COMET LINES

FREEDOM TRAILS OF EUROPE

Inspired by Stories of

Resistance & Escape Lines

During World War II

From Ireland, Spain, Poland & Belgium

Supported by Europe for Citizens

Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

COMET
LINES
FREEDOM TRAILS OF EUROPE

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Implemented by

- Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality, Ireland
- Theater & Reconciliation, Belgium
- Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi, Poland
- Iniciativas De Futuro Para Una Europa Social, Spain

Supported by Europe for Citizens programme of the European Union and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ireland. A special thanks to all those who took part in or contributed to the project and creation of the book.

Europe for Citizens
The aim of the Europe for Citizens Programme is to contribute to citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity and to encourage the democratic participation of citizens at EU level. The Europe for Citizens programme supports initiatives to strengthen remembrance and to enhance civic participation at EU level. Europe for Citizens is implemented by the Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency (EACEA). https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens_en

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IBN 978-0-9957376-5-5

Copywright: Smashing Times

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SMASHINGTIMES
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR
THE ARTS & EQUALITY

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Comet Lines – Freedom Trails of Europe was a yearlong, transnational project with four European partners from Ireland, Spain, Poland and Belgium that used creative processes of theatre workshops, performances, film and new digital technologies to promote a remembrance of European history with a focus on 'Escape Lines' during WWII.

Escape lines' were secret World War II networks set up to assist Allied soldiers and citizens leave Nazi occupied territory during WWII. Today the Escape Lines are remembered as 'Freedom Trails' where citizens from across Europe and beyond, including the children and relatives of those who worked on the escape lines and those who were saved, come together to walk parts of the routes of the original lines especially over the Pyrenees. The aim is to remember and honor those who risked and in many cases lost their lives to help others be free.

The Comet Lines project gathered a range of stories of those involved in the escape lines and freedom trails of Europe, remembering the stories of 'helpers', escapees and evaders - those who either organised or used the escape lines of mainland Europe during WWII. The stories were used as inspiration to create a theatre workshop, performance and creative arts symposium, using the stories and activities as a catalyst for bringing people together to raise awareness of the power of European solidarity and the role of the EU to promote peace, democracy, and gender equality today.
The project remembers the stories of both men and women who set up and worked the escape lines including Belgium woman Countess Andrée Eugénie Adrienne de Jongh (1916-2007), nickname Dédée, who set up the Comet line (Le Réseau Comète) for escaped Allied soldiers and airmen. The Comet Line or Comète is estimated to have repatriated some 800 Allied servicemen who themselves were aided by over 3,000 civilians, 700 of whom were arrested and some 290 shot dead or died during deportation.

Established in 1940 in Brussels, the Comet Line provided a means of escape for Allied soldiers and

airmen on the run in Nazi occupied Europe. The escapees were given food, clothing and false identity papers by members of the Resistance in countries such as Belgium, France and Spain and were then guided by a chain of 'helpers' taking them through France, over the Pyrenees into neutral Spain and finally to freedom through Gilbraltar. The network was established by De Jongh, a courageous 24-year-old Belgian woman who took enormous risks actively setting up and running the network with people from different nationalities and who herself personally escorted many of her charges out of France at risk to her own life. Dédée's own hero was Edith Cavell, a British nurse shot in 1915 in Schaerbeek for helping troops escape from occupied Belgium into neutral Netherlands during the first World War.

Comet Lines – Freedom Trails of Europe was implemented by Smashing Times, Ireland (lead partner), in partnership with IFES Coop, Valencia, Spain; University of Humanities and Economics (AHE), Łódz, Poland, and Theatre et Reconciliation, Brussels, Belgium. The project was supported by Europe for Citizens under Strand One: European Remembrance with support in Ireland from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – Communicating Europe Initiative.

Impacts

By focusing on stories of 'helpers' and escapees - those who either organised or used the escape lines of mainland Europe during WWII - the project explored what happens when intolerance and totali-

1. https://www.azkunazentroa.eus/az/ingl/activities/the-comet-line-%E2%80%93-the-escape-network/al_evento_fa

tarianism take over and democratic processes are denied and encourages debate on contemporary democratic achievements in Europe today.

The annual transnational work programme implemented for Comet Lines: Freedom Trails of Europe used creative and cultural processes including story telling and performance to generate a shared remembrance of European history and to reach a wide range of European citizens at local, regional, national and transnational levels. The project promotes an understanding amongst young people and adults of the European union, it's history, functions and diversity and the values it is built on, raising awareness of the importance of civic and democratic participation at EU level, fostering European citizenship and the active involvement of citizens in the construction of a stronger EU.

By exploring the causes of intolerance and totalitarianism and remembering stories of solidarity during WWII, the project raised awareness of how citizens can actively transcend borders and come together to combat intolerance and to promote a fair and equal society for all. The project linked with the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage by promoting awareness of intangible cultural heritage through the stories, values and principles of the Escape Lines and the people who worked and were saved by them. The stories for this project came from a range of countries representing a shared sense of belonging within Europe, linking local heritage to European memory and promoting intercultural dialogue and solidarity at a European level in the past and today.

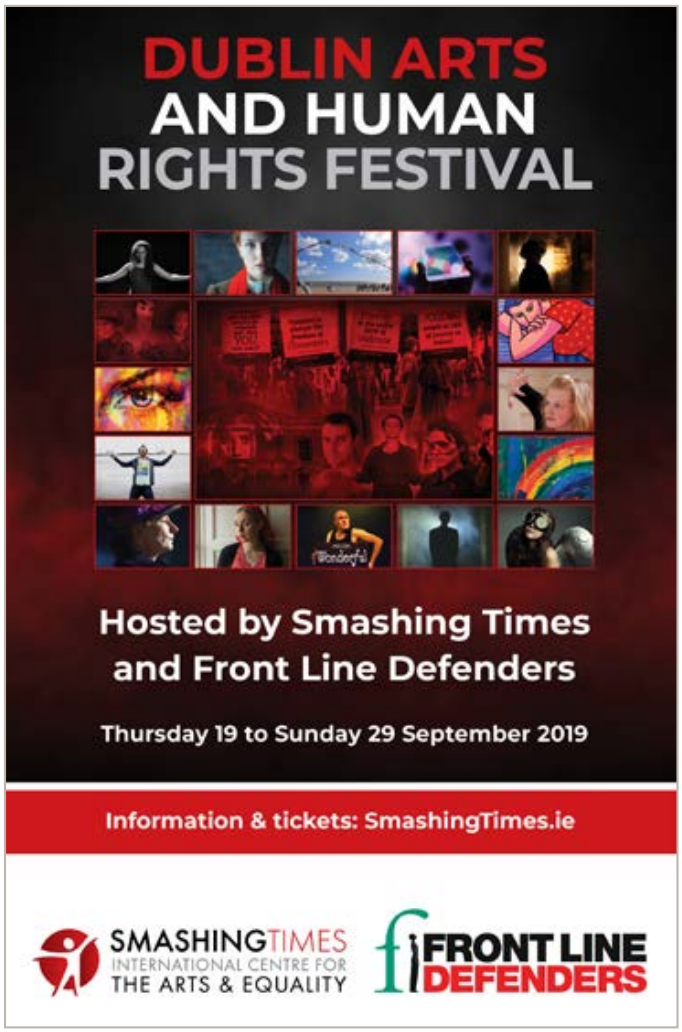
Gender Equality is a fundamental principle of the EU and a key component for democracy and peace. Women's rights are an essential component of universal human rights. Women are powerful drivers of change and this transnational project remembered promoted equality by remembering the role of both women and men in Europe and the power of the EU in promoting peace and gender equality for all. The stories of all genders areimportant as they highlight how solidarity encourages tolerance, mutual understanding, inter-cultural dialogue and reconciliation, all key values for building democracy, equality and peace today.

A key part of the project is to establish a transnational European network made up of different types of organisations including civil society organisations, local authorities, research institutions and youth and community groups. Links are made with all countries in Europe including the WWII Escape Lines Memorial Society from Great Britain to across Europe. With this wide breath of countries and cultures we can encourage remembrance, debate, and the sharing of common history and values. As lead partner Smashing Times were delighted to welcome over ten European partner organisations to Dublin for the final Comet Lines symposium presented as part of the inaugural Dublin Arts and Human Rights festival which took place in September 2019.

Creative Actions

Creative actions implemented by the project are two transnational partner exchanges; a communications and dissemination strategy; a transnational book (digital) with articles and stories of people from Ireland, Belgium, Poland and Spain who were involved in the escape lines and Resistance across Europe during WWII. The stories are used to inspire the creation of a theatre workshop model and performance implemented with panel discussions; and an international creative arts symposium bringing citizens together to remember the people who managed the escape lines during WWII and the solidarity that existed between citizens from countries including Great Britain, Poland, Belgium, Ireland, France and Spain.

The project culminated in an international symposium on Thursday 19 September 2019 held as part of the inaugural Dublin Arts and Human Rights festival hosted by Smashing Times and Frontline Defenders in Dublin, Ireland and attended by over 30 arts and civil society organisations from across Europe and members of the public. There were three main events held on Thursday 19 October, conducted by the four partners as part of the Comet Line: Freedom Trails of Europe project.



Dublin Arts and Human Rights festival hosted by Smashing Times and Frontline Defenders

Mary Moynihan, Smashing Times speaking at Comet Lines Freedom Trails of Europe Symposium, Ireland, September 2019

International Symposium

The first event of the International Symposium was 'Freedom Trails of Europe: Intersections between the Arts, Equality, Human Rights' held on 19 September, 10am-1pm at the Samuel Beckett Theatre. This event featured panel discussions, theatre workshops, and song. Helen McEntee, Minister for European Affairs, TD Meath East, Ireland, presented a keynote speech on the role of the EU and European solidarity to promote democracy, equality and peace today, with reference to the founding of the EU after WWII and how, in times of crisis, European citizens can come together to transcend borders and combat intolerance.

The panel of speakers included John Morgan, Lawyer and Secretary, Basque Pyrenees Freedom Trails Association (BPFTA); festival curator Mary Moynihan, Writer, Theatre and Film-Maker, and Artistic Director, Smashing Times who spoke about arts, creativity and human rights, linking the arts within a EU context to democracy, equality and peace. Frédérique Lecomte, Director, Theater & Reconciliation, Belgium and the Congo spoke about her work using creative processes to promote conflict resolution and reconciliation in the Congo.

Following the panel talks, participants then took part in a series of workshops involving citizens in fun activities to promote remembrance and awareness raising in relation to stories of solidarity during WWII and the role and benefits of the EU today

Top: L to R Megan O Malley, Carla Ryan and Michael Bates in Shadow of My Soul by Mary Moynihan inspired by Comet Lines - Freedom Trails of Europe

Above: Fernando Benavente, Spain, performing at Comet Lines Freedom Trails of Europe Symposium, Ireland, September 2019

Participants at event organised by Theatre Reconciliation, Belgium for Comet Lines Freedom Trails of Europe project supported by Europe for Citizens. Photo by Véronique Vercheval

for promoting democracy, equality and peace. Facilitators were Tamar Keane, Kamila Witerska, Frédérique Lecomte, Larissa Manley, and Michael McCabe. The moderator was Dil Wickremasinghe, a journalist and human rights activist and the event ended with a rousing rendition of a song of Revolutionary Change by Fernando Benavente, IFESCOOP, Valencia, Spain.

The second event on 19 September was a full-length workshop presented by Frédérique Lecomte, Director of Belgian company Theater & Reconciliation. Frédérique showcased and discussed her extraordinary work that she had developed using creative processes to promote conflict resolution and reconciliation in the Congo and demonstrated the new Remembrance Through Theatre workshop model developed as part of the Comet Lines: Freedom Trails of Europe project.

The third event Escape Routes and Freedom Trails – European Solidarity between Nations, 19 September 7.30pm, took place at the Samuel Beckett Theatre and was a fantastic evening of theatre, film, music and panel discussions celebrating and remembering extraordinary stories of Irish and European men and women involved in the Resistance and in 'escape lines'. The event remembered the escape lines and freedom trails as well as modern day experiences of human rights defenders working on civilian rescue operations in Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, etc) today.

Dil Wickremasinghe

The evening began with a powerful theatre performance Shadow of My Soul by Mary Moynihan, directed by Dr Eric Weitz and performed by Carla Ryan, Megan O'Malley and Michael Bates, with research by John Morgan, lawyer and co-founder of the Basque Pyrenees Freedom Trails Association (BPFTA). Shadow of My Soul remembers stories of Irish and European women and men involved in the Resistance and in escape lines – secret World War II networks set up to assist Allied soldiers and citizens leave Nazi occupied territory during WWII. This is a play of remembrance

reflecting on extraordinary stories of ordinary people in resistance during a time of darkness when people dared to hope for a future out there. 'I never cried in front of the Nazis, I only cried at night. They stole my sleep but they never took my freedom or my life' – words inspired by Andrée 'Nadine' Dumont, Member of the Comet Escape Line in Belgium during WWII.

The play was followed by a screening of a new film documentary Réseau Sans Nom by Basque film company Bira Productions; followed by a panel discussion with invited guest speakers celebrating and remembering Escape Lines and Freedom Trails. Audience members heard about courageous Belgium woman and human rights defender Andrée de Jongh, who set up the Comet Line that saved over 800 Allied service men as well as courageous Irish men and women active during WWII including Katherine Anne McCarthy, Mary Cummins, Catherine Crean, Margaret Kelly and Samuel Beckett.

Artists and speakers for this unique event included Mary Moynihan, writer, theatre and filmmaker, Artistic Director of Smashing Times; John Morgan, Dublin lawyer and co-founder of the Basque Pyrenees Freedom Trails' Association (BPFTA); Eneko Aizpurua, award-winning writer, Basque Country, and Trinity graduate Seán Binder, from Cork, an Aid Worker who spent over 100 days in a Greek jail arising from his work volunteering with refugees.

A musical highlight of the evening was a performance of Don't See Any Lines by singer/songwriter Hilary Bow featuring Hilary Bow and Liam Ó Maonlaí on vocals. The single Don't See Any Lines was released on World Refugee Day (20 June 2019) by Cork singer and songwriter Hilary Bow.

Overall, Comet Lines – Freedom Trails of Europe was a huge success reaching 312,730 citizens across Europe and the project partners extend a special thanks to Europe for Citizens for supporting this innovative work.

Right: Participants at event organised by Theatre Reconciliation, Belgium for Comet Lines Freedom Trails of Europe project supported by Europe for Citizens. Photos by Véronique Vercheval

Escape Lines during WWII

By Mary Moynihan

Strangers gave me their beds, their food, their friendship; they risked their lives for my safety. What more could a man ask of a fellow human?

ENGLISH SOLDIER ON THE RUN IN NAZI OCCUPIED EUROPE, WWII [2]

Secret World War II networks known as 'escape lines' were set up to assist Allied soldiers and citizens leave Nazi occupied territory during WWII. Numerous escape lines were established both large and small and many of them provided a much-needed escape route particularly for the increasing numbers of Allied servicemen trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe. During the Second World War over a quarter of a million Allied soldiers and airmen – British American, Australian, Canadian and others – were stranded behind enemy lines and became prisoners of war, filing scores of camps in Eastern Germany and Poland . . . just a few thousand – somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 – evaded capture, stayed free' [3] and made it home. 'They hid in hovels and chateaux, smart city flats and coal miner's cottages. They walked hundreds of miles, swam raging rivers in the dark, climbed mountains, sneaked past German barracks and frontier posts, talked their way through checkpoints and snap inspections or, more often, posed as deaf mutes and said nothing. Many chanced their luck on the railways where Gestapo agents and collaborationist local police roamed the corridors on the lookout for runaways.

Just as many thousands tried and failed. Caught in the Nazi dragnet which covered the continent from the tip of Holland to the Pyrenees, often betrayed by those they thought friends, they were bundled into captivity – or worse. Unknown numbers were caught and summarily executed, their very presence on occupied soil a symbol of resistance to the invader and an affront to the German's sense of invincibility. [4]

Key escape lines included The Comet Escape Line (in French, Réseau Comète), operating in Belgium, France and Spain and The Pat O'Leary Escape Lines which operated in Belgium, France and Spain, bringing escaping and evading servicemen down from the North of France to Marseille and then over the Pyrenees into Spain. Other escape lines included the Shelburne Escape Line which operated mainly around Brittany and the Tatra Trail in Poland.

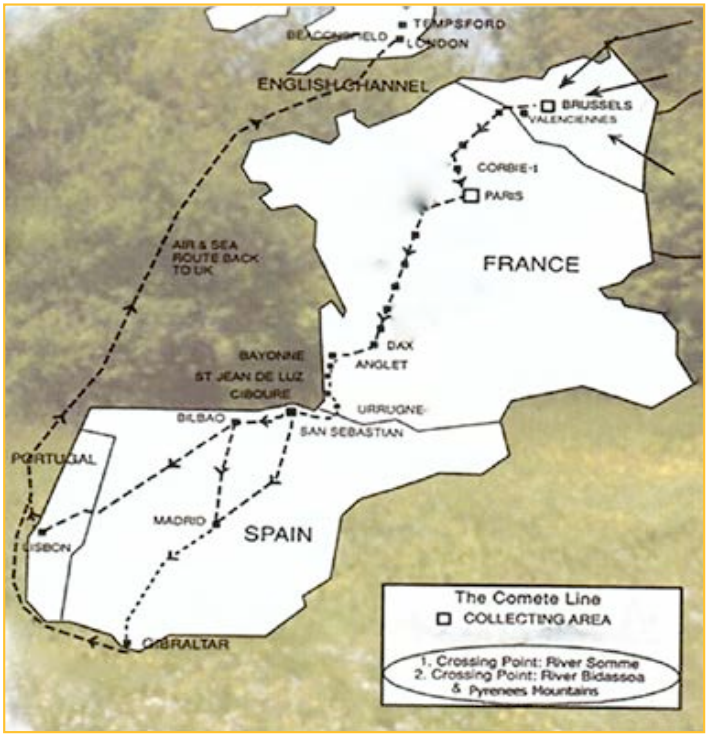
The Comet Escape Line

Established in 1941 in Brussels, the Comet Escape Line provided a means of escape for Allied soldiers and airmen and other citizens on the run in Nazi-occupied territory. The line transported escapees over 1,000 miles from Brussels through occupied France and on foot over the Pyrenees into 'neutral' Spain and finally to freedom through British-controlled Gilbraltar.

The Comet Line was set up in August 1941 thanks to the efforts of a courageous 24 year old Belgium woman Andrée (Dédée) de Jongh (1916 – 2007) nicknamed Dédée de Jongh who took enormous risks actively setting up and running the network with people from different nationalities. The Comet Line started in Brussels in Belgium where escapees were given food, clothing, shelter and false identity papers and were then guided by a chain or network of 'helpers' from Belgium through France and into Spain, staying in various 'safe houses' along the way. Many of the escapees assisted by the Comet Network were airmen who had survived been shot down from aircraft carrying out missions over Germany and Nazi occupied Belgium and the Netherlands and who now needed an escape route home, as well as British soldiers captured after battles such as Dunkirk and who had managed to escape as they were being transported to prisoner of war camps. The line was originally called 'The Dede Line', and later the Comet Network.

Two friends involved with Dédée who assisted in setting up the line were Henri De Bliqui and his cousin Arnold Deppé. In April 1941 De Bliqui was arrested as part of his work on the Comet line and later executed. His cousin Arnold Deppe continued the work organising safe houses for travel over the mountains into Spain while 24 year old Dédée and her father Frédéric de Jongh, a school teacher, looked after arrangements from Brussels organising the escape route from Brussels through Paris to the Spanish border and over the Pyrenees into Spain. Dédée was initially living in Belgium but because of the dangerous nature of the work and continuous surveillance, she moved to Paris where the work continued and from where she personally did the runs herself, accompanying the escapees from France into Spain with the support of other helpers along the way. It is believed that Dédée herself escorted 118 airmen over the Pyrenees.

A key person involved in the Comet Line was Baron Jean Greindl (code name Nemo) who worked for the Comet Line in Brussels from 1942 when Deedee was forced to move to Paris following the arrest of several members of the line. Nemo built up the line again setting up many new helpers and safe houses and did so until his arrest in 1943. He personally rescued over 70 airmen and over 20 civilians. He was captured and sentenced to death by the Germans but was killed in an Allied bombing raid in the German barracks at Etterbeek.



Map of the routes followed by The Comet Line Escape Network. Map courtesy of http://www.cometeline.org/

Also involved in The Comet Line was Andrée Dumon who had the codename Nadine. She was a friend of Deedee's and acted as the Comet Escape line main courier and guide between Brussels and Paris from 1940 to 1942. Nadine was eventually betrayed and captured by the Germans on 11 August 1942 and imprisoned for over a year in a Belgium prison before being deported to various camps in Germany including Ravensbruck and Mauthausen concentration camps between 1942 and 1945. She was liberated from Mauthausen in April 1945.

Helpers in the Comet Escape line risked their lives to assist Allied escapers leave Nazi Germany. These helpers came from all sections of society. They were teachers, doctors, mothers, fathers, miners, bakers, nurses, farmers, factory workers and business people. The evaders who were captured were interrogated and sometimes tortured and then sent to prisoner-of-war (POW) camps. The helpers however, who were arrested, were interrogated, tortured and deported to concentration camps where many of them were executed or died due to torture, starvations and beatings. On top of this if a person was arrested for assisting the enemy their family members were also arrested and oftentimes interrogated, tortured and killed. In France the reward for turning in or revealing the name of someone who had assisted an Allied soldier, 'helpers' as they were known, was 10,000 francs.

At the liberation, the survivors emerged from the filthy, disease ridden camps of Ravensbruck, Mauthausen,

2. Nicoll, John, Rennell, Tony, Home Run, Escape from Nazi Europe, 2007, preface.
3. Nicoll, John, Rennell, Tony, Home Run, Escape from Nazi Europe, 2007, preface.
4. Nicoll, John, Rennell, Tony, Home Run, Escape from Nazi Europe, 2007, preface.

Dachau, Gross Rosen and from many other camps. All were very ill, emaciated and many barely able to walk. Despite their situation the helpers left the camps as a proud and respected group. [5]

The Pat O'Leary Escape Line

The Pat O'Leary escape line was run by a Belgian army doctor called Capitaine Albert-Marie Edmond Guerisse who was known as Pat O'Leary (his nom-de-guerre). The Pat O'Leary line was called after the codename of Guerisse who took over command of the line and ran it from 1941 to 1943. During this time he was a secret agent working against the Nazis and, along with many other helpers, was instrumental in helping thousands to freedom including Allied airmen and soldiers. Other people involved in the line included Mme Suzanne Gerard and Marie-Louise 'Françoise' Dissard.

O'Leary was a doctor with the Belgium army and had left the beaches of Dunkirk for England in 1940. When the Belgium army gave in to the Nazis he continued to fight with the Allies and was taken on by a British Navy Special Operations Unit where he took on the identity of Pat O'Leary, a 'French-Canadian, in order to protect his family in Belgium. He worked on several missions in the Mediterranean area and would travel himself from Holland to the South of France as part of his work with the Pat O'Leary line, helping to escort numerous escapees himself. [6]

The line was betrayed to the Gestapo in 1943 and he was severely tortured on numerous occasions but refused to give up any information. He spent time in several camps including Mauthausen, Natzweiler, Neubremm and finally Dachau.

Throughout his time in prison, Lieut.-Cmdr. O'Leary's courage never faltered. Numbers of prisoners have given evidence that his moral and physical influence and support saved their lives. On his liberation from Dachau, Lieut.-Cmdr. O'Leary refused to leave the camp, where he had been made 'President' of all the prisoners (including some thousands of Russians), until he had ensured that all possible steps had been taken to ease the lot of his fellows. He was then given the opportunity to return to his family, but he insisted on proceeding to France, to trace the surviving members of his organization, and to help them in any way he could. [7]

He was highly decorated after the war and received numerous medals including the French Croix de Guerre (1939-1945) and the British George Cross.

The Shelburne Escape Line

The Shelburne Evasion network was operational from January to July 1944 and was responsible for saving 'over 119 evaders (mostly American) plus other escaping personnel'. The line was mainly used by the British Military service M1-9. As an escape route, the Shelburne line brought men to the northern coast of Brittany in France where they were the transferred onto English motor gun boats to be shipped back to the coast of England. According to the WWII Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS) the Shelburne escape line:

> operated from the Brittany coast (in England) in conjunction with the Royal Navy's 15th Motor Boat Flotilla. . . operating mainly from Dartmouth and at times Falmouth (in England). Motor gun boats (MGBs) and Motor Torpedo Boats (MTBs) together with other light craft and fishing boats had been operating throughout the war from June 1940 . . the Flotilla operated in the 'no-moon' period; grass ropes were used for anchor chains to enable them to be cut with an axe in an emergency and to be much quieter and the oars of the surf-boats were muffled. The North and West Coast of Brittany were mainly used by SOE and SIS to insert and extract agents but also collected evaders and other fugitives. [9]

Many of the landings and collections took place at a section of the Brittany beach area codenamed 'Plage Bonaparte'. A key person involved in setting up the line was Raymond Labrosse, a Canadian army radio operator. He had been parachuted into France in 1943 by M19 to work on an escape mission called Oaktree which preceded the Shelburne. When the Oaktree escape line was 'compromised in February 1943' [10] Labrosse returned to England via an escape route over the Pyrenees and persuaded the British authorities to send him back to France to set up an new escape line that became the Shelburne. Labrosse along with French Candadian Sargeant Major Lucien Dumain were set back to France in November 1943 to set up the Shelburne line.

The Shelburne escape line completed its first successful operation on the night of 28, 29 January 1944. The Royal Navy's 15th Motor Gun Boat Flotilla (MGBs 502 and 503) were used for the tasks, and missions would always be carried out during a period of the month when no moon was guaranteed. The special naval unit established in 1942 and based at the port of Dartmouth, had become familiar with clandestine work, so was a logical choice. The powerful gun boats had quiet motors, carried modifications to cut down noise in other areas and with a top speed of 35 knots took at least 25 personnel including the crew. A channel crossing could be made in less than four hours. [11]

The Shelburne Evasion network had numerous helpers including Paul Campinchi, Count George d'Oultremont, Marie-Thérése Le Calvez, Anne Ropers, and school teacher Marie Antoinette Piriou or Toni as she was known. Toni worked as a teacher in the village of Plouray. She 'had a Parisienne style with a commanding presence and she spoke English . . when Toni spoke, people listened'. She and her friends assisted numerous English and American fighters by hiding

5. www.ww2escapelines.co.uk/belgium-france/comete/
6. www.tracesofwar.com/persons/544/Gu%E9risse-Albert-Marie-Edmond.htm

them in their homes, in basements, attics, and stables and even the local school. The escapees were moved from place to place regularly to avoid detection until a truck or car would arrive to take them to catch a train destined for the Northern French coast. Very often the trains would be full of German troops and the journey was hazardous. The 'helpers' would provide the soldiers with false identity papers and civilian clothes. There would be many 'near misses' as the soldiers were moved from place to place until they arrived at the French coast line to wait to be picked up by a British gunboat that would have departed from places such as Dartmouth on the Southern English coastline.

