 with the rank of warrant officer. Their uniform was that of warrant officer nurses with a silver caduceus ornated with the letter D of 1cm high. They were attached to the Ministry of Defense and to the Home Office and received orders from surgeon generals of their units. They wore the armband planned by the Geneva Convention signed by the French on September 22 1864 [15; 16]. Villain was triumphant.

First, on January 1916, Blatter, the president of the NDF and Georges Villain who represented the Dental School of Paris, met Lacaze, the French Naval Minister, several times to attract his attention on the need to create naval dental corps. Lacaze also sent a report to President Poincaré who immediately approved it on March 1 1916. The naval dentists were assimilated to medical auxiliaries with the same uniform and the same badges. The two decrees appeared in the Official Journal. The NDF then hastened to send the text to all the French dental surgeons in a letter dating from March 3 1916. Blatter, the president of the NDF and Villain, its general secretary, were the signatories [2].

On March 4, the Official Journal published another decree, which specified that the Naval Minister, the admiral Lacaze, was authorized to recruit dental surgeons to assist the naval doctors from whom they received orders. A decree published on the same date ordered that the unranked dentists were to be appointed to nursing sections. On June 9, the ministerial instruction of stomatological services n° 8119 3/7, the army dentists' true charter, established the organization of surgical and maxillofacial centres, service centres for toothless soldiers and garrison dental offices in a thorough and detailed manner [2; 7].

From 1917, dental schools organized bracing centres for ambulatory sick men in collaboration with military hospitals and stomatological centres. On March 10, Villain was inexhaustible and was always behind Godart's back who finally ordered to make dental braces free for the soldiers and non-commissioned officers. On April 7, the regimental dental officer was born. At the end of 1917, 50 army dental officers were counted. On July 3, a bill informed the dentists that they were to receive the required equipment they needed from September 1 [2; 7].

The negotiations with Godart went on until his departure on February 8 1918. The NDF praised his remarkable work in the service of the profession.

From March 20 1918, Lucien Mourier, Justin Godart's successor, received Blatter and Villain, and confirmed them the next introduction of a bill insuring the creation of dental officers. On March 25 1918, it was introduced in the Chamber of Deputies in the name of the Minister of War and that of the Finance Minister. On April 25 1918, a delegation made up of Blatter and Villain for the NDF and the three headmasters of schools from Lyon and Paris, met Mourier and debated over some clauses of the bill such as the future officers' distinctive insignia. Throughout the month of May, the higher authority of the profession met to insure the rapporteur M. Lorimy's active support and that of the Army Commission of the Chamber of Deputies. On July 5 1918, the latter issued a law that insured a long-lasting army dental corps for good. The dentists were to obtain the rank of lieutenant and second lieutenant. On Tuesday 8 October 1918, the Senate approved this law. On October 18, 1918, the Parliament voted the law that appeared in the Official Journal on October 20 1918 [2].

From 1914 to 1918, 88 dentists died on the front. 156 citations were delivered to dentists [2; 7 ; 15].

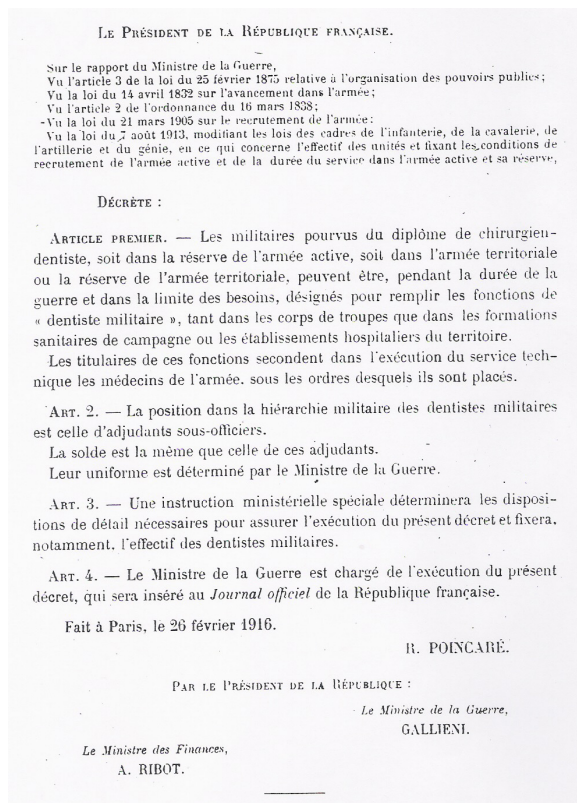


FIG. 6 – Raymond Poincaré's decree of February 26 1916 ordering the creation of a dental officer in the French army [2].