In one rescue operation carried out by the Shelburne Line referred to as Operation Bonaparte up to 28 American soldiers were rescued on March 18 1944. A number of the men rescued and returned to Britain that night had spent up to three months in occupied territory sheltered by people such as Monsiur and Madame Desire Aurent or Jean and Marie Gicquel who ran the 'House of Alphonse', a key safe house.

On the night of March 18, 1944 the men arrived onto what the French referred to as Bonaparte beach having scrambled and walked down from a 200 foot high cliff edge. It was around midnight and the men hid in the dark waiting for the rescue boats to arrive. The coast was dotted with German outposts. As the men waited, suddenly the air lit up with bright lights and the roar of German guns. The helpers and rescues who were waiting on the beach thought the Germans had discovered the British gunboat waiting off shore but it turned out to be a practice firing session for the Germans. About 3am that morning when all was quiet and dark again:

> five plywood rowboats appeared out of the dark. It was about 3 AM, and each boat was manned by a British seaman. . . After the boats had gone, the French patriots began their slow climb back up the cliff to prepare for the next mission the following night. . . After a short ride, the rowboats reached Motor Gunboat (MGB) 503, and the men were taken below. As if to remind the evaders that the war was still on, a report reached the gunboat that a group of German E-boats had been spotted between them and the English coast . . . However, no contact was made as MGB 503 sped along at 30 knots. Early the next morning, the Americans watched gratefully as Dartmouth, England, slowly came into view. Interrogation and debriefing would follow as the men began to unwind from their unexpected European adventure. Tragically, MGB 503 hit a mine in the North Sea the day after VE-Day and all but two of the crew were lost. [12]

Freedom Trails Today

During WWII escape lines operated throughout Europe and across the Middle East and Pacific. Numerous escape lines were set up including the Comet Escape Line, the Pat O'Leary escape line also known as le Chemin de la Liberte, the Shelburne Escape line, the Samson Network, and many others.

7. www.tracesofwar.com/persons/544/Gu%E9risse-Albert-Marie-Edmond.htm
8. The Shelburn Line, ELMS website https://theescapeline.blogspot.com/2013/04/the-shelburn-line.html
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Years later, long after WWII had ended, many of the British and American airmen who were rescued would write letters and try to contact those who had risked their lives to save them. A number of organisations were established to support reunions of those seeking out their wartime rescuers, both men and women, wanting to thank them again for saving their lives. Many of these organisations continue to hold annual commemorative events and walks attended by people of all ages who come together to ensure that those who risked and in many cases lost their lives and those who were rescued by the escape lines are not forgotten. According to the WWII Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS), 'the commemorative walking trails are chosen to be representative of the routes walked in WWII' and also to be accessible to as many people as possible who wish to follow in the steps of history'. [13]

A number of the trails travel over the Pyrenees and through the Basque regions in France and Spain. These routes across the Pyrenees into the Basque Country, including those along smugglers' paths, were a major link in the escape lines' networks during WWII. There were various safe-houses on either side of the border in the Basque areas between France and Spain, many of the mountain guides were locals, and Basques cities and many villages were involved – Donostia-San Sebastian, St Jean de Luz, Oiartzun, Bayonne, Renteria, Hernani, Elizondo, Mendibe, Irún, St.-Jean-de-Pie-Port (Garazi), Isaba, Orbaizeta, Otsagabia, to name just a few.

Annually, on the second weekend of September, an organisation in South-West France called Les Amis de Comète, which was set up exclusively to commemorate the Comète escape line, hold a commemorative weekend in the French Basque Country. This event is attended by families of evaders mainly Allied airmen who were rescued by the escape lines during WWII and by family members of the helpers who worked on the escape lines, and by those interested in Escape Line history. The events are attended by people from a range of countries including the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Belgium, Poland, Australia, New Zealand, South African and Ireland.

The first day of the commemorative weekend consist of various ceremonies such as visiting sites of historic significance and graves of the escape line helpers and guides for example a key Basque guide Florentino Goikoetxea. The main activity of the weekend is to hike across the Western Pyrenees into Spain, following a section of the original escape route. The hike usually alternates between two different routes. One is the coastal route from St Jean de Luz, through Urrugne, continuing on to the last safe house of the trail, an isolated farmhouse that belonged to Francia Uzandisaga, a widow with three young children who worked on the escape line. This house was the last stop for the evaders and their helpers before they set out at night to climb the mountain into Spain. This farmhouse is the place were Dédée de Jongh was arrested by the Nazis in January 1943 along with Francia, a young farmhand who worked for Fancia and three evaders, Stan Hope, George Ross and Bill Greaves. The three airmen were sent to prisoner-of-war camps and survived the war. The other three were sent to concentration camps and the only one to survive was Dédée. The owner Francia died in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp for women.

The hikers then continue on climbing up into the mountains and down the other side to the Bidasoa River which runs along a part of the border between France and Spain. The hikers wade across the river in memory of the evaders who had to do this in order to reach the opposite bank which is in Spain. This ends the first day. On the second day which begins early the next morning, the hikers continue on to the Sarobe farm which is located above the village of Oiartzun. This farm belongs to the Iriarte family and is the place where the evaders were fed and sheltered while the guides made contact with other helpers. Members of the Iriarte family play host to the hikers and provide food and rest. During the war the evaders would be given food and a place to rest before heading from here to San Sebastián where they were often picked up by a Comète helper called Bernardo Aracama who had a garage in San Sebastián. Separately, another organisation called the Basque Pyrenees Freedom Trails Association holds a commemorative ceremony at the Aracama premises in San Sebastián which still belongs to the family and is now a driving school.

During one fateful crossing of the Bidasoa River and the only time it happened, two evaders were drowned as they crossed. The drownings happened in winter and the river was at a very high level and the weather was extremely cold. The two who were lost were Antoine d'Ursel, a senior member of Comète and Jim Burch, a US evader. On the night the men died, their bodies washed up on the river edge on the French side of the border. The bodies were discovered by the Germans who wrongly believed that the two men had been helped by people from the village of Biriatou, which was closer to where the bodies were found. The Germans brought the bodies to the village and left them on the steps of the German HQ, as a warning.

A curfew was in operation overnight but when the Germans arrived back to the Kommandatur the next morning, the bodies had been completely covered in flowers. Enraged, the Germans took the bodies away and they have never been found. The two men who lost their lives, Antoine d'Ursel and Jim Burch, are remembered at a memorial to them on the cliff overlooking the river.

It is important that all those involved in the escape lines are forever remembered for their brave and selfless actions during WW2, knowing that, if caught, they would be tortured, sent to concentration camps and/or executed. Many were. These men and women showed tremendous bravery in their actions to stand up for freedom and to reach out and support the dignity and rights of all human beings on an equal basis and their stories will continue to inspire generations into the future as we all work together to promote democracy, peace and equality for all.

The Tatra Mountains Escape Line

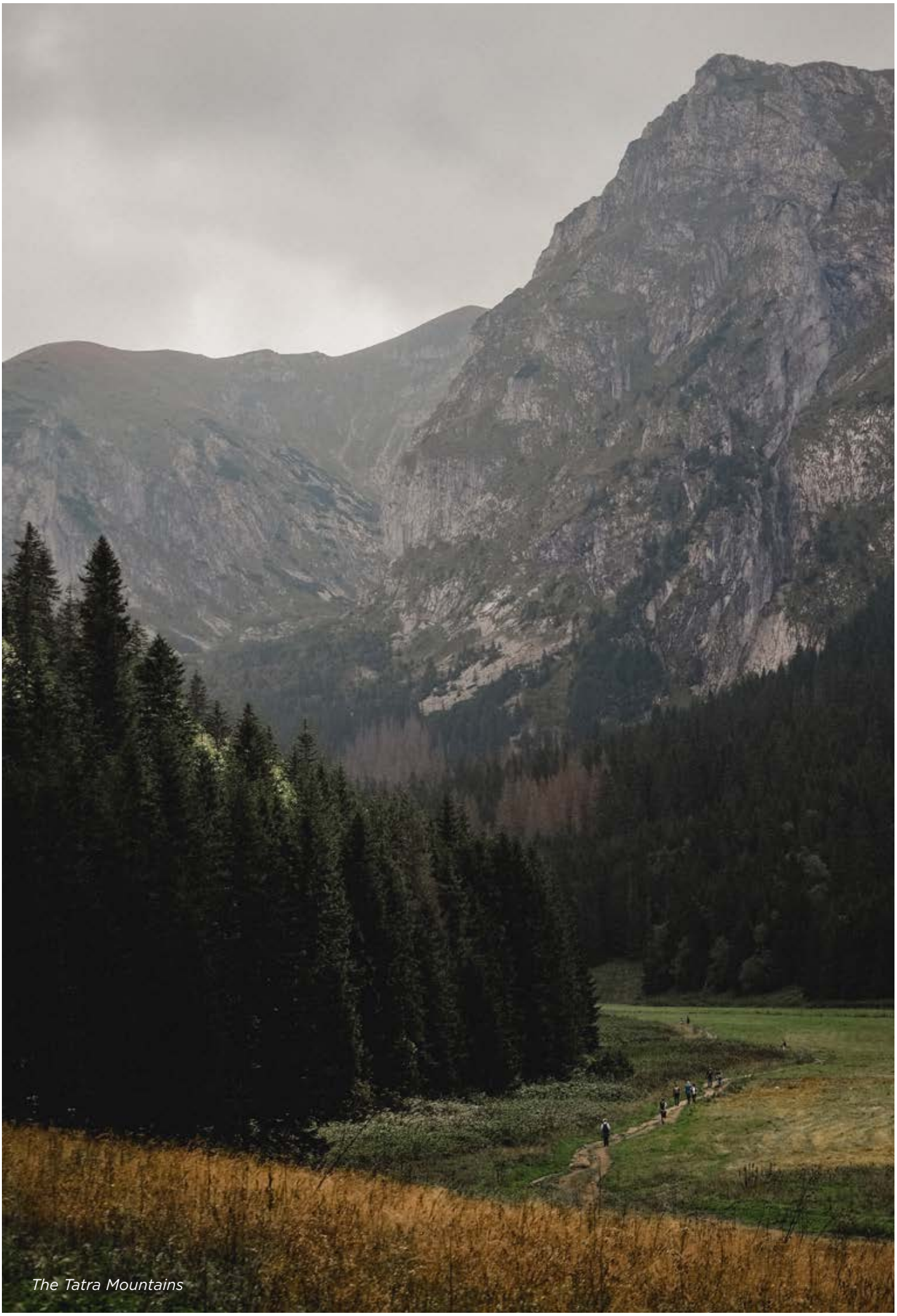
By Paulina Adryańczyk-Linard

Crossing the borders between Belgium, France and Spain, you had the Comet Escape Line set up during WWII. Less well-known is the Tatra Escape line, a trail in Poland that crossed the Polish, Slovakian and Hungarian borders.

There is very little information available on this escape line. Even in school history books in Poland, we rarely find information about the couriers, both men and women, who travelled across this difficult terrain from occupied Poland in to Hungary and then on to Great Britain where the Polish government in exile was located. The Tatra escape line crossed over the Tatra Mountains, the highest range of the Carpathian mountains that lie along Poland's border with Slovakia and the men and women involved with this escape line played a key role in promoting freedom and saving lives during WWII.

Couriers who worked on the Tatra escape line out of Poland, passed orders and news on to the West. They also transported people along the line including emissaries and, above all, Polish soldiers who wanted to travel to fight with the Polish Armed Forces in the West, a Polish military formations set up to fight alongside the Allies in the fight against Nazi Germany during WWII. Travelling in the opposite direction back into Poland, the couriers would carry mail, underground press information, money, weapons, explosives or radio transmitters (necessary to establish radio communications). They also escorted emissaries and officers who were under directions to work with the underground within the territories of occupied Poland. Without the help of these couriers, underground activity on the Polish - Slovak - Hungarian route would not have been possible.

The largest number of civilians to escape over the Tatra Mountains travelled during the initial period of the war. Many escapees made it to Hungary and the West on their own, and sometimes they used the help of local people who knew the area, often for a fee. Many people died during these expeditions, some from the cold and as a result of frostbite, and some shot by the Germans as they tried to escape. Many more were imprisoned in Slovak or Hungarian prisons.



The Tatra Mountains

Support and help from various organizations in Hungary was very important for people fleeing Poland. Those organizations included the Hungarian-Polish Care Committee, Adam Mickiewicz Association, the Union of Hungarian Legionnaires, the Hungarian-Polish Scout Circle, the Hungarian Red Cross and the Hungarian YMCA. In Hungary, at different times throughout the war, there were about forty camps set up for Polish refugees, and a network of Polish diplomatic embassies organized the transfer of numerous Polish people to France.

During the WWII occupation of Poland, the Polish government went into exile firstly in France and then in Great Britain. The Polish army, air force and navy re-formed outside of Poland so they could continue to fight in the war. Within Poland a resistance army was established called the Home Army (Armia Krajowa or AK) and it became the largest underground resistance force in Europe fighting against the Nazis. Within the Home Army or AK, a specific cell was set up with responsibility for carrying out communications with foreign countries and a key part of their work depended on the Tatra escape line. Because of the growing demand for the courier service across the Tatra mountains, there was an urgent need to put a more organised structure in place in relation to border crossings and transfers. At the end of 1939, structures necessary for a permanent 'illegal' courier service were organized and set up between occupied Poland and its government in exile, which was firstly based in France, in Angers and later (from the late summer of 1940) in London.

An Intelligence structure and transfer points along the courier route were established, both for intelligence-political and civilian purposes. Couriers travelled by train from Paris to Budapest, and then they transferred to Poland via Slovakia. After crossing the border they reached Warsaw by train. A base in Budapest, which played an important role in the courier service, functioned almost continuously until January 1946, despite the many difficulties it encountered ranging from German brutality to Hungary joining the Axis powers in 1940.

In order for the border transfers to operate successfully, it was important to choose people well-suited to the role of courier. There was a need for young people who were fit and in good physical condition, accustomed to working in difficult conditions and who were honest, clever and willing to make the necessary sacrifices. Potential candidates were identified and investigated, and then they were

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interviewed and trained. Those who were selected took an oath of loyalty to the homeland and became de facto Polish soldiers. Amongst the more famous couriers to work on the Tatra line, there were representatives from the pre-war world of sport, as well as mountain guides and mountaineers. The vast majority came from the Zakopane region of Poland including, among others, the famous Polish ski champion Helena Marusarzówna and her brother, Bronisław Czech, a Polish sportsman and artist.

Entire families from Podhale, Poland's southernmost region often referred to as the Polish highlands, participated in the Tatra escape line. Family names of those involved included Krzeptowscy, Mastalscy, Frączyści, Kula or as mentioned earlier, the Marusarz family. The main courier escape routes ran through Podhale or Sądecczyzna. Starting points in Podhale were Zakopane, Chochołów and Waksmund. These routes crossed over into Slovakia and also crossed over the Hungarian border near Košice or Rožňava. From Zakopane, couriers usually travelled through the Tatras (for example through the Przełęcz under Kondracka Kopa or through Tomanowa Przełęcz to the Dolina Cicha – in winter by skiing), from Chochołów through the Tatra Mountains or through Orawa, and from Waksmund through Spisz. When crossing over the border into Slovakia the couriers mainly travelled by car (with trusted contacts from Solvakia), as well as by train and sometimes on foot. When crossing over the border into Hungary, the main mode of transport was by train.

It is not known exactly how many people worked as couriers or guides on the Tatra trail or how many operations took place. This is due to the fact that the crossings were 'illegal' and remained 'unregistered' as they required high levels of secrecy to succeed. Wacław Felczak, an outstanding scientist and expert in Hungarian history and culture, was one of the leaders of the courier movement. In 1940- 1945, he not only worked with the Polish underground but also worked as an emissary for the Polish government in exile. After the war, he continued courier activity aimed at the communist authorities, for which in 1948 he was sentenced to a long prison sentence.

With regard to the various materials transferred across the different borders such as mail, attempts were made to reduce the size and volume. Correspondence was photographed and concealed in everyday objects, for example, pens, cigar holders, cigarette cases, compacts, books, food items, as well as being sewn into clothes. When transferring people or items such as mail, passwords with a three-part structure were used consisting of password, response and counter-response. Special groups were set up to produce false identification papers creating fake identities for the couriers that had to be credible. The couriers also required the appropriate currencies necessary for paying for travel costs by rail and for bribes.

The couriers working in the Tatra mountains faced many dangers. On the one hand, the mountains were their allies, yet on the other hand, the mountains were unpredictable and full of surprises. Added to this were the dangers of German and Slovak patrols, mostly accompanied by tracking dogs that walked the mountains along the border. Such meetings usually resulted in the arrest, then torture, and finally death of the couriers who were captured. Many of those who crossed the Tatra trails met such a fate. [14]

It is important to remember the history of the people who worked on the Tatra escape line and what happened to them. It is important to take an interest in these stories from eighty years ago, so as to inspire a deeper reflection and to broaden our knowledge of these events. By remembering these stories we can stimulate a reflection on courage and dedication, on solidarity between people, and on a willingness to help others even when our own lives are being threatened. There is a reflection on values of honesty and decency, which are not easy to find in today's modern world.

14. A. Filar, Opowieści tatrzańskich kurierów, Warszawa 1977, p. 11 – 36; G. Rutkowski, Polska walcząca. T. 22 Tatrzańscy kurierzy,Warszawa 2016,p. 5-50.

Totalitarian regimes and resistance movements in occupied Europe

By Paulina Adryańczyk-Linard

HISORIA MAGISTRA VITAE EST – THE STUDY OF THE PAST SHOULD SERVE AS A LESSON TO THE FUTURE

This Latin sentence should guide all politicians and ordinary people who find themselves in a situation where nationalistic movements are gaining increasing popularity, and groups are proclaiming slogans based on the need to defend national culture or religion from incoming 'others' or when young neo-fascists are on the streets under the pretext of patriotic mottoes.

In these circumstances, it is particularly worthwhile recalling events from less than a century ago; events that led not only to the birth of Fascism and Nazism, but also to an increase in popularity for these ideologies, to the takeover of power by Mussolini and Hitler in Italy and Germany, and to the reality of World War II that resulted in the enslavement of almost all of Europe.

During the interwar years a number of political, social and economic factors played a key role in the rise of political extremism and this, coupled with the 'quiet consent' of the main European politicians, ensured that successive governments across Europe failed to take action. What resulted was the tragic events of 1939 and everything that followed leading to one of the most devastating world wars of all times. Today we can view what happened in the lead up to World War II as a lesson we can learn from, to ensure that similar events do not happen again.

We must realize that the destruction of democratic values is a fact in many countries around the world . . . We are tempted to close our eyes and wait out the worst. History, however, teaches us that freedom will not defend itself. It needs our help.' [15]

15 M. Albright, Faszyzm. Ostrzeżenie, 2018, p. 308.

The birth and popularity of Fascism and Nazism

In order to talk about the roots of Fascism and Nazism, it is necessary to go back to the end of the First World War and the consequences that arose because of it. Germans, blamed for the outbreak of the war, felt deeply burdened by the decisions of the Paris conference and the terms of the Treaty of Versailles (it was also called a dictate). Territorial losses, demilitarization and extremely high war reparations were a huge burden for Germany and had a severe impact on the German people, creating a deep sense of humiliation and injustice. The Treaty of Versailles (signed in 1919) and the 1921 London Schedule of Payments required Germany to pay 132 billion gold marks (US$33 billion) in reparations to cover civilian damage caused during the war. The severity of the treaty orders were questioned before the treaty was signed and again after it was signed, with elements of the treaty intensively criticized and eventually rejected within Germany. During the 1920's Germany went on to experience a situation of severe economic hardship, as well as a social and political crisis. Political slogans based on resentment towards the Versaille orders became extremely popular ensuring a rise in popular support for the National Socialist German Workers Party, the NSDAP or Nazi party, that had initiated the slogans. The NSDAP was initially a marginalised group that now

rose to power and became a mass movement based on the success of the anti-Versaille political slogans and other actions. The party, commanded by Adolf Hitler, promoted German pride and came to power in 1933 and accomplished this by using democratic mechanisms of parliamentary elections. Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) became Chancellor of Germany and soon after, he assumed dictatorial power.

Although Italy was considered to be a part of the winners group after the first World War, the country could not speak of an actual victory. The decisions made by the Treaty of Versailles were as bad for Italy as they were for Germany. In 1915 Italy had joined the Triple Entente of Britain, France and Russia in return for a promise of benefits after the war, including territorial gains. When these territorial gains did not materialise after the war, there was a sense of an 'incomplete' victory (also referred to as stolen or crippled victory).

This sense of an 'incomplete victory' accompanied the birth of the veterans' unions which led to the establishment of the National Fascist Party, and the 'march on Rome' in October 1922, an organised mass demonstration that resulted in Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party finally taking control and ascending to power in Italy.

Benito Mussolini, like Adolf Hitler, was able to establish a strong relationship with the public based on a sense of perceived injustices and Mussolini went on to become an object of worship. Both Hitler and Mussolini had the ability to unleash in their 'followers' very strong emotions. Hitler was a powerful orator and regularly spoke at public meetings across Germany. Both he and Mussolini managed to garner the public's attention and support, making the public feel that there were participating in something great and unique. They motivated the general public by generating within them a sense of 'victimhood', that they, as a group, were victims. They also identified anyone as different to them as the enemy. These sentiments were used to justify any necessary actions that needed to be taken against the 'enemy' whether those enemies were internal or external. They created amongst the general public, the primacy of the group, to which everyone has duties superior to any rights; the need for closer integration and the authority of natural leaders. [16]

'Unlike imposed earlier monarchist systems or military dictatorships, fascism nourished itself with widespread public dissatisfaction resulting from a lost war, job losses, a sense of humiliation and the threat to national identity. The stronger the level of dissatisfaction, the more willingly thousands of followers worshipped the Nazi leader for his dreams of rebirth or promises to regain stolen goods and values. [17]

Outbreak of War

World War II began on September 1, 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. The war was initially seen as a two-sided Polish-German conflict. However, it soon turned out that Poland was only the first of many countries to be forcibly occupied by the

Third Reich. The spring of 1940 brought attacks on Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and France, creating massive change across Central and Eastern Europe.[18] The United Kingdom, isolated from the rest of the continent by the English Channel, managed to successfully defend their country during what became known as the Battle of Britain (July 1940 to June 1941) against sustained attacks from the Nazi air force (Luftwaffe) and they remained a free country for the duration of the war, an action that played a key role in the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany.

The governments of several European countries occupied by the Third Reich now found themselves in exile. Many of these governments in exile found shelter in the United Kingdom and from here, they attempted to coordinate the activities of the various resistance movements and underground structures that came into operation within their own countries under Nazi occupation. Many of the countries also set up armed forces in exile that continued the fight against the Nazis.

However, it is important to ask how all this happened? Was it not possible to foresee the beginning of World War II on 1 September 1939? After all, from the 1920s onwards, the Germans had carried out a series of activities within a European context which could be defined as 'symptoms' of war. Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 and in 1934 he became known as the Führer or Supreme Leader. In 1934, Hitler secretly carried out a policy of re-armament, building up the size of the German army in violation of the Versaille Treaty restrictions. In 1935 the existence of the German air force (Luftwaffe) was made known and Germany introduced military service, again violating the terms of the Versaille treaty. No actions were taken by the other European leaders.

In March 1936 Germany once again broke the terms of the Versaille Treaty by marching their army into the demilitarized Rhineland areas and in March 1938 the Anschluss of Austria took place which saw the annexation of Austria as it came under German control. In September 1938 the Munich Agreement was signed between Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy, effectively permitting the German annexation of the Sudetenland in Western Czechoslovakia.

All these activities were made possible thanks to the policy of appeasement conducted mainly by the British and French governments. Appeasement was seen as a way to ensure security in Europe. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain proclaimed 'I bring you peace' on his return from Munich in September 30, 1938. Less than a year later with the outbreak of WWII, he was proved wrong.

The situation in Occupied Europe

National socialism was a set of political beliefs associated with the Nazi party of German. A key feature of Nazi political ideology was the idea of creating a 'living space' (Lebensraum) for Germany. Nazi leader Adolf Hitler promoted 'lebensraum' as a key principle of Nazi foreign policy, stating that land expansion was essential for the survival of the German people. He created a master plan to conquer Eastern and Central Europe in order to secure more space to build his vast German empire. The aim was to ensure German control over the rest of Europe. This was connected to a culture of discrimination within Germany that resulted, over time, in the extermination of foreign-born enemies, including Jewish people, Slavs and members of the Roma community. Other persecuted groups included homosexual men, people with disabilities, Jehovah's witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, political enemies or political opponents including people classified as communists or members of a trade union, those considered as 'asocials' including homeless people and authors and artists whose work was considered subversive.

Another key part of Nazi ideology was 'Germanisation', the idea of building a German empire made up of an elite race of Germanic people, the superior biological Aryan race. 'Germanisation' began with a 'classification of people' across Nazi occupied Europe, removing those not considered part of the' master race'. This led to ethnic cleaning and eventually genocide on a vast scale as those not considered part of the superior race were removed from society and were either enslaved or exterminated as they were of no value. The Nazis developed a system of forced labour camps and concentration and death camps to enact the final solution. These camps were spread out across the Third Reich and in occupied countries. The vast majority of extermination camps were located in Polish territories where, before the outbreak of war, the highest number of Jewish diaspora lived, almost 3.5 million Jewish people. Within occupied Poland, the 'Deutsche Volksliste' or German People's List was set up by the Nazi party, as a Nazi party institution that regulated citizenship, determining who was acceptable and who was not.

16. R. O. Paxton, Anatomia faszyzmu, Poznań 2005, p. 281-283
17. M. Albright, Faszyzm. Ostrzeżenie, 2018, p. 23
18. In 1940 the North of France fell under German occupation, and in the south, a free zone was created, managed by a government that collaborated with the Germans and had their headquarters in Vichy (headed by Philippe Petain). French citizens who did not accept this situation founded the Free French Committee and fought back against the Third Reich. The Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg) were occupied in 1940 and the authorities of these countries found shelter in the United Kingdom, as did the Polish government (setting up firstly in France and then in the United Kingdom). As for the remaining countries, several of them remained neutral, i.e. Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal. A number of European countries allied with Germany (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia - although cooperation with Germany was partly forced), some submitted to the Italian and later German attacks (Greece). It is worth mentioning that in the case of Yugoslavia, national conflicts helped Hitler. The Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed by Croatian nationalists (the Ustashas) in 1941 with the full support of Germany and Italy, with Ante Pavelić as the leader (although this state was in fact under occupation by the German and Italian armies). The remaining areas were occupied directly by Germany or were divided among allied states. Bulgaria took over Macedonia, Hungary took over Vojvodina, and Italy took over parts of Slovenia and Montenegro.

Even though the practices of the Nazi occupying force were not consistent across Europe, there were some common features. Once the Nazis had occupied a country, the lands were incorporated into the Third Reich and all administrative and legal structures were now directly controlled by Germany. People living in the occupied territories who were deemed unsuitable for membership of the German nation were deported with many removed to forced labour camps in Germany to provide slave labour. German colonists were brought in to live in the occupied countries. The occupied territories were required to make their labour forces and natural resources available to the German state, to support the war machine of the Third Reich. German occupation resulted in total exploitation.

People living in the countries and territories occupied by the Nazi regime suffered in many different ways including a loss of property, forced labour, displacement, mass executions of certain groups such as the intelligentsia, politicians or athletes, imprisonment and torture, social and cultural limitations, liquidation of education, the plundering of cultural artefacts, food shortages, forced transfer of goods and natural resources to the German state and the displacement of children including the forced removal of children so they could be raised by German families or their forced removal to Hitlerjugend youth homes. People experienced a constant sense of danger and fear and a growing sense of helplessness and a lack of hope. The Jewish people were isolated and oppressed within ghettos leading to mass deportations of Jewish populations to extermination camps. The genocide of the Jewish people known as the Holocaust or Shoah resulted in the deaths of over six million Jews. The Nazi regime created a state of unparalleled brutality across Europe.

The Germans established a system of government for the Third Reich including within the occupied territories and this resulted in repression, racial and national segregation, exploitation, and intimidation. The Nazis demanded total loyalty and obedience through a rigorous system of legal prohibitions, orders and regulations that were imposed on a regular basis and were used to suppress all forms of resistance directed against the authorities. Civil liberties for the German population were excessively restricted with limits place on the right to travel, on correspondence and on any type of gatherings including religious worship. The civil and political rights of Jewish people were completely abolished and anyone who provided assistance to Jewish people was severely punished or executed. The death penalty was formally introduced in Poland for anyone who hid or otherwise helped Jews.

The actions of the Nazis generated a wide range of responses within the occupied territories. On the one hand, there are numerous examples of acts

of solidarity, support and kindness. The threat of a common enemy (the Nazis) mobilized local and national communities to come together through cooperation and resistance. On the other hand you also find hostility, jealousy, hatred and betrayal. Many people were forced to fight for their own survival and that of their immediate families even at the expense of others. There are many stories of collaboration with the Nazis to ensure a person's survival or for personal gain, highlighting selfish attitudes. However, we should remember that living in a time of war creates extreme circumstances and it is not always easy to make judgements. However, how people react in a time of war and adversity can be a measure of one's humanity.

Despite the brutality of the Nazi regime and the extremely difficult and repressive conditions imposed across occupied Europe including the relentless actions of the authorities to suppress any form of resistance, actions of solidarity existed everywhere and resistance movements were set up in many different countries. An organized resistance movement was established in Poland and was one of the largest in Europe. The underground system that functioned in Poland was on an organised scale unprecedented throughout Europe and it played a key role in the fight for liberty along with the resist-

19. M. Mitera, Zwyczajny faszyzm. Położenie prawne obywateli II Rzeczypospolitej w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939-1945, Warszawa 2017, p. 117-178.

ance movement in France, the guerrilla movement in Yugoslavia and the various resistance groups that existed in other European countries.

All forms of resistance were important in the struggle to defeat the Nazi occupiers. Resistance groups and partisans (members of irregular military forces) existed across Europe and they directly opposed and fought against the occupying force and local collaborators through various means including armed conflict. Many people resisted in their own way by refusing to take part in forced labour that would support the occupying force. Others operated on the edges of the resistance and provided support through an economic underground or by providing safe houses, false alibis etc. People who tried to escape from Nazi occupied Europe to Allied or neutral countries were also resisting the occupier. Tens of thousands of people fled from Poland, especially to Hungary. Up to 100,000 fled from Norway to Sweden and Great Britain, and up to 30,000 fled from Alsace and Lorraine to France and Switzerland. These escapes would not have been possible without the support of the various escape lines and resistance groups established by ordinary people to assist others to escape from Nazi occupied Europe. People who assisted others to escape showed extraordinary courage, bravery, kindness and determination as they risked their lives to assist those who needed to cross the borders of occupied Europe.

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Democracy, Civil Rights, Gender Equality & Peace

By Kamila Witerska

Democracy literally means 'rule by people'. The term is originally from the Greek dēmokratiā, which was coined from dēmos (people) and kratos (rule), in the middle of the 5th century BCE to signify the political systems existing in some Greek city-states.

Since Ancient Greek times, both the theory and practice of democracy has undergone profound changes. For hundreds of years, people practiced direct democracy within city-states or tribes. From the 18th century on, when the tribe became a state, direct democracy gave way to representative democracy. Representative democracy required a set of political institutions radically different to those that existed in previous democracies. In addition, from the 20th century onwards, the electoral law was change with voting rights extended to almost all adults. Therefore, a modern democrat might argue that Athens (because they excluded so many adults from dēmos) was not really a democracy even though the concept of democracy was invented and used for the first time in Athens in Ancient Greek times.

Despite the important changes that have taken place, it is possible to identify a significant number of early political systems that were associated with some form of 'rule by the people' even if they were not fully democratic according to modern standards.

Electoral law and Equality

Representation is a key part of any democratic structure alongside having the right to vote. During the 19th century property requirements that prohibited people from voting were reduced and eventually removed. Denying women the right to vote and excluding them from dēmos was increasingly questioned particularly by women themselves. In 1893 New Zealand was the first country to acknowledge a woman's right to vote. More and more countries granted women equal suffrage and other political rights and by the mid-20th century, women were considered full and equal members of a democratic society in almost all countries that considered themselves democratic.

In 1920 the United States granted women the right to vote. However, for almost a half a century, African Americans continued to be prevented from voting by both legal and illegal means, and were denied the right to take part in political activities mainly

in the Southern states of America but also in other parts of the country. Only after passing and vigorously enforcing the Citizens' Rights Act of 1964, were African Americans eventually admitted to the American demos and guaranteed the right to vote.

As a result of the above actions that took place during the 19th and 20th centuries, the right to vote was gradually extended to all adult citizens. Ensuring that all citizens within a country had an equal right to vote became a key condition for democracy itself.

Spread of Democracy in the 20th century

During the 20th century, the number of countries with basic political institutions of representative democracy increased significantly. At the beginning of the 21st century, independent observers agreed that over a third of independent countries in the world have democratic institutions comparable to the institutions of English-speaking countries and older democracies in continental Europe. In addition, in one-sixth of the world countries, these institutions, though somewhat limited, ensured a high level of government democracy. All in all, these democratic and para democratic countries contained almost half of the world's population.

The Value of Democracy

Why should people rule? Is democracy really better than any other form of administration? A history of the 20th century shows that democracy has a number of features that most people, regardless of their basic political beliefs, would find desirable:

1. Democracy helps prevent the rule of cruel autocrats.
2. Contemporary representative democracies do not fight with each other, so there is a guarantee of peace.
3. Countries with democratic governments seem to be more prosperous than countries with undemocratic governments.
4. Democracy tends to support human development - measured by health, education, personal income and other indicators - to a greater extent than other forms of government.
5. Democracy helps people protect their basic interests.
6. Democracy guarantees its citizens basic rights, which undemocratic systems cannot grant.
7. Democracy provides its citizens with a wider range of personal freedoms than other forms of administration.
8. Democracy provides people with the maximum

opportunity to live according to the law of their choice.

9. Democracy provides people with the maximum opportunity to take moral responsibility for their choices and decisions regarding government policy.
10. In a democracy, there may be a relatively high level of political equality.

Despite these advantages, there have been critics of democracy since ancient times. The main argument against democracy in the past was a belief that the majority of people are unable to participate in government in a sensible or competent way because they lack the necessary knowledge, intelligence, wisdom, experience and character. In this way, the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato argued that the best type of government would be one ruled by the aristocracy or 'philosopher Kings' whose rigorous intellectual and moral training would make them exceptionally qualified to govern. The view that the people as a whole cannot rule themselves was accepted not only by kings and aristocratic rulers but also by political theorists (primarily Platonic), religious leaders and other authorities. This view was most often invoked by opponents of democracy in Europe and other countries to justify the various forms of dictatorship and one-man regimes that came into existence.

There will no doubt be critics of democracy as long as there are democratic governments. The extent of their success in attracting supporters and promoting the creation of undemocratic regimes will depend on how democratic governments meet new challenges and crises.

Problems and Challenges

At the beginning of the 21st century, democracy faces many challenges, some of which are long-term, and others which were created relatively recently. These include:

Inequality in relation to Resources

Although decentralized market economies favoured the spread of democracy, in countries where they were not sufficiently regulated, such economies eventually led to major inequalities in economic and social resources, from wealth and income to education and social status. Since people with more resources naturally used them to influence the political system in their favour, the existence of such inequalities constituted a permanent obstacle in reaching a satisfactory level of political equality.

Immigration

After the Second World War, immigration to Western Europe, Australia and the United States grew dramatically. In order to escape from poverty or oppression in their homelands, immigrants from mainly developing countries usually undertake forced labour in the service sector or in agriculture. Differences in language, culture and appearance between immigrant groups and residents of the host country, as well as the widespread belief that immigrants take jobs away from citizens and benefit from expensive social services, have made immigration a subject of debate. In some cases, anti-immigration moods have contributed to the start or rise of extremist parties and political movements such as the National Front in France, Republicans in Germany, the militia movement and various white supremacist groups in the United States, and anti-immigrant movements in the United States and Great Britain. Some of these organizations promoted racist or neo-fascist doctrines that were hostile not only to immigrants, but also to basic political and human rights, and even to democracy itself.

Terrorism

Acts of terrorism committed in democratic countries or against the interests of democratic governments in other parts of the world have become increasingly common since the 1970s. The most dangerous single act of terrorism on September 11, 2001, destroyed the World Trade Centre buildings and killed over 3,000 people, mainly in New York and Washington.

In response to such events, and especially following the attacks of September 11, democratic governments have adopted various measures to increase the ability of police and other law enforcement agencies to protect their countries against terrorism. Some of these initiatives involved new restrictions on civil and political freedoms and were therefore criticized for being unconstitutional or incompatible with the principles of democracy. At the beginning of the 21st century, democratic governments face the challenge of maintaining a satisfactory balance between the seemingly conflicting aims of, on the one hand, ensuring security and, on the other hand, maintaining democracy.

The European Union as an international system supporting Democracy, Civil Rights, Gender Equality and Peace

At the end of the 18th century, both the theory and practice of democracy shifted from a small city-state to a much larger nation-state. Although their increased sizes enabled democracies to solve the larger problems that they encountered, problems arose that even the largest democracy could not solve alone. To solve these problems after World War II, many international organizations were established, in particular, the United Nations (1945), and its number and scope of duties quickly grew in the second half of the 20th century.

The European Economic Community (EEC) created in 1957, was renamed as the European Union (EU). The EU consists of various independent countries that have gathered together as members of the EU and combine some of their sovereignty to gain the strength and benefits from size. Combining sover-

eignty means that the Member States delegate some of their decision-making powers to joint institutions that were set up for making decisions on specific issues of common interest to be taken democratically at a European level. The main EU bodies are the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Council.

Goals and Values of the EU

The goals of the European Union are to:

- Promote peace, its values and the well-being of its citizens
- Offer freedom, security and justice without internal borders
- Promote sustainable development based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive market economy with full employment and social progress, and environmental protection
- Combat social exclusion and discrimination
- Promote scientific and technological progress
- Enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among EU countries
- Respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity
- Establish an economic and monetary union whose currency is the euro.

The following EU values are common to all EU countries in a society in which inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination prevail. These values are an integral part of a European way of life.

Human dignity: Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected, protected and constitutes the real basis of fundamental rights.

Freedom: Freedom of movement gives citizens the right to move and reside freely within the Union. Individual freedoms such as respect for private life, freedom of thought, religion, assembly, expression and information are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Democracy: The functioning of the EU is founded on representative democracy. Being a European citizen also means enjoying political rights. Every adult EU citizen has the right to stand as a candidate and to vote in elections to the European Parliament. EU citizens have the right to stand as candidate and to vote in their country of residence, or in their country of origin.

Equality: Equality is about equal rights for all citizens before the law. The principle of equality between women and men underpins all European policies and is the basis for European integration. It applies in all areas. The principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Although inequalities still exist, the EU has made significant progress.

Rule of law: The EU is based on the rule of law. Everything the EU does is founded on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by its EU countries. Law and justice are upheld by an independent judiciary. The EU countries gave final jurisdiction to the European Court of Justice and its judgements have to be respected by all.

Human rights: Human rights are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. These cover the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, the right to the protection of your personal data, and or the right to get access to justice.

These goals and values form the basis of the EU and are laid out in the Lisbon Treaty and the EU Charter of fundamental rights. In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.

Gender Equality

Promoting gender equality is a core activity for the EU. Equality between women and men is a fundamental EU value, an EU objective and a driver for economic growth. The Commission's 2010-2015 strategy for equality between women and men prioritised five key areas for action which are:

- Equal economic independence for women and men
- Equal pay for work of equal value
- Equality in decision-making
- Dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence
- Promoting gender equality beyond the EU

Progress has been achieved in recent years, as witnessed for example, by the highest employment rate ever recorded for women (64 % in 2014) and their increasing participation in economic decision-making. However, this upward trend is offset by persistent inequality in other areas such as in terms of pay and earnings.

All five key areas identified in 2010 remain valid today. Action over the past five years to address gender inequalities needs more time to secure the necessary changes and support in the form of new measures in these areas. At the same time, recent socio-economic changes resulting from the economic crisis, the rapid spread of digital technology and immigration and integration impact on gender equality.

Therefore, as set out in its 2016 work programme, the Commission will continue its practical work to promote gender equality. Action will continue with a focus on all the five priority areas. Efforts are required from all actors if we are to achieve real equality between women and men in all spheres

of life within the EU and elsewhere. This "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019" is a reference framework for increased effort at all levels, be they European, national, regional or local. It continues to corroborate the 2011-2020 European Pact for gender equality. In this programme, the Commission has reaffirmed its commitment to continue its work to promote equality between men and women. This means maintaining the focus of gender-equality policy on the five existing thematic priority areas:

1. Increasing female labour-market participation and the equal economic independence of women and men
2. Reducing the gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and thus fighting poverty among women
3. Promoting equality between women and men in decision-making
4. Combating gender-based violence and protecting and supporting victims
5. Promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world.

European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is an autonomous body of the European Union, based in Vilnius, Lithuania, and established to contribute to and strengthen the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in all EU policies and the resulting national policies, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, as well as to raise EU citizens' awareness of gender equality.

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Irish in Resistance during WWII

By John Morgan

Many courageous and interesting people, either from Ireland or with links to Ireland, were active during World War Two. In October 2014, a plaque was unveiled in the courtyard of the Irish College in Paris to recognise the role that Irish women and Irish men played in serving the cause of the liberation of France during WWII. Fifty Irish women and men were named and remembered for their work with the French resistance as part of the ceremony.

The plaque was unveiled by 'Fiona Mc Carthy - whose great aunt, Katherine Anne McCarthy, also known as Sr Marie-Laurence, helped 120 allied servicemen escape from German-occupied France – and Joe Linehan, whose third cousin Maureen Patricia O'Sullivan parachuted into occupied Limoges for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) to work as a radio operator'. [21]

In an article in the Irish Times, Lara Marlow writes that some 750 Irish people lived in France when WWII started. According to Dr. David Murphy, Professor of Military History at NUI Maynooth, many 'Irish people became involved in the full range of resistance activities . . . in intelligence-gathering, the best known was Samuel Beckett. In sabotage, Sam Murphy from Belfast excelled at disabling German vehicles.[22] Samuel Beckett (1906-1969) was an Irish playwright, novelist, short story writer and winner of the Nobel prize for Literature in 1969. Sam Murphy from Belfast was an electrician who became involved with a resistance or Maquis group called Veny near Toulouse in France. Murphy took part in various acts of vehicle sabotage and theft and was involved with the resistance until liberation in 1944.

Dr. Murphy has written extensively about Irish women and men in the French Resistance, Special Operations Executive (SOE), and Escape Lines during WW2. He has co-edited a book, Franco-Irish Military Connections, 1590-1945, in which the last chapter covers WW2 looking at very courageous and interesting women and men involved in the 'secret' war. [23]

Alongside Katherine Anne McCarthy (Sr Marie-Laurence 1895-1971)and Maureen Patricia O'Sullivan (1918-1994), other Irish women involved in resistance in France during World War II included Mary Herbert (1903-1983) who was a member of the SOE in France. Mary operated under the name Marie-Louise Vernier (codenamed Claudine) and she joined The Scientist network near Bordeaux working as a courier, arranging parachute drops for supplies and arranging safe routes out of occupied France for agents and escapers.

Irish man William O'Connor was involved in the French Resistance which he joined in July 1940. He was active in the movement known as the La Voix du Nord where he did intelligence gathering and courier work. According to historian David Murphy, O'Connor had served during the first world war and after the war he married a French woman and settled in France. He was 'basedin Douai where he worked as a gardener in the local British military cemetary. [24] O'Connor was arrested in September 1943 and imprisoned in a number of camps including Aachen, Rheinbach and the hard larbour camp at Siegurg, his last place of confinement, where he was tortured before being released in April 1945. He recorded later that during interrogation he had been tortured and, alongside other brutalities, his fingers and teeth had been broken with a hammer. [25]

Wiliam Cunningham from Dublin worked as a journalist before the war in Paris, he served in the Foreign Legion, was evacuated from Dunkirk and later parachuted back into France by the SOE in 1942 to serve with the resistance as part of a sabotage operation code-named Dressmaker. His nom-de-guerre was Paul de Bono. He survived the war and returned to live in Britain.

In addition to Irish people in France there were numerous Irish people in other European countries who were involved in escape lines. Escape lines were secret World War networks set up to assist Allied soldiers and citizens leave Nazi occupied territory during WWII. Mary Cummins (1905-1999) from Dublin, who had a talent for languages, found herself working in Brussels during World War II when Belgium was invaded by the Nazis. She joined the Belgium resistance and worked translating messages and as a courier smuggling messages and arms. [26] Mary was arrested by the Nazis and went on to survive Ravensbruck Concentration Camp for Women and Children, returning to live in Ireland after the war. She later became Countess Mary O'Kelly de Galway.

The Comet Line was set up in Brussels in August 1941 thanks to the efforts of a courageous 24 year old Belgium woman Andrée (Dédée) de Jongh (1916 – 2007) nicknamed Dédée de Jongh who took enormous risks actively setting up and running the network with people from different nationalities. With regards to the Comète Escape line, seven people from Ireland were saved by this line, four from the Republic of Ireland and three from Northern Ireland. Three people from Ireland that were involved in running and working on the escape lines as helpers, that we know of to date, were Janie McCarthy (1885-1964) from Killarney who survived the war, Catherine Crean, birthplace unknown, who died at Ravensbruck Concentration camp for women and Robert Armstrong, originally from Monaghan who died in the Waldheim camp for political prisoners in December 1944. [27] These are small numbers but represent a large sacrifice based on the percentage of Irish helpers who died compared to the number of Irish people saved on the Comet line.

21 Paris Honours Irish who fought, spied and died for France, article by Lara Marlowe, Irish Times, 7 October 2014 https://www.google.ie/amp/s/www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/paris-honours-irish-who-fought-spied-and-died-for-france-1.1954055%3fmode=amp
22 Ibid.
23 http://www.fourcourtspress.ie/books/archives/franco-irish-military-connections/
24 Article in WW2 Talk on Ireland's Uncelebrated Resistance Heroes http://ww2talk.com/index.php?threads/irish-times-paddy-osullivan-soe-saarf.25628/
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In relation to Catherine Crean, we know she was from Ireland and was living in Belgium during WWII. She was involved in assisting Allied soldiers to hide and in securing supplies for them. She was arrested by the Nazis and died in Ravensbruck Concentration camp for women shortly after the camp was liberated in 1945. Very little is known of her life in Ireland before the war. Catherine is remembered by Belgium woman Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon in Nadine's book Je ne vous ai pas oubliés published in 2018. Catherine and Nadine were friends and met through their work on the Comet escape line. Nadine describes the final moments they spent together in Ravensbruck Concentration camp shortly before Catherine died.

Anne Duchene (née Hodges 1869-) was an Irish woman living in Belgium. Her Belgium-Irish family sheltered Scottish soldiers of the Allied forces. Anne was to pay a huge sacrifice through the loss of her two children, a daughter Florence (Florrie) Duchene (1906-1945) who died in Bergen-Belson concentration camp in April 1945 and a son Leopold who was released from a Nazi prison at the end of the war and died soon after.

Margaret Kelly (1910-2004) was a dancer from Ireland and the founder and impresario of the world-famous Bluebell Girls Dancing Troup. During WWII Margaret regularly risked her own life to save her husband and business partner Marcel Leibovici whom she married in 1939 and whom she hid from the Nazis as he was Jewish. Another woman hiding people from the Nazis was Margaret Kearney Taylor who was born in the UK of an Irish family. She lived in Paris and then Madrid where she was involved in escape line resistance work, sheltering people in Madrid who had fled Nazi-occupied France during WWII, including Jewish people.

Although not born in Ireland, two interesting women of Irish descent are Margaret Kearney Taylor (1890-1982) and Olga Baudot de Rouville (1891-1979). Margaret Kearney Taylor was born in the UK of an Irish family. She lived in Paris and then Madrid where she was involved in escape line resistance work, sheltering people in Madrid who had fled Nazi-occupied France during WWII, including Jewish people. Olga Baudot de Rouville was active in the French Resistance and was a member of the Pat O'Leary Escape line based in Marseille during WWII. Olga's mother was Irish woman Susan Baudot de Rouville (née Walters), born in Newport, Co. Tipperary.

To date these Irish men and women remain uncommemorated in Ireland. They are Ireland's 'uncelebrated resistance heroes'.[28] Their names, stories, couarge and bravery deserve to be remembered. In this book, we have prepared biographies for six Irish people who were involve in Anti-Nazi resistance. They are Katherine (Kate) Anne Mc Carthy (1895-1971); Maureen Patricia O'Sullivan (1918-1994); Mary Herbert(1903-1983); Mary Cummins (1905-1999) Catherine Crean, (?-1945) who died in Ravensbruck Concentration camp for women and Samuel Beckett (1906-1969).

We also wish to acknowledge here the following Irish people who were also involved in anti-nazi resistance. They are Janie McCarthy (1885-1964); Margaret Kearney Taylor (1890- 1982): Margaret Kelly (1910-2004): Olga Baudot de Rouville (1891-1979): Anne Duchene (1869- unknown) and Robert Armstrong (-1944) who died in Waldheim Concentration camp.

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Katherine (Kate) Anne Mc Carthy (1895-1971)

Free! We were free! We could not believe it. And we kept wondering if we were not dreaming!

Katherine (Kate) Anne Mc Carthy (1895-1971), also known as Sr Marie-Laurence, was a Cork woman who joined the Franciscan Religious order and became a member of the Musée de L'Homme Resistance group in Northern France during WWII, assisting over 120 Allied servicemen to escape from Nazi-occupied France. She was condemned to death by the Nazis and sent to Ravensbruck Concentration Camp for women where she nearly starved, contracted typhus and was four times designated for the crematorium by the 'huntsman' who selected women unfit for hard labour. [29] Sister Kate survived the war and returned to Ireland where she lived for the rest of her life becoming Mother Superior of the Honan Home Convent in Cork until her death in 1971.

Kate was originally from near Drimoleague in County Cork and in 1913, aged 18, she moved to Calais in France and joined the Franciscan religious order as a nun, taking the name Sister Marie-Laurence. She was transferred to the market town of Béthune, near Lille in Northern France where she worked as a religious nurse and was there when World War One broke out. The town became a major hospital centre and Kate nursed 'Allied and some German wounded'.[30] After the war, Kate went to America to work and returned to Béthune just before the beginning of WWII where she worked as a civilian nurse.

During the fighting that raged across France in the summer of 1940, she found herself with several wounded British and French soldiers in her care. As these men recovered, she smuggled them out of the hospital and some of her earliest evaders made it through the lines to the beachhead at Dunkirk. She later passed recovered patiens on to one of the fledging local Resistance groups and it was through this activitity that she became involved with the wider work of the Musée de L'Homme movement. [31]

She was arrested by the Gestapo at the Béthune Hospital in June 1941 and was tortured and spent over a year in solitary confinement, enduring 'difficult' interrogations because she had joined the Musée de l'Homme resistance group in Northern France, assisting Allied servicemen to escape and gathering intelligence for transmission to England. It is said that the Germans also discovered plans of the Calais and Boulogne region Kate had made for the Resistance.

After over 13 months of imprisonment in Loos, Kate was put on trial at the Hitler Military Tribunal of Lille on 11 July 1942 along with others who were involved in the Resistance including a colleague named Robert Henneton. The charge made against Kate by the Nazi court was described as making 'war without weapons'. Kate and Henneton were both sentenced to death. Henneton's sentence was carried out and he died singing the Marseillaise. Although Kate was 'waiting and getting ready every day to serve the same sentence' [32] her sentence was not carried out and Kate said that 'hope and courage clung to me and did not leave me'. [33] Kate's sentence ended up being commuted to deportation. On August 12 Kate was transferred to the prison of Saint-Giles, then to Anrath in the provence of Dusseldork, then Lubeck, then Furstenburg and finally she was sent to the notorious Ravensbruck Concentration Camp for women about ninety kilometres north of Berlin. According to Kate:

Ravensbruck! Infernal word that left in all the women who knew it, a horrible memory. The 'hell' of Dante was not worse. Those who went there could say that after a few hours stay they had to abandon any hope. [34]

The camp was under the orders of the German SS Nazi party member Heinrick Himmler, one of the main architects of the Holocaust. The camp took its name from a small village nearby called Ravensbruck situated on the edge of a lake and surrounded by forests. The camp opened in 1939 and was one of the last to be liberated by the Allies in 1945. In her book If this is a Woman by Sarah Helms, she writes that 'at its height Ravensbruck had a population of about 45,000 women; over the six years of its existence, around 130,000 women passed through its gates, to be beaten, starved, worked to death, poisoned, executed and gassed. Estimates of the final death toll have ranged from about 30,000 to 90,000; the real figure probably lies somewhere in between but so few SS documents on the camp survived nobody will ever know for sure'. [36]

The camp held prisoners from all nationalities including French, Belgium, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Russian, Irish and British. While up to ten per cent were Jewish, the camp held many women that opposed the Nazis, women 'rounded up because the Nazis considered them inferior beings and wanted them removed from

society; prostitutes, criminals, down-and-outs and Gypsies' [36] as well as women in the Resistance.