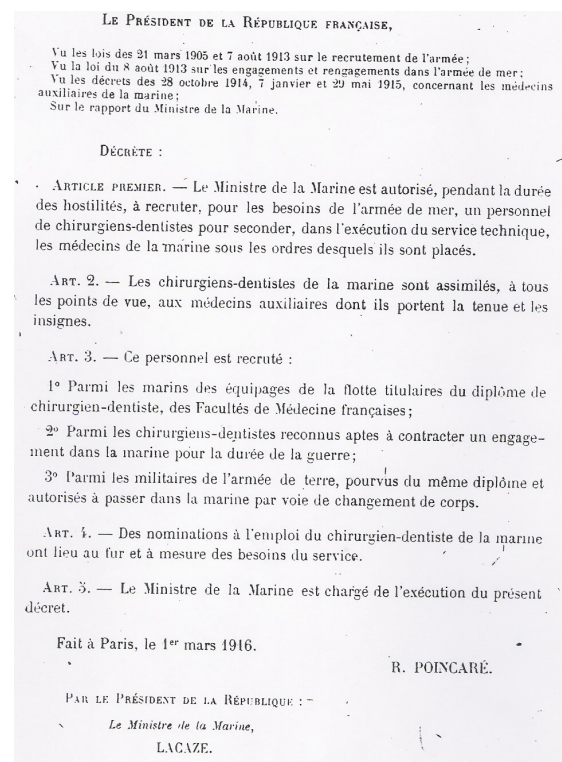


FIG. 7 – Raymond Poincaré's decree of March 1 1916 ordering the creation of a dental officer in the French navy [2].

*After the armistice...*

After the demobilisation, there were no dental officers left in the active army. Therefore, on October 23 1919, Mourier decided to call upon civil dentists offering them interesting financial remuneration. Through Villain, the NDF got involved so that the practitioners could continue their action with the seriously injured of the face. Moreover, Villain insisted on the importance of the State's involvement to cure and equip the injured of the face with braces during their life. Finally, he made an appeal to his civil colleagues' patriotic and professional senses so that they would serve the cause of the national interest with « their science, their conscience and their devotion [2]. » « *Now that we are civil again, we should continue the active and praiseworthy role that our profession played during the war. We should do it because it is our patriotic and professional duty to allow our professional organizations to carry out their action until the complete satisfaction of our fair demands [21].* »

### *The Inter-allied Dental Congress*

On November 9 1916, the Inter-allied Dental Congress took place in Paris. It also held its sessions from November 9 to 13 for the presentations and communications, and from November 14 to 18, for the visits in the different services and the different trainings in Paris that took care of prosthetics and maxillofacial restorations. It was on November 13 that the general assembly took place. Villain initiated it [16].

Delegates organized conferences and fieldwork as well as presentations on sick men within the head office of the Dental School of Paris, located at 45, rue de la Tour d'Auvergne [15]. There, a very complete exhibition of various casts braces and devices for temporary or definitive reduction, jaw block, dilatation for various trismus, labial and oral atresia.

After the solemn session chaired by the Undersecretary of State of the French Defence Health service, Justin Godart, numerous reports and communications were read on the treatment of maxillary fractures and particularly, those of the lower jawbone. In those works, everything was dealt with: from fractures without significant loss of bone substance and poor state to the complete loss of the jawbone, osteofibrous pseudarthrosis, osteosynthesis, bone grafting...

There, they also presented the attitudes to adopt in such cases, the first aid techniques and the various methods to support and immobilize the fractures. According to the programme, they also discussed about toothless men as well as the studies concerning the organization of dental services on the front and regional services [6 ; 8 ; 11 ; 13 ; 19].

The congress slowed down the action of most of the stomatological services in France since numerous dentists of garrison attended it [19]. After the congressional meeting, Villain got a big round of applause from the audience. This congress was a great success [2; 7].

In 1917, Georges Villain published all the acts of congress. They represented two volumes, 1 600 pages and 1 100 figures. Villain published them in less than a year without neglecting his various responsibilities [1; 20].