In an interview after the war, Kate describes her time in Ravensbruck, the terrible conditions the women lived under, the starvation, beatings, torture, experiments, and refers to the smoke coming from the camp's big chimney and how the crematorium never stopped 'its infernal job'.

There, she witnessed women being beaten to death and recalled how she and others were forced to stand in silence for hours in rain and snow as fellow prisoners collapsed around them from exhaustion and hunger. She was forced to do hard labour for 12 hours at a time – her only food a ladle of turnip. Dogs were unleashed on the prisoners if they were not working hard enough. Prisoners were also severely beaten, a fate Sr Kate also suffered. [37]

At one stage during her incarceration in the camp, Kate became seriously ill and was removed to a building that housed the sick, where many patients were simply left to die. Amazingly, Kate survived and was returned to her original unit. In her testimony made after the war, Kate remembers the kindness shown to her by her friends in the camp who tried to look after her while she was ill. When Kate recovered and was sent back to the original unit where she was living she discovered two of her friends, Mrs Leleu and Mrs Tardiveau, had been transferred to Mauthausen Camp and she described the sorrow she felt.

I then found myself immensely lonely and I was wondering if I would ever see them again. This loneliness was very hard to bear but I felt I had to pull myself together, hold tight and fight with all the physical and moral strength I had left against discouragement and death. All the more as crimes and horrors were going on in a growing motion. I am taking about gas chambers and crematoriums. You had to get up, show yourself as courageous and pretend to be in good health. Bad luck to those who could not work anymore or had grey hair! [38]

According to Kate a man called 'the huntsman' would go through the camp selecting women who he deemed unfit for work and who would be sent away to die:

But it was in the morning that the 'huntsman' used to appear. With his hands behind his back - like a cattle dealer - he inspected the women who, one by one, marched past him. He used to separate them into two groups: those over 50 with grey hair or swollen legs or who looked tired were put on the left. They were the condemned ones. The other ones, looking healthier were put on the right. They were the favoured ones. [39]

Those who were chosen were marched away in what was referred to as the Black Convoy. Sister Marie Laurence was picked out four times by the huntsman. The first time she survived because of the assistance of a Polish woman on the line who took pity on her and told her to hide which she did. The second time she climbed out a window and the third and fourth time she hid under the beds. She said
I can still hear the noise of that lorry taking away the condemned women, piled up under a wet cover, who disappeared in the early morning hours. [40]

Four Irish women that we know of ended up in Ravensbrück. In addition to Katherine there was Sr Agnes Flanagan and two Irish women who were involved with the Belgium Resistance, Mary Cummins and Catherine Crean.Crean died shortly after the camp was liberated in 1945. Sister Kate survived the war and was liberated from the camp to members of the Swedish Red Cross in April 1944.

Free! We were free! We could not believe it. And we kept wondering if we were not dreaming!
We were asked to go on a bus, which drove us to Lubeck. We drew a deep breath with our still weakened lungs, to breathe in this fresh air with a new smell. Space! The air of freedom! Everything looked beautiful!. Back to life that we had lost so many times! . . . We reached the Denmark border where we received a wonderful welcome. Then it was Copenhagen . . then . . . Sweden. We then flew to Scotland and a few days later I was able to kiss, in the London train station, my brother that I had not seen since 1936. [41]

Sister Kate returned to Ireland where she lived for the rest of her life, becoming Mother Superior of the Honan Home Convent in Cork, until her death on June 21 1971. She is buried in St Finbarr's Cemetery. Kate was personally decorated for her bravery by General de Gaulle and also by Winston Churchill and was awarded the 'Black Cat' emblem of the Maquis. On October 6th 2014, a plaque was unveiled at the Irish College in Paris to remember those Irish people who had worked for the Resistance during WWII and Kate's names was one of those called out in a moving remembrance ceremony.

After the war Sister Kate was interviewed about her experiences which are documented in The Odyssey of Sister Marie-Laurence and her interned female companions. From Bethune to Ravensbruck. From convent to Nazi convict prison. A report by Jean Prévost. In the document Kate is referred to as a soldier with no uniform who bravely took part in the glorious fight for the liberation of France and the charge against her, when she is sentenced to death by a Nazi court is described as making 'war without weapons'.

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Maureen Patricia O'Sullivan (1918-1994)

I was terribly frightened at times, but there was a wonderful spirit of sharing danger with men of the highest order of courage, which made it a privilege to work for them. [42]

Maureen Patricia O'Sullivan (1918-1994) was born in Dublin and attended St Louis Convent School in Rathmines, Dublin, before moving to Belgium as a child. As an adult she returned briefly to Ireland before moving to England where she joined the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) in 1941 during WWII. She was recruited by British Intelligence and parachuted into occupied France for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) to work as a radio operator. She regularly used her intelligence and her cunning to avoid arrest, torture and death while passing through German checkpoints in occupied France during WWII. After the war Maureen became a decorated war hero receiving an MBE from the British government and the Croix de Guerre from the French government.

Maureen Patricia O'Sullivan on her wedding day, 1945, Calcutta, India. Photo Courtesy of her son John Alvey, via www.specialforcesroh.com

Maureen was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 31 January 1918. Maureen's father was John Aloysius O'Sullivan (1873–1949), an Irish journalist and her mother was a German woman, Johanna Repen (1889–1919), who died when Maureen was only 15 months old. Maureen originally went to school at St Louis Convent in Rathmines and then, at the age of seven, she was sent to Belgium to live with her aunt. Maureen was educated in Belgium and after finishing her schooling there, she returned to Ireland where she attended the Rathmines Commercial College in Dublin. In 1939 she was residing at 2 Charleville Road in Rathmines, and then, in the same year, she moved to England and worked as a nurse at 'Highgate Hospital London'.[43] In 1941, Maureen joined the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) and was stationed at RAF Compton Bassett in England. While working as an acting Corporal in the WAAF she came to the attention of the SOE. [44] Language skills were vital for undercover work and Maureen was fluent in French and Dutch.

The SOE were a secret British Second World War organisation created in 1940, made up of volunteers, and set up to wage war against the Nazi occupiers of Europe. The aim of the organisation was to carry out acts of sabotage behind enemy lines such as blowing up trains, bridges and factories and to support subversion and guerrilla warfare in the occupied countries of Europe.

Maureen entered the SOE in December 1943. According to the Irish historian David Murphy when Maureeen first joined the SOE she became known as Paddy and 'training courses followed in parachut-

ing, the use of small arms and in the use of mortars. Her disciplinary record during training was mixed as, bored with the routine, she frequently engaged in back talk with her instructors. [45] Maureen was described as a 'bit of a rebel'.

On completion of her training as an active agent, Maureen was parachuted into Limoges in South-Western France 'on the night of March 24, 25', [46] 1944, three months before D-Day. She was aged 26. Because of bad weather and fog conditions the pilot discussed turning back however Maureen insisted they continue. She barely survived the parachute drop as she had to leap from the plane through the bad weather. Her parachute became entangled on the way down, however she managed to fix it and survived the drop, suffering a concussion from the fall. According to the book Shadow Warriors of World War II: The Daring Women of the OSS and SOE, she claimed that the two million Francs worth of bank notes stuffed into her backpack for the French resistance cushioned her impact and saved her life. [47] 'Two wireless transmitter sets . . and a pack of supplies' [48] were also thrown out of the low-flying plane after Maureen. On coming to, she managed to leave the field where she had landed and moved out of sight eventually coming across the local resistance unit who were waiting for her.

Maureen carried false papers under the name of Micheline Marcelle Simonet (she also used the code name Josette) and she began her dangerous work as a wireless operator for the Fireman resistance circuit in the Limoge area of France. Her workload increased hugely in the run up to D-Day. She often cycled up to 60kms per day, taking and sending important messages on seven wireless sets hidden at many unlikely but convenient locations. [49] Maureen would cycle from town to town transmiting messages from secret radios, all the while evading the continued attempts by German agents and Nazi spies to infiltrate the resistance units the agents were working with. She moved from safe house to safe house, all the time transmitting secrets back to London from the area around Limoges, where the Gestapo and their French collaborators were ever-present dangers'. [50] To ensure that her location was not discovered, she was continually on the move, sometimes even travelling in daylight with her wireless set – which had been drummed into her in training not to do.

In May 1944, a few weeks before D-Day, she narrowly escaped arrest by using the 'evasion through flirtation' technique with soldiers at German checkpoints so they forgot to open the suitcase in which she carried a radio transmitter.

Capture was never far away. Once, while cycling between safe houses with a wireless transmitter concealed in a suitcase that was strapped to her bicycle, she was stopped at a German checkpoint. The soldiers demanded she open the suitcase. But just then, when all seemed lost, a lieutenant arrived and, brushing past the soldiers, told O'Sullivan she resembled a woman he knew back home. She spun a yarn about how her mother was German and, for half an hour, flirted with him for all she was worth. Disarmed by the promise of a date the next day, the officer sent her off, forgetting to look in her suitcase. [51]

On another occasion there were two guards and she flirted with both and contrived to chat with them separately so that as she cycled away both Germans believed they had secured a date for the evening. On another occasion, she was challenged by enemy troops at a checkpoint while carrying a wireless radio in her suitcase, and when the guard asked her what was in the luggage, she laughed and said, "a wireless, of course!" The soldier thought she was joking, and sent her on her way'. [52]

Maureen returned to England in October 1944 and was preparing to return to Germany in 1945 when reportedly the tabloid paper the Daily Mail in England carried an article on her actions in Europe. Unable to continue working undercover, she was then stationed in calcultta in India working as a liison with the French Forces there. After the war Maureen became a decorated war hero receiving an MBE from the British government and the Croix de Guerre from the French government. Maureen married Walter Eric Alvey a former SOE trainer and they lived in Ilkley, West Yorkshire, Engalnd and had two sons, John and Robin. Maureen died on 3 March 1994 in England, aged 76. According to historian David murphy, 'Patricia O'Sullivan of SOE later summarised succinctly her wartime career when she said 'I was terrible frightened at times, but there was a wonderful spirit of sharing danger with men of the highest order of courage, which made it a privilege to work for them'. [53]

42 Article in WW2 Talk on Ireland's Uncelebrated Resistance Heroes
43 Special Forces Roll of Honour Awards, SOE O'Sullivan, Maureen Patricia (Paddy)
http://www.specialforcesroh.com/showthread.php?30193-O%27Sullivan-Maureen-Patricia-(Paddy)
44 Ibid.
45 Article in WW2 Talk on Ireland's Uncelebrated Resistance Heroes
46 Article in WW2 Talk on Ireland's Uncelebrated Resistance Heroes
47 Shadow Warriors of World War II: The Daring Women of the OSS and SOE, 2017, by Gordon Thomas and Greg Lewis
48 The Mystery of Ireland's lethally seductive Spy, 21 March 2002, Irish Independent
49 https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/by-the-full-moon-they-flew-irishwomen-in-the-second-world-war-1.1468918
50 Ibid.
51 The Mystery of Ireland's lethally seductive spy, Irish Independent, 21 March 2002
52 She Spies – Six Amazing Female Agents who helped the Allies win WWII by Greg Lewis , Military History Now, 6 September 2018
53 Article in WW2 Talk on Ireland's Uncelebrated Resistance Heroes

Mary Herbert (1903-1983)

Mary Herbert (1903-1983) was a member of the Special Operations Unit (SOE) during WWII. Born in Ireland in 1903, she later went to the University of London, was fluent in French, Italian, Spanish and German; and had qualifications in Arabic and Russian. Mary worked in the British embassy in Warsaw and then in the Air Ministry in London as a civilian translator.

She joined the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) in 1941 and the SOE in March 1942 and was later sent into France, arriving by boat into a cove near Cassis on 31 October 1942. She crossed illegally from the Vichy zone into the occupied zone on 10 November 1942, not knowing that the next day the Germans would take over the Vichy zone.

In early December, as Marie-Louise Vernier (code-named Claudine), she joined The Scientist network near Bordeaux as a courier, meeting its leader, Claude de Baissac. His sister was the celebrated agent, Lise de Baissac. In addition to courier work, her role included arranging safe routes out of occupied France for agents and escapers and arranging parachute drops for supplies.

In August 1943, Claude was recalled to London. Expecting their child, Mary disguised her pregnancy and gave birth to their daughter in December 1943 in Valence, calling her Claudine. The Gestapo finally caught up with her in February 1944 and her daughter was taken into the care of French Social Services. She used her knowledge of Arabic to create a persona of a Frenchwoman from Egypt and used her knowledge of the German language to convince the Gestapo who later released her. While in prison however Mary was interrogated and tortured but she never deviated from her story. She escaped to England with Claudine in late 1944, where they were reunited with Claude. Mary and Claude married in Corpus Christi church in London on 11 November 1944. They never lived together.

Mary Cummins (1905-1999)

Born in 1905, Mary Cummins grew up in the Drumcondra area of Dublin. She had a talent for languages and found herself working in Brussels during World War II when Belgium was invaded by the Nazis. She joined the Belgium resistance and worked translating messages and as a courier smuggling messages and arms. [54]

Mary was arrested by the Gestapo at her Brussels apartment, was sentenced to death by the Nazis and spent the next four years enduring torture and other humiliating and degrading treatments in various Nazis concentration camps. At one point Mary narrowly missed deportation directly to Auschwitz extermination camp and certain death in the gas chambers when the train she was travelling on derailed. Mary survived the war and came back to Ireland in 1946. She later became Countess Mary O'Kelly de Galway.

Mary grew up in a relatively wealthy upper middle-class family in Waterfall Cottage, a large home on the Richmond Road in Drumcondra, Dublin. There were 10 in the family and her father Thomas was a civil engineer. Mary had a happy childhood and went to national school in Fairview and then to the Dominican College, Eccles Street, Dublin where she excelled at languages including French. Mary travelled to Brussels in Belgium to work as a teacher for a wealthy family. During her time in Brussels she became friends with a group of people who set up a resistance group as the Nazis took over, invading Belgium on 28 May 1940 when the Belgium army surrendered to Nazi forces. It was the second time that Germany had invaded and occupied Belgium in under thirty years, the first time was in 1914 during WWI. Belgium would remain under German occupation until their liberation by the Western Allied forces in 1945. Mary was a valuable asset to the Belgium resistance because she spoke English and had an Irish 'neutral' passport. Mary readily agreed to join and support the resistance saying that she was 'intrigued and certainly a bit nervous'.

Mary was arrested at gunpoint by the Gestapo at her Brussels apartment in an early morning raid. Aged 35 at the time she was taken to Berlin and sentenced to death. She survived 'four torturous years' [55] in Nazis concentration camps during the war. 'She was beaten and trussed up naked while 'every orifice' of her body was explored. She witnessed men being dipped into scalding water, others forced to drink liquids laced with crushed glass, other men getting their eyes gouged out'. As stated above, at one point Mary narrowly avoided deportation directly to Auschwitz extermination camp and certain death in the gas chambers when the train she was travelling on derailed.

Weighing only four stone, Mary was liberated the day after her fortieth birthday from a camp by American Allied soldiers. She spent several months in hospitals in Switzerland and Paris before returning to Ireland in 1946. Mary returned to Brussels a few years later where she fell in love with a handsome young Belgian barrister, Count Gui O'Kelly de Galway, thought to be a descendant of the Galway Wild Geese'. They married and settled down in Ireland in 1949 but 15 years later he left to go for an interview for a job in England. She kissed him goodbye at Dublin airport and never saw him again despite attempts to trace him for much of the rest of her life. [57] Mary lived in Dublin for the remainder of her life. According to Mary's family, she made the most of her life, enjoying every day to the full. She died on the 20 June 1999 aged 94 and was cremated at Glasnevin cemetery. She features in an RTE radio documentary, 'In the Shadow of Death', conducted when Mary was in her eighties. The documentary captures the defiance and resilience of this remarkably brave woman.

54 Doughty Survivor of a Nazi death decree, 3 July 1991, Irish Times https://www.irishtimes.com/news/doughty-survivor-of-a-nazi-death-decree-1.202637
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.

Catherine Crean (unknown-1945)

Catherine Crean, from Ireland, was a member of the Comete Line which was based in Brussels and ran an escape line operation though Paris and ultimately over the western Pyrenees. There is very little information available on Catherine apart from the following. It is believed that Catherine lived or stayed at a house in Brussels belonging to a Baron Jean Empain at 1 Rue Zinner during the Second World War (the house today is now part of the US Embassy compound). Baron Empain was a high society figure who may not have been present in Brussels during the Occupation as his family owned a palace in Egypt. Catherine was involved in assisting the Allied soldiers to hide and in securing supplies for them. She was arrested by the Nazis and died in Ravensbruck Concentration camp for women shortly after the camp was liberated in 1945.

Belgium woman Andrée Dumont (codename Nadine) who was a member of the Comet Line knew Catherine through their work on the escape line. Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon was 18 when she became active with the resistance in Belgium working with the escape lines. She assisted in helping Allied soldiers to escape from Nazi occupied Europe and looked after seventeen of them, moving them to houses in Brussels where they would be safely cared for. She worked with and was second in command to Frédéric De Jongh, the head of the Cométe Escape line organisation from October 1940 until her arrest in August 1942. During this time Nadine undertook all kinds of missions and at one stage guided eleven airmen from Brussels to Paris, a remarkable task considering the dangers involved. Nadine was arrested in August 1942 along with her father and was subsequently sent to Germany where she passed through the camps of Ravensbruck and Mauthausen. She survived the war and returned to Belgium in May 1945 in a precarious state of health, however she gradually recovered. Catherine Crean is mentioned in Nadine's NARA (the US national archives and records administration) file in relation to providing food and clothes for the escapees, at Baron Empain's house.

In her book Je Ne Vous Ai Pas Oubliés, Liberté 1945, Nadine Dumont describes meeting with Catherine Crean while working on the escape lines in Brussels and how Catherine enjoyed conversing with the Allied soldiers and would bring them books to read in English. On one occasion Nadine introduced Catherine as English and Catherine immediately drew herself and firmly stated 'I am Irish, not English'. Nadine saw Catherine for a final time in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp where Catherine lay dying. Nadine recalls her final moments with Catherine who was lying on a bunk in one of the huts. They spoke some words together. Catherine had a comb and she asked Nadine to comb her 'beautiful red hair which lay scattered around her pale face'. Because of her own deteriorating physical condition, Nadine was unable to lift the comb and shortly after she returned to her bunk. Nadine survived the war but Catherine died in Ravensbruck shortly after the camp was liberated in 1945.

Samuel Beckett (1906-1969)

You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on

Samuel Beckett (1906-1969) is, of course, most famous as an iconic author. He was an Irish playwright, novelist, short story writer and winner of the Nobel prize for Literature in 1969. He wrote in both French and English and is best known for his plays including En attendant Godot or Waiting for Godot (1952)

Less well known is his courage as a member of the French Resistance during World War Two. As he later said in an interview, 'You simply couldn't stand by with your arms folded'. Born in Dublin, Ireland, Beckett had been living in Paris prior to the outbreak of World War Two. When Paris was occupied by the Nazis, he was, however, on holiday in Ireland but made plans to return to Paris as soon as possible. In 1941 Beckett joined the French Resistance. He became part of a Paris-based cell of the British SOE (Special Operations Unit) named Gloria SMH. Beckett acted as a liaison officer and translated secret reports.

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born in Foxrock, Dublin, Ireland, in 1906 to a Protestant family. Aged 14, 'he went to the Portora Royal School, in what became Northern Ireland, a school that catered to the Anglo-Irish middle classes'. [58] He received a Bachelor of Arts from Trinity College Dublin where he studied the Romance languages from 1923 to 1927.

From the age of 20 Beckett travelled extensively across Europe. He first visited France in 1926 to see the Loire valley then came to Paris in 1928 to teach at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) on Rue d'Ulm in the 6th arrondissement. After that he returned frequently to write, spending time with the 'Joyce Irish circle', [59] and meeting with other writers and artists including James Joyce. Thus began a friendship that would last many years. Beckett was a frequent visitor to Joyce's apartment at Square Robiac. Joyce acted as mentor to the young Beckett and influenced his work greatly . . . Beckett is renowned for the desolation of his writing, and for the dark gallows humour amidst his grim sense of futility. He loved to shock, confuse and offend, which he did frequently. [60]

In 1930 Beckett was offered a post at Trinity College Dublin where he taught French for four terms before resigning in December 1931. During the pre-war years he travelled extensively in Germany and then returned to Paris in 1937 to live there permanently. He would go on to spend the next 52 years living in Paris mainly in the Left Bank. Shortly after Beckett arrived in Paris, he was living at 9 Rue de la Grande Chaumière when he was stabbed in an attack by a 'pimp along the Avenue Général Leclerc (then called Avenue d'Orléans) in the 14th arrondissement'. While he was recovering in hospital he was visited by a woman he had briefly met before, called Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumnesil, who would go on to become Beckett's life-long partner.

At the beginning of World War II Beckett was on holidays in Ireland but returned immediately to Paris. Beckett said in an interview with Israel Shenker 'I preferred France in War to Ireland at peace'. [61] Beckett and his partner, Suzanne had to face the practical challenges of the occupation with their fellow Parisians like the scarcity of food and lack of heating in their home.

By late 1941, Beckett had become more involved in challenging the Nazi occupation when he joined the French Resistance, specifically the resistance group, Gloria SMH which 'specialied in naval intelligence and processed reports from coastal agents before sending them back to London'. [62] The main aim of the cell was to undertake the dangerous tasks of translating documents about Axis troop movemens and to relay them to Allided headquarters in London. The cell was set up and led by a 'French chemist from the Institut Curie in Paris called Jacques Legrand (code name SMH) [63] and by Jeannine Picabia (code named Gloria), the daughter of the Cubist painter Francis Picabia. Other members of the cell included Germmaine Tillion (1907-2008), a French ethnologist and writer who was incarcerated in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp for Women and after the war was involved in the War of Independence of Algeria and remained active throughout her life as a human rights campaigner.

Beckett had joined the resistance because he was against the Nazis regime and as a response to the arrest of such Jewish literary friends as his old Trinity College classmate Alfred Péron. As a neutral Irishman who spoke fluent French, Beckett was in huge demand. Beckett became involved in collating and translating information and compiling intelligence reports, hiding them in unusual places such as in matchboxes and toothpaste tubes. He would then bring the reports to a man he knew as 'Jimmy

the Greek' (Hadji Lazaro) about 3km from Beckett's apartment where they were micro-filmed before being smuggled out of France.

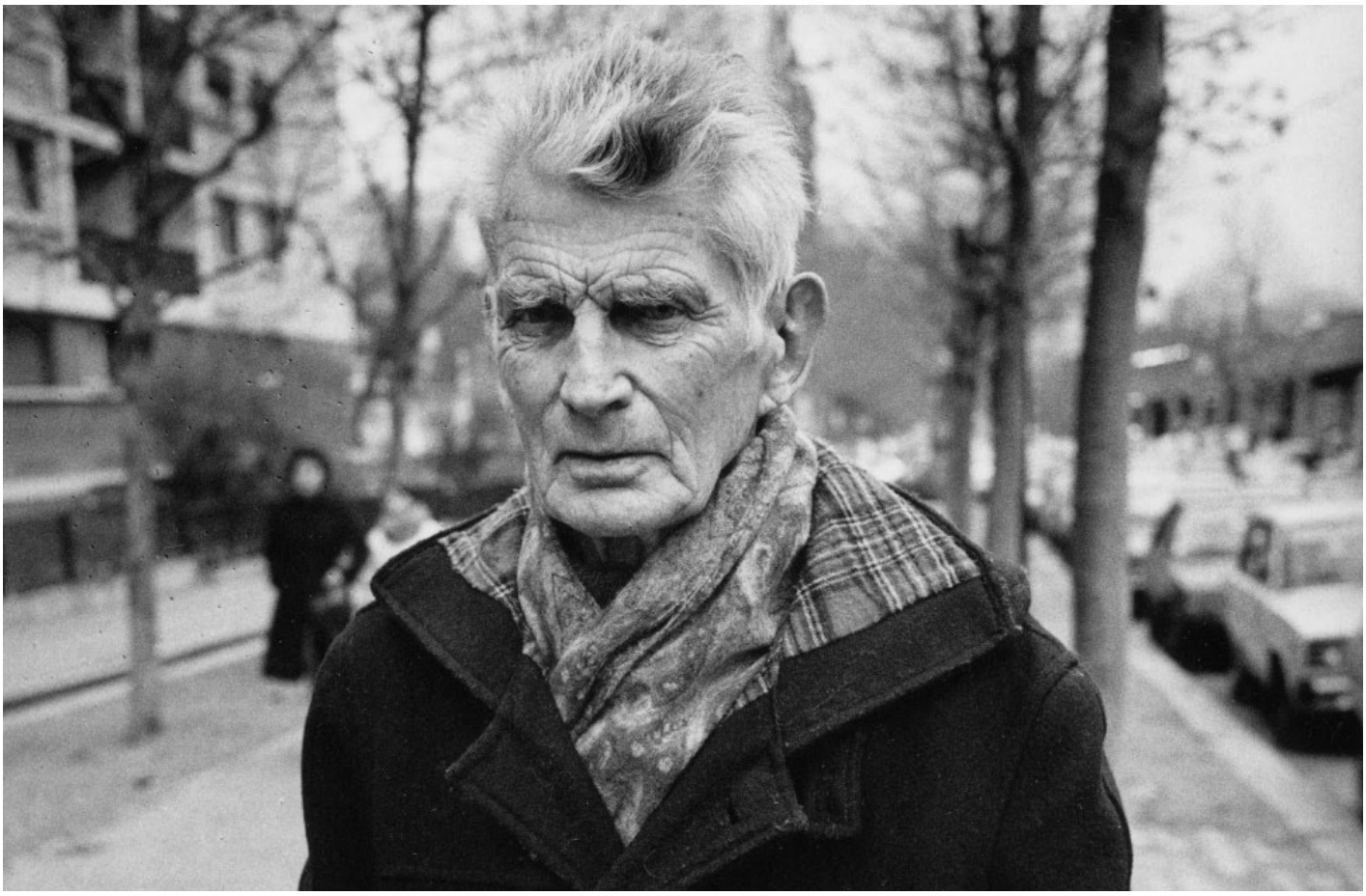
In August 1942, Beckett had to flee the apartment he shared with Suzanne at 6 rue des Favourites when Gloria SMH was infiltrated and betrayed by a double agent. Disposing of all documents beforehand, he and Suzanne initially went to a friend's apartment. When they arrived, Beckett intuitively felt there was something wrong so they changed their mind. Suzanne did return to the apartment later that day where the Gestapo was waiting. She made up an excuse why she was there which they ultimately believed but not before searching their apartment. Luckily they had disposed of the incriminating evidence.

Many of Beckett's friends had been arrested during the war and Beckett and Suzanne lived a clandestine existence. Over 50 members of the Gloria SMH resistance cell would be arrested. Knowing it was time to escape, they spent a month moving around Paris with the help of friends and connections until in September they moved to the then unoccupied Vichy zone in southern France. From October 1942 they lived in the village of Roussillon on the Southern edge of the Plateau Vaucluse in the Vaucluse mountains. From November 1942, the Vichy zone was occupied by the Nazis and both of them were constantly in danger of being arrested. 'While staying in Roussillon Beckett found work as a farm worker for a farmer named Aude and picked grapes for another farmer named Bonnelly and also assisted the resistance:

He continued his writing in the evenings, and completed his second Novel, Watt (as well as working on this third book published after the war). Having fled Paris because of his activities in the Resistance, Beckett continued helping in the south by storing armaments in the back yard of his Roussillon home. He also helped the Maquis sabotage the German army in the Vaucluse mountains.' [64]

In his seminal play Waiting for Godot first produced in 1953 in Paris after the war, the farmer Bonnelly and the area of Roussillon are mentioned by name in the original French version titled En Attendant Godot by the character Vladimir but are removed from later English versions of the text. Beckett would spend three years living in Roussillon before the end of the war and the stay there was described as a mixture of 'boredom and danger'. As an non-French person

58 Esslin, Martin. (2019). Samuel Beckett, Irish Author. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Beckett
59 Calder, John. (2013). Paris, Beckett and Me, Irish Times, 13 July https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/paris-beckett-and-me-1.1460605
60 http://www.bbc.co.uk/irish/articles/view/803/english/
61 Perloff, Marjorie. In Love with Hiding: Samuel Beckett's War. The Iowa Review 35.1 (2005): 76-103. Web https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5990.
62 Article in WW2 Talk on Ireland's Uncelebrated Resistance Heroes http://ww2talk.com/index.php?threads/irish-times-paddy-osullivan-soe-saarf.25628/
63 Knowlson, James. (2014). Samuel Beckett's Biographer reveals secrets of the writer's time as a French Resistance Spy. Independent, July
64 https://www.beyond.fr/people/beckett.html



identifiable by his Irish accent, Beckett had to avoid Nazi patrols coming through the area, by hiding, sometimes for days at a time, in the fields and woods on the outskirts of Roussillon. 'Waiting' was a key occupation and would eventually become a key part of the title Waiting for Godot. In Beckett's authorised biography Damned to Fame by Professor James Knowlson, he (Knowlson) includes a short description of Beckett found in a file in London belonging to the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a branch of British intelligence. 'Age 38 (this was in 1944). 6ft. Well built, but stoops. Dark hair. Fresh complexion. Very silent. Paris agent.' [65]

In October 1944 Beckett returned to Paris. In April 1945, he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre for his work with the French Resistance and the Médaille de la Résistance (Reconnaissance Francais) which was awarded in recognition of his acts of courage. At the end of the war after Beckett had come back to Paris, he then returned to Ireland via London to visit his family as he had not seen his mother other five years. Beckett was unable to return to his home in Paris as his status in France at that time was of 'resident alien'. So he volunteered to help the Irish Red Cross build a hospital for the Normandy town of Saint-Lo, which had been devastated by the Allies en route from Cherbourg to Paris'. [66] Beckett worked for a number of months as an interpreter at the Irish Red Cross Hospital at Saint Lo in Normandy. [67] Beckett wrote

St.-Lo is just a heap of rubble, la Capitale des Ruines as they call it in France. Of 2600 buildings 2000 completely wiped out. It all happened in the night of the 5th to 6th June. It has been raining hard for the last few days and the place is a sea of mud. What it will be like in winter is hard to imagine. No lodging of course of any kind...since last Wednesday we have been with a local doctor in the town...all 3 in one small room and Alain (Beckett's friend Alan Thompson) and I sharing a bed'.[68]

It was here that Beckett 'witnessed real devastation and misery . . . people in desperate need of food and clothing, yet clinging desperately to life.' [69]

Prior to the war Beckett's publications included 'two essays on Joyce and the French novelist Marcel Proust', a short story collection More Pricks Than Kicks (1934), the novel Murphy (1938), and two poetry collections Whoroscope (1930) and Echo's Bones (1935).[70] He also wrote the novel Dream of Fair to Middling Women which was published in 1992. During the war he completed the novel Watt which was published in 1953. While living in Dublin Beckett had studied the French language at Trinity College Dublin. In his subsequent career he began writing in French as he believed it freed him from the poetic style of the English language, and is quoted as saying that in French it was easier to write 'without style'.

After the war Beckett 'produced the major prose narratives Molloy (1951), Malone Meurt or Malone Dies (1951), and L'Innommable or The Unnamable (1953) and two plays, the unpublished three-act Eleutheria and Waiting for Godot. [71] At first Beckett's work received numerous refusals and it

was only when his book Molloy became a commercial success, receiving favourable reviews from the critics, that the same publisher of Molloy also published Waiting for Godot. 'It was with the amazing success of Waiting for Godot at the small Théâtre de Babylone in Paris, in January 1953, that Beckett's rise to world fame began'.[72]

Beckett and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil had been living at 6 Rue des Favourites but they bought a plot of land and built a small house in the commune of Ussy-sur-Marne about 60 kilometres outside of Paris. Beckett stayed away from any publicity and continued to write. In October 1960 they moved back to Paris to an apartment at 38 rue Saint-Jacques where Beckett continued to frequent his favourite bars and cafes including 'the Falstaff, the Rosebud, the Closerie des Lilas and the Petit Café' [73] at the PLM Hotel, Boulevard St Jacques, Paris.

In 1956 during the BBC production of his radio play All That Fall, Beckett met Barbara Bray, a translator and critic who was working with the BBC at the time. Beckett and Bray worked together again on a BBC commission of Embers in 1959. They became good friends and eventually started a relationship. Bray moved to Paris with her two daughters to work as a critic and writer and also to work with and spend time with Beckett, which they did so for the remainder of Beckett's life. She was quoted as saying

'It took 30 seconds to fall in love with Beckett'. Despite being drawn by his graceful, generous manner and his voice, which she described as sounding like the sea, she nonetheless kept her distance, and it was he who made the first moves in what was to become a relationship of central importance for both of them. [74]

She regularly worked with Beckett advising him on his writing and she translated the majority of work by the French novelist, playwright and screenwriter Marguerite Duras and works by major writers including Jean Anouilh, Michel Tournier and Julia Kristeva. Beckett translated his own work.

In 1969 Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, the third Irish person to receive the reward after George Bernard Shaw and William Butler Yeats. Beckett accepted the award but refused to attend the ceremony to give the acceptance speech, as he did not want the ensuing publicity and, instead he choose to remain on holiday in Morocco.

Beckett's style of theatre is often referred to as 'theatre of the absurd' dealing with themes that range from alienation to bodily functions. And yet in the article In Love with Hiding: Samuel Beckett's War, by poetry scholar and critic Marjorie Perloff, the Polish theatre critic, scholar and political activist Jan Kott is quoted as saying 'when we want realism, we do Waiting for Godot'. Many of his works contain brilliantly witty moments of dark comedy. According to Martin Esslin, the Hungarian born British theatre critic and scholar, Beckett's work is about 'the essential aspects of human experience' and 'the basic questions for Beckett seemed to be . . . how can we come to terms with the fact that, without ever having asked for it, we have been thrown into the world, into being? And who are we; what is the true nature of our self? What does a human being means when he says 'I'? [75]

In addition to Waiting for Godot, Beckett's plays include Endgame, Happy Days, Play, Ohio Impromptu, Not I, Come and Go and What Where. His play Catastrophe, written in 1982, was dedicated to then imprisoned Czech reformer and playwright, Václav Havel.

In the article In Love with Hiding: Samuel Beckett's War, the poetry scholar and critic Marjorie Perloff talks about the nature of 'waiting' that Beckett would have experienced whilst on the run during the war years. According to Perloff, Beckett does not write directly about his involvement in the Resistance although 'allusions to it are . . . everywhere in the texts of the post-war decade'. [76] In Waiting for Godot the characters of Vladimir and Estragon talk about wandering in the Pyrenees. Estragon says 'I've always wanted to wander in the Pyrenees'. In the original French version, Beckett specifies more fully:

'Nous irons,' Gogo tells Didi, 'dans l'Ariage,' and he adds, 'J'ai toujours voulu me balader dans l'Ariage.' The joke here is that the Ariage was hardly a place suitable for wandering. Also known as 'Le Chemin de la Liberte' (later the title of Sartre's trilogy of novels), it was the chief World War II escape route from France to Spain, a challenging, hazardous route chosen to avoid all official checkpoints and any likely contact with German patrols. In June 1943 alone . . . there were 113 successful evasions along the neigh-

65 Knowlson, James. (2004). Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett. Grove Press
66 Perloff, Marjorie. In Love with Hiding: Samuel Beckett's War. The Iowa Review 35.1 (2005): 76-103. Web https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5990. Page 82
67 Ryan, Isadore. No Way Out; The Irish in Wartime France, 1939-1945
68 Perloff, Marjorie. In Love with Hiding: Samuel Beckett's War. The Iowa Review 35.1 (2005): 76-103. https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5990. Page 82
69 Perloff, Marjorie. In Love with Hiding: Samuel Beckett's War. The Iowa Review 35.1 (2005): 76-103. https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5990. Page 83
70 Esslin, Martin. (2019). Samuel Beckett, Irish Author, Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Beckett
71 Esslin, Martin. (2019). Samuel Beckett, Irish Author. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Beckett
72 Ibid.
73 MacCormaic, Ruadhan. (2012). Paris Match, The Irish Times, 4 February
74 Tod, Andrew. (2020). Barbara Gray, Obituary. The Guardian, 4 March https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/mar/04/barbara-bray-obituary
75 Esslin, Martin. (2019). Samuel Beckett Irish Author, Britannica
76 Perloff, Marjorie. (2005). In Love with Hiding: Samuel Beckett's War. The Iowa Review 35.1 (2005): 76-103. Web. Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5990. Page 77

boring mountain peaks. . . Le Chemin de la Liberte would have been on Beckett's mind when he composed Godot in 1947-48.

When Beckett and his partner Suzanne had to flee Paris in 1942 after their resistance cell was betrayed, it took them almost six weeks to move South travelling over 700 kilometres in hazardous and difficult conditions and 'they made their way, hiding in barns and sheds, and sometimes trees, haystacks, and ditches'.[77] Beckett later said' I can remember waiting in a barn (there were ten of us) until it got dark, then being led by a passeur over streams; we could see a German sentinel in the moonlight'. [78]

In 1981 Beckett wrote to his friend the poet Nicholas Rawson saying 'I fare slowly on, in the long fare-welling'. [79] Beckett continued to write into his eighties producing a final piece of prose called Stirrings Still in 1988 when he was aged 82. Throughout his life, Beckett mainly wrote in French. He also translated much of his own work from English into French. According to his biographer James Knowlson French gave Beckett 'the freedom to concentrate on a more direct expression of the search for 'being' and on an exploration of ignorance, impotence and indigence. Using French also enabled him to 'cut away the excess, to strip away the colour', and to concentrate more on the music of the language, its sounds and its rhythms.' [80] Beckett's last piece of writing was a short poem Comment Dire or What is the Word? In 1988 Beckett was admitted to the Tiers Temps nursing home and he died there on 22 December 1989, aged 83. He is buried in the Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris along with his partner Suzanne who passed away in July 1989.

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BELGIAN
STORIES

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This section contains three biographies and five monologues expressing the feelings and actions of key people involved in the Comet Escape line during WWII.

The biographies on Andrée 'Dédee' de Jongh, Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon and Elsie Marechal were prepared by Mary Moynihan. The five 'theatrical' monologues by Yves Wellens, writer and playwright, were created on behalf of Théâtre & Réconciliation, Belgium in the form of autobiographical letters, 'written' in the first person by key figures of the network, namely Andrée 'Dédee' de Jongh, Andrée Dumon (codename Nadine), François Janssens, Jean-François Nothomb and Raymond Itterbeek.

Andrée 'Dédée' de Jongh (1916-2007)

Biography by Mary Moynihan

Andrée 'Dédée' de Jongh (1916-2007) Founder of The Comet Line

Established in 1941 in Brussels, the Comet Line was an escape route set up in occupied Europe during WWII that ran over 1,000 miles from occupied Brussels through occupied France and on foot over the Pyrenees into 'neutral' Spain and finally to freedom through British-controlled Gibraltar. The escape line provided a means of escape for Allied soldiers and airmen and other citizens on the run in Nazi-occupied territory. The Comet Line was set up in August 1941 thanks to the efforts of a courageous 24 year old Belgium woman Andrée (Dédée) de Jongh (1916 – 2007) codename Dédée de Jongh who took enormous risks actively setting up and running the network with people from different nationalities.

Dédéé (meaning Little Mother) was born in Schaerbeek in Belgium in November 1916. She was the youngest of two daughters and prior to the war she had a successful career as a commercial artist in the town of Malmedy. When the Germans took over Belgium she moved to Brussels, where she used her first-aid training to work as a nurse for the Red Cross, tending to wounded Allied soldiers. But she wanted to do more and so she set up an escape line that later became known as the Comet Line and ran from 1941 to 1944. She worked with hundreds of other people who wanted to stand up to Nazi brutality in some way. The route ran from Belgium across France and over the Pyrenees into Spain and was so-called because of the speed of getting the soldiers moved along the line to freedom.

Dédéé's father Frédéric de Jongh, a schoolteacher, was also active in the Comet Line. Their work on the line became so dangerous that Dédéé herself told new recruits to expect death or capture within six months of joining up. Dédée's own hero was Edith Cavell, a British nurse based in Brussels during WWI. Cavell was arrested and shot in 1915 in the Tir National in Schaerbeek for helping troops evade capture by the Germans, assisting them to escape from occupied Belgium into neutral Netherlands during the war.

Dédée initially set up a string of safe houses from Brussels to the Pyrenees to shelter the Allied soldiers. She pressed 'friends and relatives to give money, food, shelter, and to forge ID papers for escaping soldiers' as her aim was to get the soldiers home.[81] She found couriers willing to take them over the Pyrenees and eventually travelled over the mountains herself. Dédée had arrived for the first time at the British consulate in Bilbao with a Gordon Highlander called Private Jim Cromer and a couple of Belgian officers. At first the members of the consulate were wary because of the number of German spies in action, and they found it hard to believe that this beautiful and delicate young woman had walked over the Pyrenees. In an article called The Comète Escape on the website of the WW2 Escape Line Memorial Society (ELMS):

The Consulate, very concerned that de Jongh could be a Gestapo 'plant', took a number of weeks to confirm her credibility – her youthfulness and slightness of build made them suspicious and doubt that she was capable of being in charge of such an important and dangerous operation. Once the British were satisfied, the Consulate agreed support for the escape line and asked for RAF aircrew evaders to be given priority for return to active service. Andrée de Jongh was given the name of 'Postman' because of her important intelligence reports that were also reaching London from other agencies in Belgium. Her mail was referred to as 'letters' and her evaders as 'parcels'. For a while the line was known as the 'Ligne Andree'. [82]

Dédé made a verbal agreement with Michael Cresswell, a member of M19 stationed in Madrid, for support and funding. The Comet Line received financial and logistical backing and support form 'M19, the British intelligence branch set up to bring home stranded servicemen from occupied territory. The desk officer who oversaw support for Comet was the later Tory politician Airey Neave, who himself had escaped back to England from Colditz'.[83]

Members of the different Escape Lines often worked with the Resistance and the SOE or British Special Operations Unit. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1940 to 1945 set up the SOE to 'set Europe ablaze' and its aim was to link up and work with the various resistance groups particularly in France in order to undermine and fight back against the Nazi totalitarian regime. Resistance groups were set up in all countries occupied by the Nazis during WWII and were 'underground' or secret groups or networks of ordinary civilians who were opposed to and fought against the Nazi regime and were made up of cells or groups of men and women. They used guerrilla warfare tactics and activities ranged from intelligence gathering to espionage and acts of sabotage as well as running escape networks to assist Allied soldiers and airmen who were trapped behind enemy lines to escape. In France, the Resistance were a collection of French movements that fought against the Nazis regime and they were made up of people from all sections of society, their symbol was the V sign for victory and they sang the Marseillaise.

Dédée originally worked from Belgium but when the work became too dangerous there due to continued surveillance, she eventually moved to Paris where the work continued and from where she personally did the runs herself, accompanying the escapees from France into Spain with the support of other helpers along the way. An example of a Comet line journey would involve the men travelling from Paris by train, arriving at Francia Usandizaga's house in Urrugne on the French side of the border where they are entrusted to the Basque guide Florentino Goikoetxea who brings them over the mountain and across the Bidassoa river to a farm in Sarbobe. From here they travel to Irun and then take a train to San Sebastian where they are picked up by car (from the British embassy) and drive to Madrid. They stay in Madrid before taking a train to Gibraltar and from here either a plane or a boat to England. The Comet Line was betrayed on many occasions leading to the arrest and imprisonment of many of those involved:

. . . the line was blown in February 1942. It was rebuilt in June but the new organisation was again infiltrated and a number of arrests were made, including those of Andree Dumon (Nadine, Comète's main courier between Brussels and Paris) and her family on 8 August 1942'. Jean Greindl took on the task of rebuilding the Brussels base completely and more evaders started moving to the Pyrenees. At the end of November 1942 two German agents, posing as American aircrew, caused many more arrests both in Brussels and the Pyrenees. Andrée de Jongh, together with three aircrew evaders, was arrested on her 34th crossing on the 15 January 1943, at the safe house of Francia Usandizanga in Urrugne. After the arrest of Andrée de Jongh, Jean-Francois Nothomb (Franco) became Comète's controller in the French Spanish border area, retaining Comète's legendary guide Florentino. Franco made crossing number 34 alone with Florentino on the 24 January to warn Michael Cresswell (Timothy Monday) at the British embassy in Madrid of Dédée's arrest. [84]

After her arrest from the safe house in Urrugne, Dédée was interrogated and tortured. The only thing Dédée told her captors was that she was responsible for the entire escape line and the only reason she admitted this was because she wanted to save her father whom the Nazis believed was in charge. The Nazis refused to believe Dédée had set up and run such a large escape line because she was a woman and because of her youth. Thanks to German chauvinism, the German soldiers could not conceive of a twenty-five year old women organising a thousand mile escape line extending from Brussels to San Sebastian.' [85]

Dédée avoided immediate execution and was sent to Ravensbrück Concentration camp for women and then Mauthausen. Dédée, like many others became a 'Nacht und Nebel' prisoner of the Germans, suffering every degradation at the camps before being liberated by the Russians on 30 April, 1945.

The Basque woman who kept the safe house at Urrugne was called Francia (Frantxia) Usandizaga. Francia, aged 32, was a widow and the mother of three young children, Mayie, Thérése and Jean. She was a friend of Dédée's and she regularly allowed her home that she shared with her three young children to be used as a safe house, showing extreme courage

81 https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/30/magazine/30dejongh-t.html
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and bravery. The house was situated on the mountain at Bidegain Berri Farm, near Urrugne, on the French side of the border. It was here that Francia was arrested alongside Dédée on 15 January 1943, along with her Basque farmhand Juan Manuel Larburu, aged 31, and three RAF evaders, Stan Hope, George Ross and Bill Greaves. The three RAF men spent the remainder of the war in German prisoner of war camps and the three civilians were all transported to concentration camps where only Dédée survived. Francia died in captivity in Ravensbrück concentration camp for women.

After Francia's arrest 'she was imprisoned together with Lucienne Dassie and her mother at Fresnes Prison and at Fort de Romainville in the outer Paris suburbs which operated as transit camps for the main concentration camps. Thinking only of her sad children, downhearted, she prayed and made herself a rosary out of pellets of bread. She was later deported to Ravensbruck where she was beaten to death just prior to liberation by a KAPO guard at Ravensbruck in April 1945. She was buried in a mass grave which today is marked by a memorial. [86]

Dédée's father Frederic de Jongh was arrested and tortured and some months later, he was executed by a German firing squad on 28 March 1944 in Paris. Dédée described herself 'as strong as a man' and in addition to having the nickname 'the postman', she was was known as the Little Cyclone, a name given by her father because of her determination to get things done. Andrée or Dédée herself referred to her escapees as 'packages' and this is where the nickname 'the Postman' came from.

After the war Dédée trained and worked as a relief nurse in Leper colonies in Africa including the Belgian Congo and Ethiopia. She was awarded the title of a Belgium countess in 1985. Dédée won several awards including the George Medal (England), the Medal of Freedom (America), the Croix de Guerre with palm (Belgium) and she became a chevalier of the Légion d'honneur (France). Dédée passed away aged 90 in October 2007.

Dédée's favourite Pyrenean guide was Basque smuggler Florentino Goicoechea (Goikoetxea), famous for his great strength, his knowledge of the mountains and his reverence for brandy. One British airman he helped, recalled that from time to time Florentino would call a halt to the march and 'rummage about in a bush', producing a brandy bottle which was passed around before being replaced to sustain the next group of escapers.[87] Dédée led 33 expeditions over the Pyrenees and was personally responsible for saving up to 118 Allied airmen with the Comet Line. The following is a description of the Citation of the Medal of Freedom with Golden Palm awarded to Andrée de Jongh. This medal is awarded to those who assisted the American war effort during WWII:

Andrée de Jongh, Belgian civilian, for exceptionally meritorious achievements which aided the United States in the prosecution of the war against the enemy in Continental Europe, as a member of the Belgian underground movement, from August 1941 to January 1943. With extraordinary courage, ingenuity, and zeal she helped to conceive and operated the Comète Line, a thousand-mile escape route for Allied fliers falling in enemy occupied territory. In the face of almost insurmountable obstacles she personally conducted 118 Allied flyers to freedom, and more than four hundred airmen were returned to active duty through her genius for organization and her ability to inspire her co-workers. Though she was captured and imprisoned while convoying a group, she had so ingeniously designed her organization that it endured till the day of liberation. Her heroic self-sacrifice in the cause of freedom merits the highest esteem of the Allied Nations. [88]

87 http://www.ww2escapelines.co.uk/belgium-france/comete/
88 http://www.cometeline.org/cometorgnameDeJonghAndree.htm

Andrée 'Dédee' de Jongh

Autobiographical Letter/Theatrical Monologue by Yves Wellens inspired by the life story of Andrée 'Dédee' de Jongh

I was 24 years-old in 1940. This meant that I had already been born in the midst of an earlier global conflict. I was raised with admiration for great women, something my father passed on to me. One of them was Edith Cavell, a British nurse working in Belgium, who set up and organized an escape network with Belgians from the Mons region and with Frenchmen from Lille and Valenciennes during the Great War. Edith, along with Gabrielle Petit who was also a nurse and who provided intelligence and valuable information to the English, both helped hundreds of Belgian soldiers escape from the clutches of the occupying force. Both were shot. I was assigned a leadership role in the network (a Briton renamed it after my arrest, hailing the return of two British airmen who were shot a fortnight before by saying It's just like a comet), but I do not place much value on this. It does not make sense as

my part was not one I could play alone. Obviously I want the names of all my comrades to be remembered. I do not even consider myself a figurehead, a link that is more solid than most perhaps, and one that could not be broken.

At the start of the war, I quit my job as an advertising illustrator in the Malmédy region and in Brussels, and I joined the Red Cross since I had been trained as a paramedic. And thus I found my calling, which was to serve. I wanted to become a nurse but my father did not approve of the religious teachings in the hospital where I wanted to register, believing that I would lose my freedom of thought. And so my creed, to serve, is one I have devoted my life to and back then my life was in the Resistance. That is what I did during the war, surrounded by terror and brutality, and confronting all atrocities without backing down.

My family helped a lot, becoming fully involved in these dangerous operations, it seemed natural to us to do so! The family home was obviously our base and my mother always kept our Schaerbeek home available for the network. My father placed himself entirely at my service and died because of this - he was arrested in 1943 and shot in early 1944 at Mont-Valérien. My aunt discreetly supported my sister-in-law Alice, and my sister Michelin, whose husband was in Great Britain at the beginning of the war, raised my two nephews while sending messages back and forth for me. When I was arrested in 1943, and found myself inside the Saint-Gilles prison before being transferred to Germany, all my family members were already in prison! My sister was deported and eventually released at the same time as I was.

But this did not happen overnight. Initially I was in charge of a network organizing clandestine accommodation for escaped English soldiers, but this network was soon dismantled by the German police. We soon set up a new network and Arnold Deppé, who created the new network with me, worked in the Biarritz area for the Gaumont company and maintained these contacts during the war, which proved to be very useful later on. Along with my father and Arnold, we created an escape route to Spain (a country considered as 'neutral' at the time, even if Franco sided with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy), with the network crossing through occupied France and into the so-called 'free' zone.

Everything needed to be organized, nothing could be improvised. We were facing a sprawling, disciplined, unscrupulous enemy whose threats were almost always carried out –which meant that executions were more often than not arbitrary. We could never let up regardless of the pressure. It seemed as if every gesture was magnified, transporting us to a different world from the people we crossed paths with on the street. And yet, all of it was real.

The network was responsible for helping to evacuate servicemen (Britons, but also Americans, Canadians, Scots, Irish, and even sometimes Poles) who wanted to get back to Great Britain after finding themselves trapped in Nazi occupied territory. We helped Allied pilots whose planes had been shot down over Belgium, France or the Netherlands as well as those who had escaped from prisoner of war camps or from Dunkirk, and also resistance fighters and volunteers who wanted to get to Great Britain to continue the fight alongside Allied forces.

English airmen dropped their bombs at night to prevent excessive losses. The crews of these planes entering Belgian airspace faced three possibilities. Firstly, once their mission was accomplished they headed safety home, which was the best outcome and which happened many times despite the limited training they received. Secondly they were shot down and killed. Thirdly, and this is where the Comet Line comes in, they parachuted out and found themselves on the ground and on the run, at the mercy of their pursuers.