### *Mandated by the government*

During the war, Godart appointed him head of mission in England to the British Dental Association in June 1916 and then in the USA, in Chicago to the mixed congresses of the Canadian Dental Association and of the National Dental Association in the USA, in July 1918. Following the request of the American Institute of Dental Teachers, he attended its meeting which took place in Atlanta on January 1919, and hold a series of conferences which focused on traumatic lesions of facial structures, jawbones, in thirty American and Canadian dental universities [9; 18; 22].

In 1917, the American army requested him to give lectures in the Medical Training Schools of Langres in France and in Camp Greenleaf at Chattanooga (USA). Then, he was once again appointed as a delegate by the French government in the US and Canada in 1919 and then 1933 in Chicago [9; 18; 22].

### *NDF and FDI*

He was made member of the National Dental Federation for the first time in 1907, became its president in 1924 and remained so until his death. Likewise, he joined the International Dental Federation in 1908 and from then, attended all the society's events [18]. His membership was of paramount importance. He became its assistant secretary in 1914 and its general secretary in 1926. Highly involved in its works, he became the chairman of the 8th International Dental Congress that was hold in Paris in 1931. Through this great meeting, he displayed such a tremendous activity that the Congress was one of the greatest scientific events of the time. 3,000 delegates met for this occasion and acclaimed him when he became its president, a position that he held until 1936. He was made its honorary president. He was its third French president after Charles Godon, the founder of the federation who chaired it during two terms from 1901 to 1904 and then from 1909 to 1910. Its second French president was E. Sauvez, who held that position from 1907 to 1909 [10].

Villain made sure to publish all of his reports and works that were presented there into two big volumes of more than 3,000 pages. After the Congress whose organization revealed to be remarkable in every way and during the gala, Villain was given a bronze engraved sign by the members for his outstanding work [22].

### *Villain and Nazism*

On July 28, 1933, during the annual Congress of the International Dental Federation in Edinburgh, George Villain, the president, delivered a thundering speech lambasting the crimes of the Nazi regime. Villain strongly advocated freedom and the idea of democracy and overtly wished to help the distressed German Jews notably if they were dentists. He partnered up with Maurice Roy, his great friend to have the National Dental Federation's executive committee adopt a motion stating: « *Duly brought together in session in Edinburgh on July 28 1933, the International Dental Federation's executive committee only considers the protection of the rights acquired by the dentists from all over the world through their diplomas delivered by competent authorities of their respective countries and declares that by no means, an issue of race, religion, politics can restrain freedom and the carrying out of our duly qualified colleagues' duties. Likewise, no imposed restriction could make them breach their moral and professional obligations.* » The latter was unanimously adopted apart from the Germans who left the International Dental Federation [10]. Until his death, he tried to help and then to save the Jewish dentists from the Hitlerian yoke.

### *Unanimous honours ...*

Being the member of honour from numerous foreign congresses, a great number of societies insisting on having him as their honorary member: the Belgian General Dental Association, the Finnish Association of Forensic Odontology, the Royal Society of Medicine, the Montreal-based Canadian Dental Association, the Sociedad Dental of Caracas (Venezuela), Dansk Tandloegeförening (Denmark), the Swiss Society of Odonto-Stomatology, the Academia de Estomatologia del Peru, the Sociedad Odontologica of Valapraiso and that of Chile, the Federacion Dental Mexicana, the Japan Dental Association, the Kaiserlich Deutsche Leopoldina Akademie der Naturforscher (Germany), the Association of Dental surgeons in Bulgaria, the Association of stomatologists of Lviv (Poland), the Austrian dental association [18 ; 22]...

He was also appointed Doctor of dental surgery (honoris causa) and Honorary Professor of the Laval University of Montreal, Doctor ès sciences (honoris causa) of the University of Pennsylvania and Doctor of law (honoris causa) of the Loyola University Chicago [22].

### *... And international decorations*

Besides, he was appointed knight of the Legion of Honour in 1923, then officer in 1936. He was also commander of the Order of Isabella the Catholic in 1925, knight of the Order of Leopold in 1933 and commander of the Austrian merit in 1937 [18].

### *Worldwide tribute were paid to him following his death*

He tragically died following a car accident at the age of 57. At this time, he is still one of the highest figures of the French dentistry. He left behind him 241 publications in French, English and German. All over the world, he presented 129 communications in French and in English. Tributes following his death multiplied in the whole world in fraternal newspapers and in all languages [17; 22].

A bust was inaugurated in his honour on July 23 1939 at the Dental School of Paris located at 45, rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, in the 9th district of Paris [22].

Today, a prize by the International Dental Federation awarding scientific research still bears his name.

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