Once they reached the ground, they had to get rid of any equipment they had and move quickly through unfamiliar territory. It was too risky to reach out to figures of authority such as the local notary, priest or local civil servants who were all the time being monitored of course. The downed airmen who had avoided capture needed to make their way back to England so they could return to combat and so the idea of creating a network was established in order to help them get home. We contacted different resistance groups in our area and asked them to bring any downed airmen they came across to the network so we could assist them. Members of the Resistance had their own work to do such as sabotaging bridges or barracks and would possibly not have the time to spend on returning British airmen to England.

Of course, over time the English themselves refined their own methods of helping Allied soldiers overcome the dangers that plagued them while they remained on the run. The men who stayed with us in Brussels showed us an 'escape kit', a sort of survival pouch that we were full of admiration for, crying out in awe (but not too loud). The escape kit was an ingenious design and had all kinds of objects in it including different food dishes, some in powered format and money of course, as well as milk, matches, a razor, soap, a box of toothpaste powder, a water bottle, water purifying tablets, energy tablets; and a silk map of the area, which was light and noiseless when you spread it out. They had all sorts of ways to hide a compass such as inside a jacket button (the yellow dot on the button indicating North) or on a collar stud, or inside a pipe, lighter or belt buckle. They could even hide it inside a safety pin magnetized for orientation, or more classically inside shoe heels. And once the lining was removed, these 'escape boots' could be converted into civilian footwear. There was even a list of phrases that the Allied airmen had to learn made up of expres-

sions and sentences but nothing that could sustain an actual conversation, much less an interrogation. The goal was to erase any hint of the fugitive's country of origin, but obviously things such as an accent cannot be erased.

Little by little, relays, smugglers or lodgers emerged amongst communities located near the Belgian and French borders. Some people acted as 'administrations' for us and would manufacturing false papers or even passports. The airmen were taken care of by residents or hoteliers who - it should be stressed - risked their lives for 'collaborating with the enemy'. They provided the Allied soldiers with civilian clothing and sheltered them, often in farmhouses or outbuildings. As soon as a group could be brought together (each time between three and five people, and each time accompanied by a physician - Christmas 1941 was the fifth pass with seven people, including myself and two Basque guides, meaning 10 people which was a lot but this passage was successful), we would take the road, two or three times per month.

Obviously there was the occupying force and there were his agents, his snitches, who infiltrated our groups. Everything thus needed to be checked, several times if necessary. On the other hand, the British had at first been reluctant. They did not believe that we could organize such travel arrangements unhindered (travel that could last for up to a week). I personally had to convince the people responsible in the Consulate in Bilbao to help us for the final stage. They were not taking me seriously, or they were distrustful (no doubt I was young in their eyes to pretend I was 'managing' such a group). At the beginning, it was a mix of both - in the end, they were almost expecting us. And, in April 1942 I set my father up in Paris on Rue Oudinot with a sort of mid-way point branch, both to distance ourselves from Brussels (where the network had been infiltrated and where we had barely escaped a raid) and to serve as a transition base in charge of coordinating operations which were to continue at all costs.

During the exodus in 1940, some people were unable to make it to Great Britain, and as a result some Belgians settled in the Basque Country. Elvire de Greef settled in an abandoned farmhouse, the Villa Voisin, in Anglet, some 18 kilometers from the Spanish border. Her husband was an interpreter with the Kommandantur, and with a front row seat to supply valuable information to the resistance networks. An Englishman (called Bee Johnson) who worked with the Belgian Olympic Committee in Brussels had made it into the house with them and set himself up as 'handyman'. In concrete terms, he organized the crossings, I entrusted him with, and he was my substitute after my arrest. He was arrested, then released a day later with the help of Elvire's husband.This was where we gathered to prepare the crossing of the Spanish border – there were three other farmhouses that served as staging posts in the Basque Country. Elvire was in charge of the group's finances: when she was arrested, she pretended that, in reality, the money that she held came from the black market and the smuggling that she alleged she was involved in, when in fact she used it for the needs of the network! Her captors, being Germans who themselves dabbled in this sort of thing, feared how much she knew about them, and she was released! All of this work - staging posts, branches, supporters - was built progressively over a period of time and under the constant terror of being discovered, with the routes we have patiently built now revealed and destroyed.

Several borders had to be crossed. Between Belgium and France, there were passes, in Sivry or in Erquennes for instance. Lille or Valenciennes could be reached, then they could ride the train up to Paris (oftentimes our tickets were not even checked by stationmasters). Once in Paris, they would head to the South of France, first to Bordeaux then to Bayonne, through the Landes on bicycle or (much later) to Dax, then with the omnibus on to Anglet. Basque guides would then take over, and took us through smuggling routes in the mountain and ravines all the way to the Bidassoa river. We normally crossed around 4 or 5am, between two guard houses manned by soldiers from the Guardia Civil (quite a few people actually died there, especially because of floods, currents and cold). The Consulate in Bilbao (the one in San Sebastian was monitored too closely) drove the fugitives up to Madrid, where the Embassy took charge of them and brought them to Gibraltar. And from there they were shipped to England, with a possible stopover in Lisbon.

I was arrested in the Pyrenees, during my 23rd crossing in January 1943, following a denunciation, most likely made by a Basque farmer. I was imprisoned in Bayonne, then in Biarritz and in Fresnes. I confessed to being the founder of the escape route, but the Gestapo did not believe me – ironically, just like the Consulate of Bilbao. That saved my life and the crossing that I was responsible for did end up happening, the day after my arrest.

If you fall, a friend comes out of the shadows to take your place . . .

The network, the line continued its activities and carried out more than one hundred crossings, the two last ones by plane directly from Biarritz to London, almost as a way of tipping its wing in salute. I was released by the International Red Cross on April 22, 1945, at the same time as all the other prisoners. I no doubt saw a sign there, given that I had resumed my nursing studies now that the war was over, which had been my resolution as a youth. Youth that, of course, I had not lost.

Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon (1922-unknown)

Biography by Mary Moynihan

Belgium woman Andrée Dumon-Antoine (1922-unknown), codename Nadine, was an organiser, courier and guide for the Comet Escape Line during WWII. The Comet line, set up in 1941 and run by a number of people including Andrée (Dédée) de Jongh from Belgium, was one of numerous secret escape lines set up in occupied Europe to assist trapped Allied servicemen to escape back to their home country. Nadine was the Comet Escape line main courier and guide between Brussels and Paris from 1940 to 1942. She was eventually betrayed and captured by the Germans on 11 August 1942 and imprisoned for over a year in a Belgium prison before being deported to various camps in Germany including Ravensbruck and Mauthausen between 1942 and 1945. She was liberated from Mauthausen in April 1945.

Nadine was originally from Brussels and when she was young her family moved to the Congo as part of her father's work as a doctor. The family returned to Brussels in 1928. Nadine's father Eugene Dumon was a member of the Belgium Red Cross when the Germans invaded Belgium and also a member of the Resistance and his work with the Red Cross made him aware of the numerous Allied soldiers who needed assistance. Nadine joined him as an active member doing courier work. In 1940 she met Frederic de Jongh, of the Comète organisation whom she worked with until her arrest in August 1942. Her various jobs for the Comet Line included finding food and clothing for the Allied evaders and escorting secret mail and her 'parcels' (Allied airmen) by train from Brussels to Paris and then on to freedom via Spain working under the codename Nadine.

It was in December 1941 that Nadine took Allied Canadian pilot Albert Day from Brussels to Valenciennes. Albert Day's plane was shot down as he returned from a raid over Frankfurt. He first met Nadine as an 18-year-old woman and a member of the Resistance at a station in Brussels. He said she 'was so tiny, so small, and so beautiful a young lady that it almost seemed silly that someone my size was gonna put my life in her hands. She handled everything and we ended up in Valenciennes.' [89] Many years after the war Alfred was quoted as saying 'She wasn't one of the most important women in my life - she is the most important person in my life - as are all these helpers who helped me . . . We know the risks she took. Although she was a tiny girl, she looked six foot tall the way she handled us.'[90]

Andrée Dumon, Codename Nadine, Comète Guide

Nadine went on to assist over 25 Allied pilots from Britain, Canada, Australia and the US supporting then to cross from Belgium into France where they were met and guided on via the Comète Line network down to Spain via the Pyrenees. 'I was never frightened' she says 'I am lucky because I have cold blood - you understand that, cold blood? Also, when you are in danger you have no time to think 'I am afraid', you must think, 'What can I do?' very quick - so no time to be afraid.' [91]

Nadine was almost 20 when she was betrayed and arrested by the Nazis at her home in Brussels along with her family on 11 August 1942. As they Nazis came into their home, Nadine's father Eugene urges her to try and escape through the backdoor of the house while he escapes over the rooftop but they are both captured and arrested along with Nadine's mother. Her sister is not at home and escapes arrest. According to Nadine 'The Germans take my father in a car, me in another car. I was smiling and the Germans say, 'Soon you will not smile anymore.' But I always smile. I look so young when I arrive in the prison that a woman warder said, 'Oh, you'll be free very soon. We don't arrest children. But I knew very well I will be not free'. [92] Nadine was interrogated and suffered beatings and threats of execution but told them nothing. 'I forced myself to

89 https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/hometruths/escapeline.shtml
90 Escape Re-union, Home Truths, BBC, https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/hometruths/escapeline.shtml
91 Escape Re-union, Home Truths, BBC

smile - in French we say, 'rire jaune, a yellow smile'. She was imprisoned in Saint-Giles prison in Belgium for a year before she was taken away 'disappearing' into 'Night and Fog' along with her father.

Nacht und Nebel or Night and Fog was the codename for a decree issued on 7 December 1941 by Adolf Hitler against persons 'in occupied territories engaging in activities intended to undermine the security of German troops. They were, upon capture to be brought to Germany 'by night and fog' for trial by special courts. The code name stemmed from Germany's most acclaimed poet and playwright Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) who used the phrase to describe clandestine actions often concealed by fog and the darkness of night'.[94] Basically anyone that the Nazis considered enemies of the state were 'disappeared into camps' with their families told nothing about where they were gone to. Nadine's mother Marie was released from Saint-Giles prison in August 1943 on the same day that her husband and daughter, Eugene and Nadine were deported from Saint-Giles to Germany. They were both deported in the same transport group but only met briefly as they were leaving and in one of the stop-over points, Cologne. After this Nadine never saw her father again as he is sent to Gross-Rosen where he died on February 9, 1945. 'When the Germans evacuated the camp, he refused to leave the sick prisoners, and was burned alive with them in February 1945'. [95]

Nadine was moved from camp to camp including the slave-labour Ravensbrück concentration camp for women and finally to Mauthausen prison in Austria for 'incorrigible Political Enemies of the Reich'. Nadine describes the journey from Ravensbrück to Mauthausen in cattle trucks as lasting for four days. The prisoners had no food or water and the hygiene conditions were deplorable. The train stopped in a field some way from the camp. Nadine was very weak and when she jumped out of the cattle truck her legs buckled underneath her and she collapsed on the ground. Realising that the guards will shoot her, she manages to get up and starts marching towards Mauthausen. As they marched Nadine became aware of how beautiful the surroundings were with snow covering the land and the trees, stars in the sky and the river sparkling:

It was a moonlit night and Nadine still has a vivid memory of the beauty of the scene that greeted the prisoners: the ground and the pine trees were covered with snow and the River Danube was silver beneath the stars. Walking through the drifts was heavy work and the intoxicating beauty around her somehow made the temptation to give up all the stronger. 'I'll lie down in the snow and they'll shoot me and it will be finished,' she thought. But then she heard a voice telling her mother how she had died and it spurred her on. 'They cannot say that to my mother,' she said to herself, 'it cannot happen.' Nadine's courage reflects the spirit of many of those who worked on the Escape Lines during the Second World War. [96]

Although at the end of her strength and ready to lie down and let it be over, Nadine recalls hearing 'in her heart' a voice saying that her mother would hear how her daughter was shot on the road and rather than hurting her mother in this way, she finds the strength to carry on, aided by others around her. On arrival at the camp the prisoners were forced to stand for hours in the snow before they were taken to the showers and provided with prisoners clothes. The camp had a policy of 'extermination through work' where prisoners were worked to death. Miraculously Nadine survived the war and returned to live in Belgium in May 1945 in the house where her family had been arrested from.

Nadine's sister was Micheline Dumon (1921-2017) known as Michou or Lily. She was training as a nurse and was away from home when Andrée and her parents were arrested by the Germans. Micheline took over their work for the Comet Line helping British and American airmen escape from occupied Belgium. When asked how she managed to escape arrest she told George Watt in his book The Comet Connection: Escape from Hitler's Europe (1990): 'I knew a lot of people and moved around a lot. I never stayed in one place and so I was always alone. Also I was lucky. [97]

Micheline was involved in arranging shelter for the evaders, making them false identity papers and organising guides to take the men from Belgium, through France and into Spain. She too moved to Paris to continue the work when it became too dangerous in Brussels and she would go with the men by train to Bayonne and across the Pyrenees on foot and into Spain. The Comet Line was repeatedly infiltrated by spies with numerous arrests and Micheline would spend time liaising with M16 and sourceing new members and safe houses to ensure the work continued, playing her part in the work of the Comet Line. When the situation became too dangerous Micheline moved to London where she continued her work with the British Secret Service. 'In 1945, she married Pierre Ugeux, a major in the French section of the special operations executive, who had been assigned to her'.[98] Micheline died in 2018 and was survived by her two daughters Nicole and Brigitte and a son Guy. Pierre her husband died in 2009 and another son Stedan predeceased her. Both sisters Nadine and Micheline are remembered for their bravery and courage in assisting others during World War II.

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Comet Lines – Freedom Trails of Europe

Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon

Autobiographical Letter/Theatrical Monologue by Yves Wellens inspired by the life story of Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon

So as to avoid confusing me with the founder of the Comet Line (who ended up being called Dédée) and with whom I shared a first and second name – Andrée and Marie – I was known in the network as Nadine. And thereafter many people (airmen, volunteers) that I gathered with to share our memories continued to call me so.

When the war started, I was not yet 18. But many of us were chips off the old block! My father, who would become a physician in the colonies, was one of the youngest volunteers during the First World War, where he ended in Eastern Africa. In the 1930s, using the word 'Boches' was quite common, even in the Athenaeum in Uccle where I was a student. And my idealistic wishes to see reconciliation between people that were former enemies shattered when Poland was invaded in September 1939 by Nazi Germany. This resulted in France and Britain entering the war, 'the Phoney War' in which the belligerents created fronts without openly coming to blows. I did not understand at first how Belgium could remain neutral at such a time. From that perspective, the invasion of the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France and Belgium on May 10, 1940 naturally clarified things. We were at the mercy of a real armada. Along with my father in the early morning light, I saw all of these 'silver birds' in tight formation buzzing all around us. And I will always have in my head, the announcement of aggression made over the radio by Theo Fleischman who spoke about "hundreds of planes occupying the azure sky".

I first began to fold up newspapers in the shape of a V (for Victory) or to cut the letter V out of the newspapers that I then scattered along the Avenue des Nations (currently Avenue Franklin Roosevelt) where we lived. Then I joined the Luc-Marc network where my father was one of the leaders. The network shared intelligence (military, economic or political) with the British authorities and information deemed reliable was then passed on to the Belgian government in exile. The network often had the help of employees in local administration, telephone and telegraph services or railways.

I acted as courier, as a sort of liaison officer in Brussels, in the Ghent area or in Bruges. We knew that allied airmen who had been shot down during missions were hiding in the country. Through a

visiting nurse, my mother met with Mr. De Jongh, Dédée's father, who quickly suggested I work for the Comete network. In the beginning, in Brussels, this meant carrying out the same task I had previously done which was to carry secret mail that needed to be passed on to other contacts or to relay teams who went on to travel long distances carrying the envelopes with them in their pockets.

Then, in December 1941, I led an Allied pilot for the first time, crossing the border on foot up to Valenciennes, where I met up with Charles Morelle who then took charge of him as they travelled on to Paris. He was a liaison officer who was entirely dedicated to Dédée. He was arrested in May 1942 and deported. Then, it naturally happened that I ended up escorting several allied pilots (English, Canadian, Australian) to Paris myself.

It was obviously very dangerous: speaking should only be done wisely and with certainty. Silence was the rule, especially for those who were 'protected', who were not supposed to speak for themselves. One of the soldiers accidentally said 'sorry' one day while travelling in a tram carriage, which fortunately had no repercussions. If someone spoke to them, I would answer myself, under the pretext that my escorts were tired. We always traveled in third class because I believed that part of the train was less monitored. An American pilot, a rich kid I suspect, did not take it very well but we silenced him. Another time, I was in a compartment with five Germans who had spotted my suitcase, in the bottom of which I had concealed important documents. At the border, one of these Germans pointed out my suitcase to a customs officer who check the contents discovering my secret cargo. However, he simply said 'It's fine' when I whispered to him 'It's for the other side'.

I was arrested following a denunciation. My own father was also too trusting, speaking openly in public about his activities, which proved, without a doubt, to be harmful. I was transferred to the prison in Saint-Gilles (my mother was three cells away from mine) and brought several times to the Gestapo headquarters on Rue Traversière for interrogation. I faced my denunciator, the man who had betrayed me, who was so subservient to the Nazis that it sickened me. But he knew many things, he gave a lot of names, which meant that he had been around us for a while. And because he specifically implicated me, I had to undergo intensive interrogations, forcing me to invent a credible story that I put up as a front. Above all, give no names. The interrogation officer became fixated on Dédée's father, Frédéric De Jongh, no doubt because he thought that he was the leading figure of Comet. I stuck to a version according to which a Mr. René brought me to Place Rogier so I could bring English airmen from Gare du Nord to Paris, where they would be entrusted to a Mr. Victor. And I managed to write a document which fully exonerated my mother who was obviously discovered during a daily search of our home.

I was deported. After spending time in Ravensbruck Concentration camp for women, I arrived, absolutely exhausted, to Mauthausen in March 1944. A German soldier wrote a large K for 'Krank' on the back of my shirt. This meant I was ill and apparently I would be disposed of shortly. Upon the advice of a French soldier, I managed to almost completely erase the 'K'. The camp was freed on April 22, 1945 by a branch of the Canadian Red Cross. On my eventual return to Gare du Nord train station in Brussels I was re-united with my mother and Andrée De Jongh's mother, however I hated the way we were treated. The surviving deportees were lined up in single file, without so much as a chair to sit on, and were examined by four doctors, in front of all the travelers who looked at us as if we were some kind of twisted attraction. It took me over two years to walk again correctly.

Elsie Maréchal (1924 –date unknown)

Biography by Mary Moynihan

Elsie Maréchal's mother, Elsie Mary Bell, was from England and her father, George Maréchal was from Belgium. Elsie's parents met in London when her mother was working as a teacher. Her father was a soldier who had fought in the Trenches during WWI and was in London recovering from pneumonia. Her parents 'fell into her father's arms' during a bomb alert in London in the First World War'.[99] They married in 1920 and moved to Germany where George was working and then to Belgium in 1929. At this stage they had two children, Elsie and her younger brother Bobby. During WWII, Elsie and her parents were members of the Belgian Resistance. Elsie was only 16. The family were all inspired by the work of Edith Cavell and, like Edith, they all contributed to the work of sheltering Allied service men in their home in Brussels. Both Elsie and her mother were members of the Comet Line.

The first day of the occupation in 1940, my father woke us very early, shouting 'get up, there is war,' she says. 'You could hear shooting and see aeroplanes flying over the guns. The Germans arrived on motorbikes, armed to the teeth. There were hundreds of them, followed by tanks. Then I heard the boots of the marching troops. 'The family joined the thousands of refugees fleeing to Dunkirk to try to escape to Britain, but were brought back to Brussels in lorries by Nazi troops. At the end of that year, an aunt of Elsie's discussed with her the possibility of joining the Resistance. After running home and asking her parents, the reply from her mother was simple: Anything for England. . . We wanted freedom . . . Under the Germans you lost your liberty and weren't allowed to do anything. We wanted to be free. It was very dangerous. If they even heard you listening to the BBC you were sent directly to the camps. We had to muffle it up, but of course we still listened. [100]

The family met with Andrée 'Dédée' de Jongh as part of the Comète Line and they housed numerous escapees. In addition, Elsie carried messages around Brussels to different members eventually moving on, when she was 18, to sourcing safe houses in order to expand the Comet network. Later she worked at questioning young airmen to try to ascertain that they were genuine escapees and not German spies.

Elsie and her mother were arrested on 18 November 1942. Both were at home when two men called to the front door of their home pretending to be Allied American pilots looking for assistance.

Elsie and her mother were instantly suspicious of them, quizzing them over a lunch of cooked aubergine. On her mother's instruction, she left to report the surprise arrival to the Resistance's headquarters. She returned home to find the front door ajar.'I walked in and suddenly I got a revolver in my stomach and was pushed against the wall,' she says. 'One of the false aviators shouted 'the game is up'. He pushed me into the sitting room; there were eight men in armchairs, their feet on the table. Drinking, smoking with papers everywhere. They started howling at me. They were violent and told me it was the end of me and my head would come off. The sky fell in. [101]

Elsie's entire family were imprisoned including her parents and her brother Bobby. Elsie was imprisoned at the 'notorious Traversiére police station' [102] and interrogated and beaten and then sent with her parents to Saint-Giles prison in Brussels. Her brother was released after two months. Elsie's father Georges Maréchal was executed by firing squad on 20 October 1943. Elsie and her mother were both condemned to death and sent to various concentration camps in Germany ending up in Ravensbrück concentration camp, where up to 92,000 women died.

They didn't shoot the women, Elsie says. We were to die of misery, hunger and exhaustion. I felt that we had a horrible devil following us. But when we arrived at Ravensbrück, it was the worst. The first thing I saw was a cart with all the dead piled on it. Their arms and legs hanging out, and mouths and eyes wide open. They reduced us to nothing. We didn't even feel like we had the value of cattle. You worked and you died.[103]

Elsie and her mother were moved from Ravensbruck Concentration Camp in Germany to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. They were freed by the Red Cross at the end of the war and returned to Belgium. Elsie and her family like many of those involved in the Comète Line shared a belief in the value of freedom.

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Jean-François Nothomb or 'Franco' (1919-2008)

Autobiographical Letter/Theatrical Monologue by Yves Wellens inspired by the life story of Jean-François Nothomb or 'Franco'

I led Comet following the arrest of Dédée, a great woman who took many personal risks to ensure the success of the border crossings. During one of the crossings that she organized, she also succeeded, through the British Consulate in Bilbao, to get in touch with MI-9 - the Military Intelligence's 9th section, which were Britain's secret services). Their agent in Madrid was Michael Creswell who, following the arrest of De Jongh on January 15, 1943 in Urrugne, in the French Basque Country, gave the new name to the network – something Dédée herself didn't know about until her release after the war.

I met her in October 1942. She was looking for a person who looked Mediterranean, to assist her in the South sector. Franco is François in Spanish (Dédée also called me Franquito). My full name is Jean-François, my last name is Nothomb, and I used the name 'Franco', quite a transparent reference to the general and dictator who created an axis with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

It should not be believed that Spain was truly 'a neutral country' or that it was a 'safe place' for refugees or those who were fleeing oppression and barbarity, quite the contrary! The soldiers of the Guardia Civil were very present in the San Sebastian region, and the crossing of the Bidassoa river which separated the French and Spanish parts of the Basque Country was made even more difficult, because it had to be crossed between the guard houses where these soldiers stood – and thus their location had to be known. Soldiers would frequently spot us. Those they arrested were more often than not sent to the concentration camp of Miranda do Ebro, in the Burgos province. But sometimes, which was much worse, they were delivered directly to the Nazis.

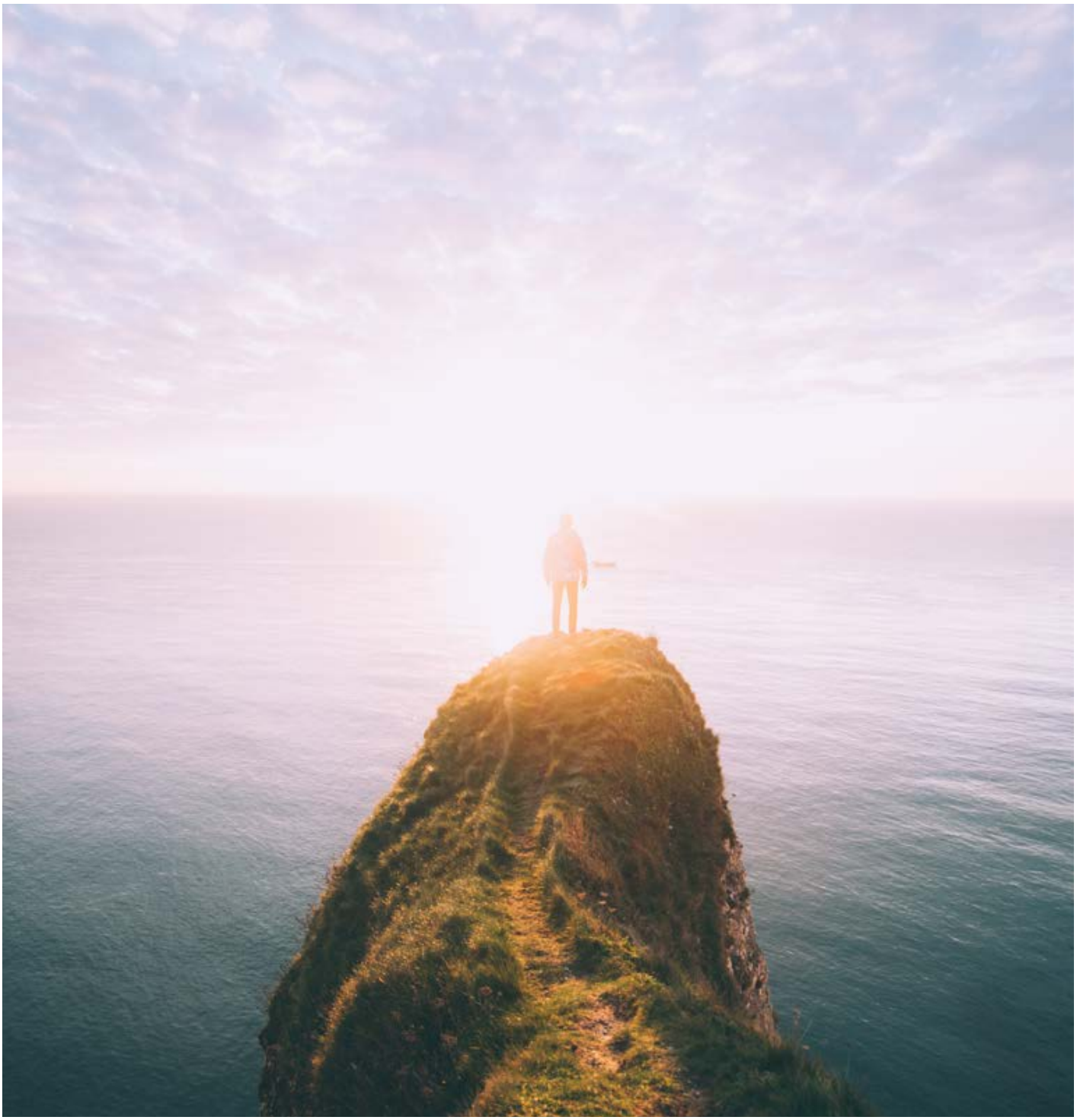
As soon as I learned of Andrée's arrest, I made the crossing alone the following day, on January 16, to notify Michael Creswell at the Embassy in Madrid. I drove back to France, passing through Bilbao and Burgos. I reorganized and 'managed' the whole South sector, from Paris to the Pyrenees - finding staging posts, safe houses (and people who accepted to take such a risk), smugglers, equipment, money, false documents, etc. We had a few assets, and especially the fact that the De Greef spouses, who had fled Belgium when it was invaded, lived in the Bayonne area, and collected the 'parcels' escorted by the members of Comet. And from July 1943 onwards, most of them were housed by Marthe Mendiara, at the Larre restaurant on the road to Cembo, a little further down than the school of Sutar. But we also needed to find other routes.

Of course, in this quest, the Basque guides, who were often smugglers and seldom spoke Spanish, provided crucial support. They knew the mountain trails that crossed the border like the back of their hand, and they had many contacts in the Spanish Basque Country. And very often, these 'mugalaris' (the Basque word for these mountain 'guides' who crossed the borders) had fought in the ranks of the Spanish Republicans, and had fled to France at the end of the civil war. It was simpler for them to embrace our cause.Following my own arrest, they were the ones who mostly took over. They had already been assisting me when, for safety reasons, I had to pull back and stay in safe houses in France. With them, I even devised an escape plan for Dédée out of the prison in Bayonne (that we called the Villa Chagrin or Villa Sorrow), but unfortunately we were not able to follow through on this.

We had to be suspicious of everything, and everyone. For instance, Creswell had recommended a Basque Capuchin priest in a monastery near Elizondo, but our taxi was intercepted by soldiers en route. We spent ten days in a prison in Pamplona, before being released at the request of the British. From there, I left the road to Bidarry and asked Pierre Elhorga, a Basque guide who had helped Dédée at the beginning by supplying her with food stamps, finding staging posts or recruiting guides, to provide me with another possible route. He found several.

I decided with him to use a safer route, to the south-east of Bayonne and Anglet, through mountain trails that sometimes rose to 600 or 700 meters above sea level, to Navarre, making us cross villages like Urdax or Erratzu in the Baztan valley, some 70 to 80 kilometers from San Sebastian.

From July 1943 onwards, escapees continued their journey either through Saint-Jean-de-Luz or through Larressore. Four guides accompanied them, all of them were wanted to be sent to the STO. One of



them was actually arrested in June and imprisoned at the Villa Chagrin in Bayonne, but he managed to escape. This route was to be used for 21 crossings, from September 1944 to the beginning of January 1945, organized with Marcel Roger (called Max) who had arrived in October.

Another route followed the towpath along the Nive river, through Villefranque and Ustariz, then through the woods to avoid towns. The crossing took place at night, following a six-hour walk through mountain passes and valleys, before climbing up a stream and crossing it to reach the first refuge, located at the end of the first two hundred meters in Spain. There were other peaks to climb, other farms where we could stop, other routes such as the one to Cambo where I would head, in a quarry, to deliver some airmen to Juanito Bidegain, a farmer. He would hen to take them to Souraïde and from there to a town between Sare and Urdax.

I was arrested on January 19, 1944 in Paris, during a meeting with the leadership of the network. Naturally we had been betrayed. I was sentenced to death by a military tribunal, then deported. I was liberated from the Bayreuth concentration camp (Flössenburg KL) in Bavaria by American troops in May 1945.

After the war, I announced and then called off my engagement with Dédée, and I joined the Brothers of Charles de Foucauld. I was sent as a missionary to Algeria to work with the indigenous population of Venezuela.

François Janssens (unknown)

Monologue by Yves Wellens

I did not want to follow in the family tradition. My grandfather and my father manufactured and renovated musical instruments, especially violins and cellos. They were craftsmen and luthiers. This did not appeal to me. Actually, from a musical perspective, I am more interested in the clarinet or the saxophone.

My father accepted my decision, provided that I worked. He asked me what trade I was considering, and I replied a tailor. I was quickly accepted into a workshop, and I simultaneously enrolled in evening classes at the Arts et Métiers. In fact, I did not work inside the workshop, I was what you call a 'picker, meaning someone who worked from home, sewing or making alterations. In addition this provided me with a cover for my work with the Comet Line. It helped to have regular and steady work, something the Germans were very fussy about. It allowed me to be mobile enough for my clandestine activities, to move about without having to justify it and of course, the work or orders had to be completed on time.

And I was even able to use my trade as part of my clandestine work. For instance, one of my own clients at the store where I was employed on Cantersteen, across from Gare Centrale, was a German officer. He would confide in me like he would have confided in his hairdresser or his bootmaker. Of course, I did not ask questions that were too specific. I was playing the part of the trusted man, and I was able to obtain information. For example one day he said that we would not see each other again for a long time. I understood by connecting the dots together, that the war was going to escalate on the Eastern front and that Germany was going to attack Russia.

When the Nazis invaded Belgium, people felt a lot of bitterness. Politicians, especially the French ones, behaved like altar boys, but the Germans did not. But I have to say that the resistance was getting ready and not just in our thoughts. We were making a very real commitment to the cause. Of course we wanted to stay alive but we wanted to get rid of the occupier and I found that commitment 'normal', it was never something I questioned or doubted. My father and my wife knew what I was doing, and they would not have prevented me from doing this. I very quickly wanted to make myself useful.

My uncle was leading a network, and I assisted him

in exchanging correspondence, and intelligence: sounding people out, getting them to talk, making them drink if necessary, so that they would talk and I would thus obtain information. I was often in contact with a professional photographer, who would take photos of the fugitives for their false documents. At one point, the network was dismantled but I remained free. I realized later that the Germans were hoping we would leave for England, there were four of us involved and I believe we could have found the means to do so if we wanted.

Fortunately, we did not do it. If we had attempted it, the whole organization, the staging posts, the accommodations would have been decapitated. It was my uncle himself who took on a role that was larger than him, who gave up the network he was leading expecting to be replaced by a much more reliable man.
Airmen had been shot down above the Channel.

To give you an idea of how poorly prepared these repatriation operations were, one of the airmen was

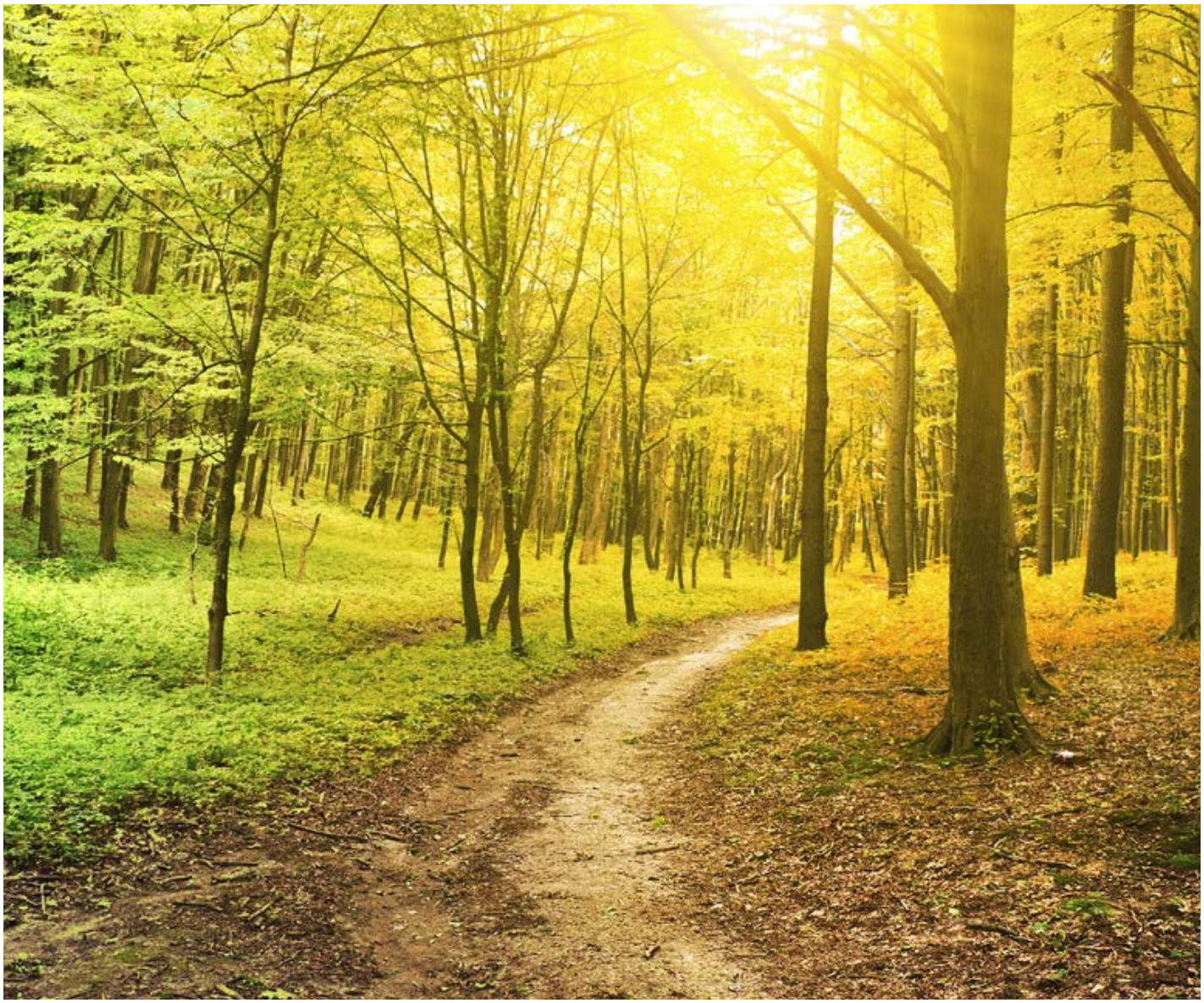
hitchhiking to Brussels – fortunately a gendarme took charge of him, which made things easier.I started harboring some of them, Poles, for instance. I clothed them entirely and sometimes I took them down to a bar so they could find some distractions.

My wife spoke English, which made things easier. So, I was doing Comet work before I even knew of the network's existence. I met Dédée's father two or three times, in the Mutsaard neighborhood near the Palais Royal. Then I met Dédée herself, and she entrusted me with various tasks by the middle of the spring of 1942. Right from the start, she told me, as she told any new member of the network, 'After three months, you will be burned!'. This proved to be roughly correct, given that I was arrested in October 1942.

Frankly, the Germans came to find one of the house's tenants, but they came across us, a friend and I, holding weapons and a torch, because we were trying to flee. The tasks were primarily to gather information, to carry correspondence, to escort airmen through Brussels and to provide false documents. I was also in contact with Henri Michelli, who was close to the Intelligence Services and who created a housing network with the baron Donny in September 1941. He was a funder but one who did not sit on the sidelines: he also took some risks and paid the price, as he was deported to Germany for three years. He started as the assistant to Frédéric De Jongh, then he became the leader of the Brussels sector, once Dédée's father was transferred close to Paris, in the Val-de-Marne area.

Michelli was arrested in May 1942, during a meeting in which De Jongh the elder was also supposed to participate – but he had left six days earlier for his new destination. Aside from that, he also sheltered airmen in his home, before joining Comet. Once in the network, he made several trips to the Ardennes to create "lines" helping to return fugitives to the central organization in Brussels.

I was profoundly marked by my captivity, of course, but also by my return following the Liberation. We were perceived like strange animals. My health was faltering. I had vertigo and I was afraid of the noise of the city. We were not being treated with much respect by certain people. I rested for a while, and then I had to resume my activities.



Raymond Itterbeek (1922-2015)

Autobiographical Letter/Theatrical Monologue by Yves Wellens inspired by the life story of Raymond Itterbeek.

When my country, Belgium was invaded, on May 10, 1940, I had to retreat to France, to Montpellier which was a recruitment center for the Belgian army. Like all youth aged between 18 and 35 I was following the orders of the Belgium government to sign up. But when I discovered our country had been occupied, I fully believed that we had to resist by any means possible.

I was very active with the scouts, and I had taken the initiative to protect Mrs. Rosenbaum, the mother of one of the cubs that I hung around with in our scout camps. I installed her with my grandmother, where the whole family lived until the Liberation. The mother of another cub asked me for help and I asked my other grandparents to hide them in their house in Molenbeek. One of their sons was careless and revealed his new address to a 'smuggler; who was in fact a snitch for the Gestapo. They were denounced and arrested and deported to Auschwitz. My grandparents only escaped deportation by selling their diamonds.

A printer, who printed false food stamps for resistance fighters or fugitive families, provided me with official and steady employment with the Interior ministry (indispensable to avoid deportation). When he was arrested, I was contacted by another member of the Secret Army, who introduced me to a lawyer, also a member of the Secret Army but also a member of the Comet network. I carried out a mission for my first network. Meanwhile, I was transferred to the Legal Department of the Ministry where I met Jacques De Bruyn who was already in charge of convoys on the escape line. At the same time, I would distribute copies of the clandestine La Libre Belgique in Woluwe. I worked for Zéro, the intelligence service, and I was the editor of a small clandestine Belgian-Hungarian newspaper.

I knew that the airmen shot down and captured by the occupying forces were cared for by the Red Cross and that, once they were healthy again, they were transferred to prisoner camps. To remedy this, a channel or escape route was devised by one of Comet's founders, Arnold Deppé, who lived in Saint-Jean-de-Luz before the war. He knew a family of Belgian refugees, the Degreefs, who had a house in Anglet, close to the Spanish border. And that is where all the airmen and volunteers ended up. The escapees were moved along the network and welcomed into safe houses by local inhabitants and then accompanied by Basque guides over the mountains. Many of these guides were deemed to be outlaws (most of them were traffickers or smugglers) who had taken up our cause.

Jacques De Bruyn told me that I would 'do a good job by becoming an agent with the network'. Our job was to welcome the airmen who had been shot down over Belgium or neighboring countries, and to lead them through France where other network members would then take over. Of course, my friend warned me in 1943 that I would only be able to carry out these clandestine escape activities for a very limited time - he spoke about a maximum of three months - because of the many secret police forces and their cronies, who tried by any means possible to detect and deter us from continuing. I knew that providing aid to the 'enemy' was automatically punishable by the death penalty. Posters and newspapers repeated this message tirelessly. And the punishment was the same for the entire family, whether they were involved or not. When a resistant member was arrested, he was the only one targeted whereas people sheltering airmen would compromise their entire family, including adolescents who were sent to re-education camps in Germany.

I accepted, of course. But before that, Jacques De Bruyn asked me to take part in two armed robberies, each time to seize documents and secret reports containing lists. The robberies took place in the gathering room of the Verdinaso, an extremist Flamingant organization, to begin with, and then in the offices of OVRA , the Italian secret service located in a building alongside the Bourse and charged with monitoring Italian airmen who were ordered to bomb London. In his mind, these successful operations were, without a doubt, a way to judge my behavior and my capabilities when confronted with danger.

The leader of Comet Line at that stage was Yvon Michiels who later became the organizer of Operation Marathon, which created a number of staging posts in the Ardennes in order to bring the 'boys' all the way to Brittany, so that they could reach the front opened by the Landing on June 6, 1944. His deputy,

an architect by the name of Jules Dricot, created my false documents, a Nivelles identity card for the Belgian sector and a French identity card from the village of Pencran, in the Finistère (I was depicted as a lawyer).

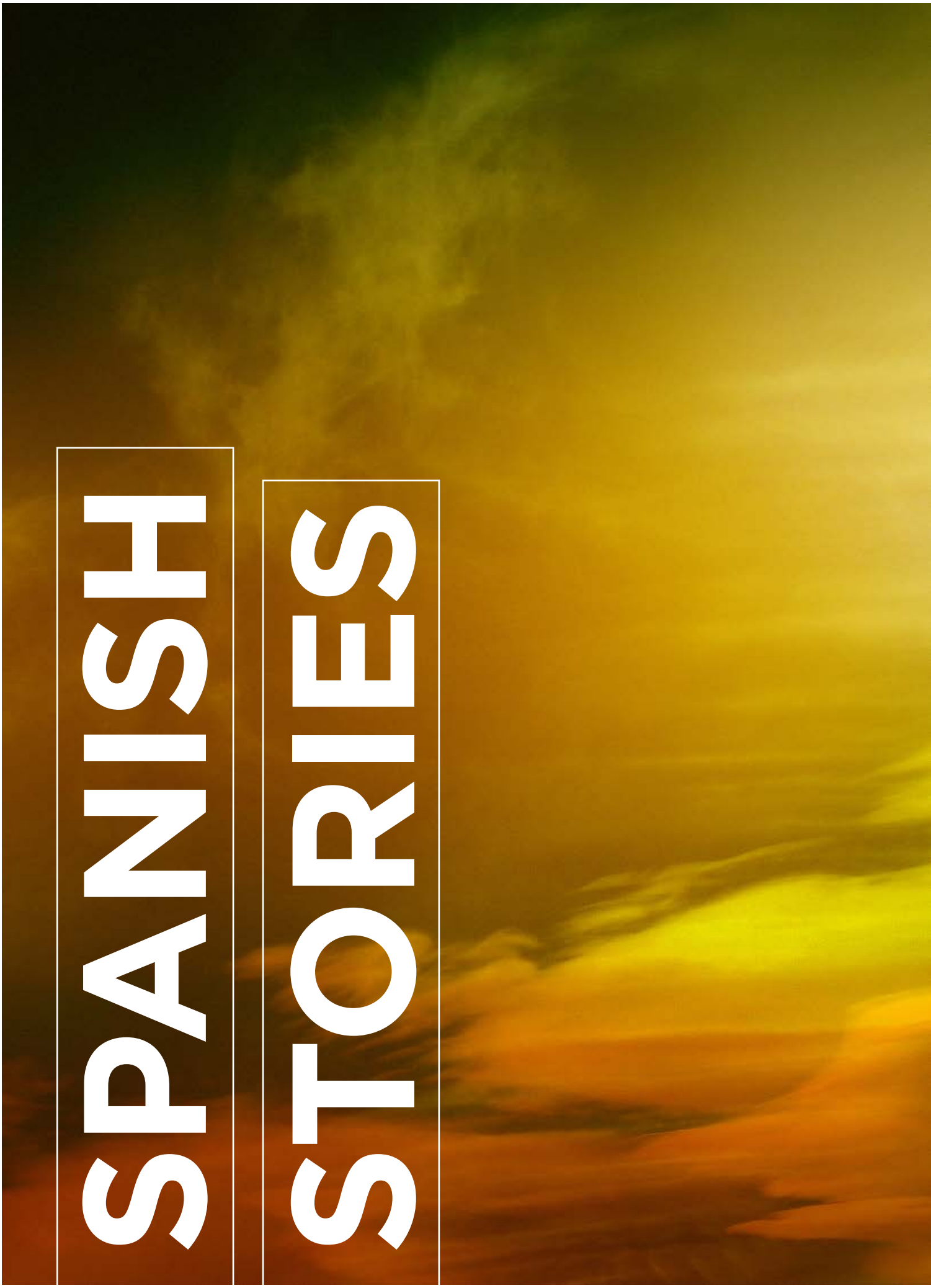
My work was twofold, first, finding safe houses for the English and Americans with people who were reliable and discreet vis-à-vis their families, neighbors and friends, and driving two airmen to France twice a week, going through the border towns of Rumes, Hertain, Sivry, and Beaumont, where smugglers would guide them to a rallying point in France (generally Lille or Valenciennes) and where other guides coming from Paris would help them continue their journey.

I was able to make 17 crossings throughout 1943 before I was arrested. Most of the time, Micheline Dumon (called Michou) would bring two airmen to the Gare du Nord. She would hand me the three train tickets, and we would board a crowded compartment, often standing on the platforms and mingling with traveling German soldiers. I felt a strange jubilation at the notion of finding myself, with my protégés in the midst of these brutes who were looking everywhere for us.

I must emphasize that all this activity was only possible because the ministry in which I worked was directed by a former war council magistrate, who would cover for us and grant us, both Jacques De Bruyn and myself, official leave that he hastened to delete upon our return.

At one time, there were so many airmen to hide that we lacked safe houses, and we had to take charge of some of them ourselves. I had also convinced seven families to house some of them before their transfer, but there were some denunciations and arrests. I was personally arrested during my 18th crossing, at the beginning of January 1944, and sentenced to death in July. But I was deported (and so was my mother), and finally freed by the Americans at the end of April 1945.

Comet was decapitated five times, but the Line would always spring back to life with new members, who were themselves always hunted down. Even when the British asked the network to cease its activities, made even more random by the bombing of the railway tracks, crossings were made. We always knew what the expression ‘Until the end’ mean.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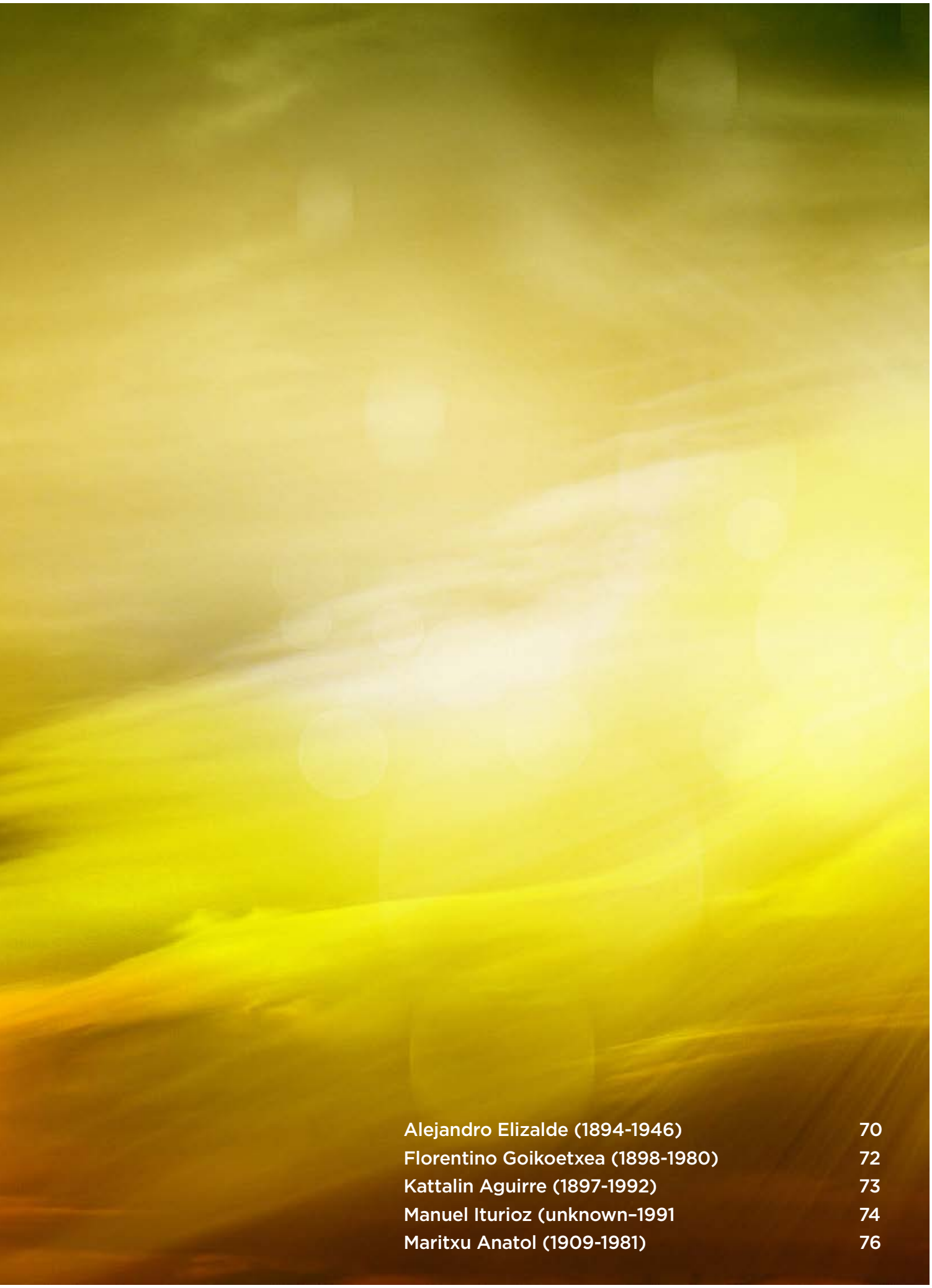

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Alejandro Elizalde (1894-1946)

By Fernando Benavente

Alejandro Elizalde Iribarren was born in Elizondo on 1 February 1894. He studied to become a teacher of commerce in Saragossa, before working as an insurance agent for La Unión and as a Ford car salesman in Donostia (San Sebastián), where he joined the Agrupación de Empleados Vascos (the Basque Employees' Organization) which would later amalgamate with the Basque trade union, ELA. On 3 November 1923, he married a Bilbao woman, Carmen Colau Marrodán, with whom he was to have seven children, and returned to Baztan, specifically to Gartzain. Alejandro joined the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV).

He was in San Sebastián when the Spanish Civil War broke out, and he enlisted with the Eusko Gudarostea (Basque Army). During the war he was the chauffeur for the leaders of the Basque militias in Gernika and he joined the Junta de Defensa de Gipuzkoa (Gipuzkoa Defence Committee), serving on the Transport commission. He intervened to prevent the execution of over 150 Francoist prisoners, but the definitive defeat suffered by the Basque front forced him into exile, and he had to leave his whole family behind in Baztan. After crossing the muga (Basque for border), he stayed at Donibane Lohitzune (in French, Saint-Jean-de-Luz), where he worked as a fishmonger, and then as a chauffeur at the seaside town of Ayenac.

After he moved to Saint-Jean-de-Luz along with other Basque exiles, he made contact with the Basque government, whose delegate at that time was Isaac López Mendizábal. The latter introduced him to captain Mouliá of the Deuxième Bureau of the French Army, to whom he initially provided information on the development of the Spanish Civil War, and with whom he worked, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, in the search for Nazi spies on the Basque coastline.

Shortly afterwards, Elizalde made the decision to join the French Resistance intelligence agency, surveilling the activities of the German spies throughout Iparralde (the French or northern Basque Country). Thanks to him, the Nazi spy Paul Longhi was imprisoned in Bordeaux, although he was later to be freed due to the German invasion, which meant that Elizalde's situation became very much compromised. On one of these missions as a spy for the Resistance, Elizalde met the Belgian, Arnold Deppé, one of the founders of the Franco-Belgian Comet Network (in French, Réseau Comète), and in June 1941 he asked him to join the organization. Elizalde was in charge of the line's contacts in the zone, above all in conjunction with 'Tante Go' (Elvire De Greef), the head of the sector, and he also organised accommodation for escapees prior to them crossing into Spain.

The Nazi army had reached Bayonne in June 1940, but the sinuous Basque muga between France and Spain, formed by the Bidasoa and Baztan rivers, continued to serve as a means of escape for Resistance members and escapees from German persecution. In addition, the direct Paris-Hendaye train was maintained.

It was also the case that, before the war, Deppé had himself worked as a maintenance technician for the cinemas found in many of the towns and villages throughout the French Pyrenees and he had perfect knowledge of the area. Taken as a whole, these circumstances prompted the activists of the Comet

Network (originally founded in Brussels) to use the Basque muga as the place where they would pass over into Spain taking with them the British Allied pilots who had been brought down over France and other countries.

Elizalde's role was to prepare the crossing of the Basque muga using guides (mostly smugglers) and to organize accommodation in nearby villages, mainly Elizondo, when the route began to shift from the Bidasoa towards Dantxarinea and Aritzakun, due to growing pressure from the Germans and the Spanish Guardia Civil. Elizalde also recruited a further mugalari (expert border guide), the Hernanian, Tomás Anabitarte.

The first border crossing, involving a group of 15 escapees, took place on 15 July 1941, but almost all of them were detained by the Guardia Civil after crossing the muga close to Endarlatsa (the exact spot was alongside the old San Miguel station of the Tren Txikito). To firm up the route, contact was made with Elizalde and others who had expert knowledge of the area, such as the Hernanian, Florentino Goikoetxea, the Zegamaran, Bernardo Arakama (a former gudari - Basque soldier - in the Batallón San Andrés, who was also an ELA member), and Maritxu Anatol, an audacious Irun woman, who was recruited specifically on Elizalde's initiative.

Elizalde also signed up fellow ELA members, the Biscayan, Martín Hurtado de Saracho, and the Alavese, Ambrosio San Vicente to the Comet network. However, the group was betrayed by a servant from a Biriatu farmstead, and on 15 January 1943 the Nazis raided the Bidegain Berri farmstead, where they captured practically the whole network. Notwithstanding this, Comet was reconstructed, and by the time its work had ended, it had saved nearly 800 evaders from the Nazis.

Elizalde was captured by the Gestapo on 13 July 1943, at Café Prado at Donibane Lohitzune beach, after being reported by the Francoist foreign minister to the Nazi authorities occupying France. He was caught in Bayonne's Citadelle, whence he was taken northwards to Fresnes and Compiegne, before his deportation to successive concentration camps, including Mauthausen, Melk and Ebensee. When he was freed by the Americans on 6 May 1945, Elizalde weighed barely 45 kilos and his health was very precarious. He took up residence on Saint Jacques Street, number 10, in Donibane Lohitzune, but he was not to recover from the extreme conditions he was forced to endure in captivity. He died on 23 November, 1946, at the Marienia de Kanbo sanatorium (Lapurdi), from a lung ailment, having traced a heroic trajectory as a fighter for freedom which stretched from his initial political and trade union engagement in ELA. Basque and French authorities attended his funeral. Elizalde was 52 years-old, and was survived by his wife and seven children, most of whom had not seen him since the outbreak of war. Years later the family settled in Doneztebe.

Florentino Goikoetxea (1898-1980)

By Fernando Benavente

Florentino Goikoetxea was a 'mugalari' who worked with the Comet Escape network (in French, Réseau Comète), an organisation that guided allied evaders across the Franco-Spanish border. 'Mugalari' is a Basque word to designate people who assisted others to cross the border between France and Spain mainly for political reasons. The word is a mix of 'muga' meaning border and 'lari' referring to people who live on the border. The word is also used to denote a smuggler.

Florentino was born on 14 March 1898 in Hernani, located in the province of Gipuzkoa, in the Basque region of Northern Spain. Florentino spent part of his younger years in the village. He greatly enjoyed hunting, a sport which he practiced with his brother Pedro and his friends Martín Errazkin and Tomás Anabitarte.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, a civil guard from Hernani went to the Altzueta farmstead to look for Florentino, without evident motive. Florentino asked the civil guard for permission to visit a brother who was living in the village, and he escaped to France, where he took refuge. He settled in Ciboure, and was engaged in smuggling. He became friends with Kattalin Aguiree who had entered the French Resistance following the German occupation, and he soon joined the Comet Escape line.

From 1941, Florentino Goikoetxea worked for the Comet Escape line, which was basically focussed on organizing the evacuation of allied airmen who had been brought down over occupied territory during bombing raids, taking them via across the French-Spanish border via the river Bidasoa to leave them in the hands of the British diplomatic authorities.

Those who crossed the Bidasoa with him retained the image of a colourful figure from a Hernani farmstead making them climb up the steep slopes from the Bidasoa to Oyarzun in the darkness of night, encouraging them onwards by saying under his breath 'two-hundred metres, two-hundred metres!', which soon became a further two-hundred, and so on it went, seemingly endlessly for the fugitives, until they reached their destination. It was an ingenuous way to motivate the exhausted airmen who arrived in Oyarzun practically dead on their feet after an eight-hour nocturnal hike. But Florentino also made use of other resources to get through the march. Sometimes, in the middle of the mountains, in total darkness, he would throw himself to the ground and from a tree hollow would pull out a bottle of Terry brandy he had hidden there on an earlier trip, and, after sharing a few swigs together, the group would move on.

But whilst it may be true that Florentino allowed himself certain licences in his hard graft, it is no less true that he achieved a rare degree of unanimity in his favour, to the extent that all Comet members who worked with him during the occupation, as well as the airmen he guided across the border in difficult circumstances, were of one voice in praising his loyalty, his commitment, his dedication and his seriousness in difficult moments.

Working until 1944 alongside the Comet Escape line founder Andrée 'Dédée' de Jongh, and following Dédée's arrest, working with his friend and companion Jean-Francois Nothomb (known as Franco), Florentino enabled 227 Allied aviators to escape, as well as numerous French and Belgian agents.

He also served with networks such as the American-dependent OSS referred to as 'Nana' and 'Margot', passing on mail to the Resistance. On 26 July, 1944, with the war practically over, Florentino was on his way home from smuggling correspondence across the border and he was caught in a surprise attack. He was transferred to Bayonne hospital with four bullet wounds, whereupon he was rescued by a successful Resistance mission, and he hid out in Biarritz until the liberation of the zone in August of that year.

Dédée's sister, Suzanne, a Comet Escape network member in Brussels, who was, like Dédée, deported to Germany, remembered Florentino in her book written after the war as 'a real Basque, honest, loyal, trustworthy in all circumstances, to be trusted absolutely'. With his simple demeanour, he was not a great talker, and somewhat brusque and shy, but Florentino performed extraordinary work for years, guiding many evaders - and not only airmen - across the border, as well as transporting a great deal of Resistance mail, alongside his great friend Kattalin Aguirre.

Florentino was highly valued by those with whom he worked during those hard years, and, of course, by the airmen he got across the border. He also received numerous official awards, medals and decorations from the allied governments. He was invited three times by the British royal family to receptions in honour of former Resistance members and, on 2 June 1977, he received the French Légion d'honneur. He passed away on 27 July, 1980, in Ciboure.

Kattalin Aguirre (1897-1992)

By Fernando Benavente

Kattalin Aguirre was born in Sara on 28 August 1897, in the Basque region of South-Western France near the Spanish Border. She took the surname of her husband, Pierre Aguirre (her maiden name was Lamothe).

Kattalin was a member of the Comet Escape Line (in French, Réseau Comète), an organisation that guided allied evaders across the Franco-Spanish border. When the head of the Comet Escape Line, Andrée 'Dédée' de Jongh, was captured in January 1943, activities of the organisation moved from Saint-Jean-de-Luz, to Ciboure, where Kattalin became a key figure, counting on the invaluable help of her daughter Josephine (Fifine), who was only aged 15 at the time. Kattalin had worked for many years at the Eskualduna hotel, which was appropriated by the Nazis for use as the Saint-Jean-de-Luz Kommandantur, and she continued working there during the war.

The airmen fleeing from the Nazis and who wanted to cross the border into Spain would arrived on bicycles from Bayonne, Sutar or even Dax. They were given lodgings at Kattalin's house, where they were clothed and fed, whilst they awaited a time to initiate the border crossing. The next stage was leaving Ciboure in the direction of Urrugne and the river Bidasoa. But crossing the bridge from Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the direction of Ciboure was a very dangerous endeavour, because it was heavily guarded. For this reason, Friday was normally the appointed day, because it was market day in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, and there was a better chance of dodging the guards.

In Ciboure, when Kattalin began working for Comet Escape line in a stable manner, the airmen were left in a small wood until nightfall. This oak forest, known as Haizetan, stretched as far as land adjoining the Aguirre household, in rue Docteur Micé.

But Kattalin was not new to the job, because she had already been working for the Resistance - which she had joined by chance - for a good period prior to making contact with the Comet Escape network. The Eskualduna hotel, her workplace, was managed by her cousin Catherine Muzuaga, and frequented by Florentino Goikoetxea, Alejandro Elizalde, Manuel Lezo and some of the area's smugglers. They were all party to the secret.

In November 1942, Kattalin met a young woman, Marguerite Corisande de Gramont, who said she was seeking lodgings for three young men, who in reality were escapees from the Nazis looking to get across the border. Kattalin immediately offered her own home for them to stay and thus began her work with the Margot network. From this point onwards, she would provide accommodation and food for the Margot evaders, and would then accompany them as far as the Urrugne road, where Florentino would collect them. In this instance the evacuees were not allied airmen, but rather French soldiers, mainly officials.

At a certain point, Margot put Kattalin Aguirre in contact with the French engineer Emile Meyran, known as Milito, who centralized in Pau the information gathered by his agents and collaborators, who were spread across France. This network was known by the name NA-NA. For a certain period, Kattalin went to Pau every week, clandestinely crossing the demarcation line. There, Meyran gave her the documents she had to take back to Ciboure, in order to pass them across the muga (border).

Via the Margot Network, Kattalin met Florentino and began to work for the Comet Network. Sometimes, Kattalin and her friend Gracia Ladouce transported a radio transmitter in pieces from their village to Orthez, and managed to get it through despite the rigorous German controls. On other occasions they also carried money.

Kattalin faced enormous risk in the execution of her multiple clandestine activities, and she risked her own life on different occasions. Just after the end of the Second World War, Kattalin Aguirre received tributes and many decorations for her work in the Resistance. In 1955, she was awarded the military medal at a public event which emphasised her role in the evacuation of airmen and in information duties. Years later, on 14 July 1985, Kattalin was awarded the Legión d'honneur. Kattalin Aguirre passed away in Ciboure on 22 July 1992, just a few days before what would have been her 95th birthday.

Manuel Iturrioz (unknown-1991)

By Fernando Benavente

Certain historians claim that Manuel Iturrioz was the first to join the legendary Comet network (in French, Réseau Comète), becoming the organization's first passeur and enabling over one hundred evaders to cross the border between France and Spain. He kept his involvement a secret from his family throughout most of his life, and only penned his memoirs when he was aged over 80. Up until that point, he had barely spoken about his experiences.

Manuel Iturrioz was born in Orexa, in the Basque country of Northern Spain but also had strong links to Hernani, also in Spain. Just before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War he joined the Miqueletes de la Diputación (chartered police) brigade, and was stationed in Hernani, where he established many contacts.

He fought the war in the Dragones battalion with people from Hernani – including the Erdocias – and after having moved on to Barcelona following the fall of the northern front, he went into exile in France, in Saint-Jean-de-Luz. He became involved in the smuggling of people and of goods following the start of the German occupation during WWII. He worked closely with Tomás Anabitarte and the nationalist from Santurce, Lezo Urreztieta, undertaking actions for the Comet network, working alongside Jean-François Nothomb or 'Franco' and Andrée 'Dédée' De Jongh, on many occasions. His acts are well-remembered, and he was an expert in avoiding surveillance on both sides of Navarre and Gipuzkoa because he established itineraries considered to be safe and stable. He was thought of as a true professional, with a very clear anti-fascist, anti-Francoist and anti-Nazi commitment in the Resistance and in clandestine operations.

Arrested on 19 April 1942 in Rentería, whilst on a bus journey from San Sebastián to Oyarzun, he was driven to Irun police station, where he was interrogated by the notorious Bazán, the companion of colonel Ortega and inspector Manzanas in their repressive activities. Taking advantage of an oversight by his keeper, he managed to escape from his cell and headed straight for the hills. He went up towards San Marcial but was unable to cross the border because there was heavy surveillance. The Germans went to his home at Saint-Jean-de-Luz. He then decided to wait in hiding and used the Aritzluzieta farmstead, close to Artikutza, in Oyarzun, as his refuge. Here, Manuel Escudero lived with his sister María Asunción. It was 22 April. Manuel Escudero hid him in a nearby cave to wait until the situation calmed down. There, he found out that three of his miquelete mates had been arrested for helping him.

He then sent the 14-year-old boy from the farm to Hernani to make contact with a friend of his. This friend was José Erdocia from the Juan Antonenea farmstead and both of them had fought in the war together and had spent time in prison in Avilés. They eventually met up and decided to keep in touch regularly, with Erdocia walking the three hours from Hernani to the Oyarzun cave every week where Manuel was in hiding. At each meeting, Erdocia, who would sometimes turn up with a shotgun and dog, having disguised himself as a hunter, would bring cigarettes, newspapers and news. Manuel remained in the hills for several months. On one occasion, Manuel journeyed through the hills to his home in Orexa and returned to Oyarzun, having made contact with Franco, and even helping to get a heavy transmitter for the French Resistance across the border.

But the area remained under heavy surveillance. The situation had worsened due to the desertion of several members of the División Azul and this was followed by an intense search action. Several prisoners had also escaped from Santoña gaol and it was expected they would try to cross the border. After moving through the mountains to Hernani, to Orexa, Goizueta, Gorriti etc, all the time fleeing from the police, Manuel decided to get married, organizing a clandestine ceremony at Orexa church on 23 November 1942 with an Oyarzun woman, María Asunción Escudero, the sister of Manuel Escudero, who had hidden him at the cave close to Aritzluzieta. He thus became the brother-in-law of Paco Garayar from Hernani, since he had married the sister of the latter's wife, Claudia. After the wedding, he went to Hernani, to the Juan Antonenea farmstead belonging to his friend Erdocia, where he remained for a period whilst continuing to evade the police on his forays through the region's hills.

On 10 September 1944, he acted as guide for seven people entrusted to him by his friend Jose Erdocia from Hernani. These were persons who were attempting to enter France to establish contact with the Basque government. To obtain help for the mission, Manuel Iturrioz made contact with another Hernani friend, Patxi Goya Zubiri, also a refugee in France due to the Civil War, where he worked as a morroi (farmhand) at a number of Basque country farms.

The most surprising element of this mugalari's biography, is the amount of times he escaped from detention. He was first detained in Ribadesella, Asturias, but managed to escape to Sara, and from there to Barcelona. He was a prisoner at the Argelès-Sur-Mer concentration camp, whence he managed to trick his way out and get to Donibane Lohitzune. The Nazis captured him on this coastline, but he also got away from them. He even managed to escape from the grasp of the assassin Melitón Manzanas, a notorious Francoist police official and Gestapo collaborator, who used his post as head of the Gipuzkoa Brigada Político-Social to torture opponents of the dictatorship.

He was on the losing side in the war, but his energetic nature meant he always kept fighting, never giving up, always moving forward. When the war ended, Manuel Iturrioz was tired after such a difficult life beset by tensions and danger. He was already married with two children. He settled in Saint-Jean-de-Luz in France and began working in the manufacturing of espadrilles. He managed to bring over his wife and children from Spain soon after, who had been living at the Aritzluzieta farmstead in Oyarzun. He settled for good in France, although he eventually returned to San Sebastián in 1981, where he remained until his passing in 1991.

Maritxu Anatol (1909-1981)

By Fernando Benavente

A well-known Gipuzkoan from the Basque region in Spain, Maritxu Anatol was born in Irun on 24 January 1909, where her French-Basque father and Spanish-Basque mother owned a customs agency.

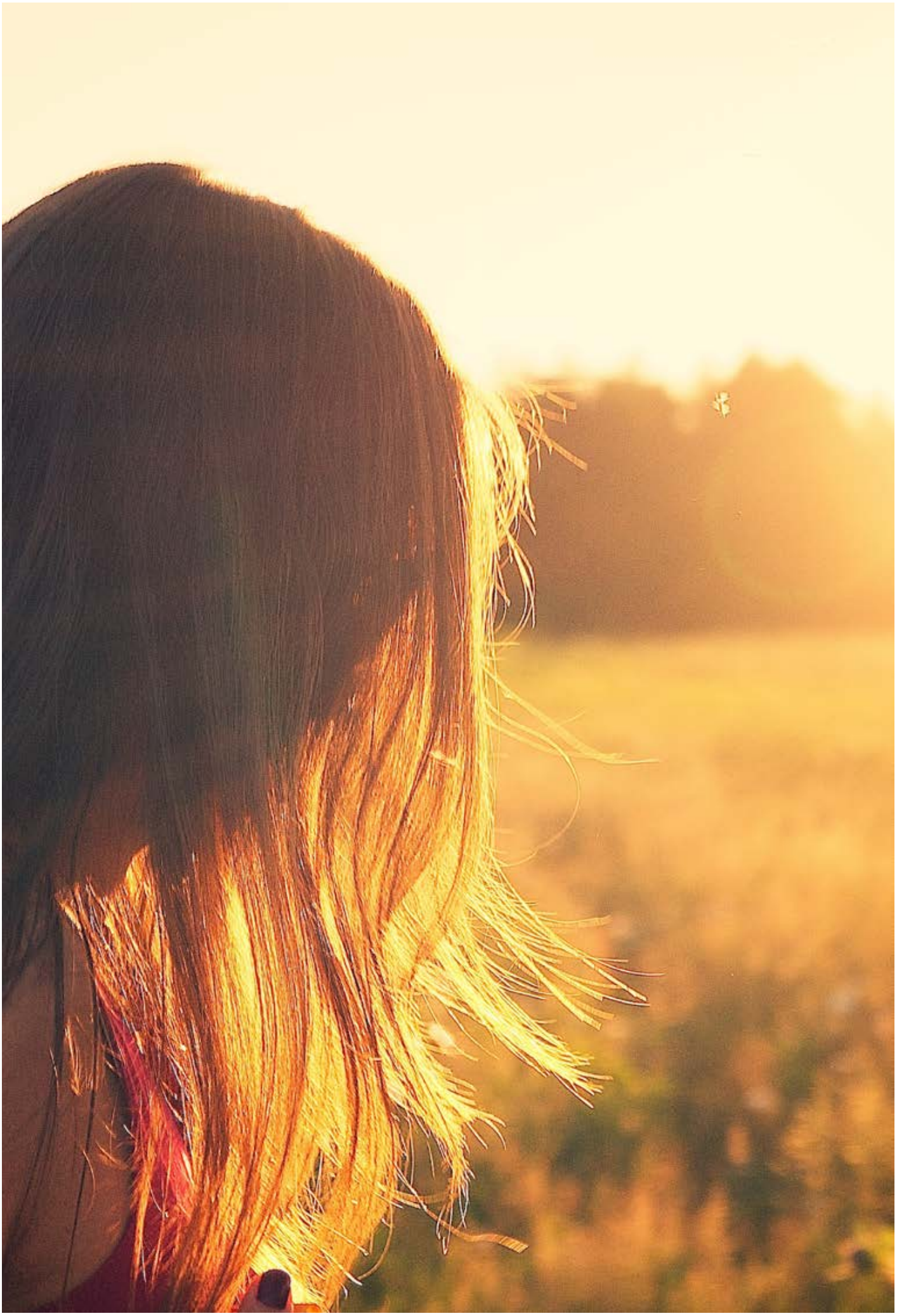
One of her brothers was an engineer, another was a priest, and a third was awarded the Legión d'Honneur for his chemical research (he invented Ergadyl). Maritxu started working at the family agency and at Casa Hirigoyen in Hendaye, causing a scandal in local society because this was not seen to be work fit for women. She had dual Spanish and French nationality, and big yearnings for adventure and action, which were not satisfied either by office paperwork or by smuggling, the main activity in Irun at that time. Her whole life consisted of intensity and commitment, a never-ending thirst for adventures that always drove her one step further.

When the Spanish Civil War erupted, the family moved to the other side of the river Bidasoa, to the Kontxesinea house in Béhobie. In the summer of 1940, the Germans appropriated part of the dwelling and 15 soldiers were lodged there. She demanded maximum respect from the head officer, and she got it.
The Resistance asked her to collaborate in passing on information and in helping evaders to escape, and she accepted immediately. Her restless temperament thus found an outlet in these clandestine activities. She was a 'Jill of all trades', she spied on the movements of the German patrols, garnered the rumours and tip-offs to be heard at the Bayonne Kommandatur, passed evaders across the border, supplied allied-forces' airmen with provisions she had obtained from nearby farmsteads or from Spain, arranged meetings and found lodgings etc.

Her personality was perfect for these type of adventures, and she had the commitment and skills to match. She always said she was a determined adventurer, like her comrades. She collected them in Paris, travelled with them with forged papers on the night train to Ambrosio San Vicente's house in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, and then, from the Sarobe farmstead, in Oiartzun, she got them across to Spain, whence they would continue on to Portugal and then London. In total, she helped 39 Jewish people and 113 airmen to cross the border (Deia, 9-03-1978).

The Comet network for which she worked did not fully trust her very personal methods: she was at ease in the familiar circles of contraband, where there were many informers. One of the smugglers from her group was seen leaving Bayonne police station. She defended him, arguing that maintaining relations with the Germans made it possible to obtain useful information for the border crossings. But the truth is that in the Comet Line they were horrified to discover that there were a good number of people who knew of the network due to the smugglers' indiscretions. Additionally, Maritxu's contact provided lodging for airmen at a house which was home to a Gestapo agent and the lover of a Nazi official. At all times she carried with her a small Star pistol. So they dispensed with the services of her and her team, and started to use her only for currency exchanges, securing pesetas for the trips across to Spain.

In the end, the worst fears of the Comet Line people were confirmed and on 13 July 1943, Maritxu's group was arrested by the Gestapo. Three of its members were deported to Germany - whence they emerged battered and bruised, but alive to tell the tale - and Maritxu, whose brother (the chemist) was imprisoned by the Nazis, managed to save her own life. She was held at the Gestapo police station in Bayonne and then Biarritz prison. She remained firm and resolute throughout interrogations. They were unable to extract any information from her, and they released her. In 1945, following the Liberation of France, Maritxu returned to Irun, where she married the trader and sportsman Eugenio Angoso, and ran her own customs agency. She was awarded numerous honours including La Croix de Guerre and the Légion d'honneur, and she exchanged letters with General George C. Marshall of the United States army and Dwight D. Eisenhower, American army general and President of the US (1953-61). She died in Irun on 27 August, 1981.



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Elżbieta Zawacka (1909 - 2009) alias ZO

By Paulina Adryańczyk-Linard and Kamila Witerska

Why was Elżbieta Zawacka such a great courier working for the resistance during WWII? She had a 'good look' as she was young with blonde hair and blue eyes and she had the right personality traits as she was confident and intelligent. She knew the German language well as she was born in 1909 in Toruń, under Prussian rule, so she attended a German school until the age of eleven. And at home, her parents would speak to their children in German to support their education.

Working as a courier during the war for the Polish 'home army', she crossed the borders of her country Poland, using various aliases such as Elizabeth von Braunegg, Elizabeth Kubica, Elise Rivière, Elżbieta Nowak and Elizabeth Watson, each time taking on a new identity. She changed her surname regularly, but the first name mostly remained the same.

During the occupation of Poland by the Nazis during WWII, the Polish government went into exile firstly in France and then in Great Britain. The Polish army, air force and navy also re-formed outside of Poland and went on to fight in the war. Within Poland, a resistance army was established called the Home Army (Armia Krajowa or AK) and it became the largest underground resistance force in Europe fighting against the Nazis.

As a paratrooper of the Home Army, Elżbieta became one of the 316 'Cichociemni' – silent and unseen Polish guerrilla fighters who were trained in England and then, from 1941 on, were parachuted by night back into occupied Poland behind Nazi enemy lines, to lead the resistance movements against the Nazis occupiers.

Elżbieta was born on March 19, 1909, in Prussian Toruń. Her star sign was Pisces. She was the seventh of eight children. Her father was Ładysław, a court clerk and her mother was Marianna. She had four brothers, Jan, Alfons, Eric and Egon and three sisters, Maria, Adelajda and Klara. Little Liz, as she was called in her family home, began her studies at the age of six in the German secondary school for girls in Toruń. The 'secondary' adjective did not mean secondary school in today's sense but referred to the middle class, from which the children who were studying there came from. School subjects were taught through the German language.

Children were punished for using the Polish language, and even for bringing sandwiches to school wrapped in a Polish newspaper. On her school certificate dated 1915, Elżbieta Zawacka received good grades for German, mathematics and calligraphy and she also received good marks for behaviour, attentiveness and order.

She wanted to continue her studies but her parents could not afford it, so after graduation, Elżbieta gave private lessons in mathematics and worked at a local post office saving money for college. She graduated from her studies in mathematics in 1936 and after graduation, she taught mathematics, physics and physical education in secondary schools. During her studies, a friend persuaded her to go to a meeting of the PWK (Women's Martial Training Organization) and from that time on, Elżbieta became involved in this organization. In March 1939, the PWK Social Emergency Service was established, and its task was to prepare as many women as possible to support soldiers and civilians in the event of a war. Because of this, over a million Polish women and young girls were trained in the field of sanitary services, anti-aircraft and fire defence.

At the outbreak of World War II, Elżbieta was 30 years old. The mobilization order was received on August 26, 1939, during a summer instructor camp in the field of physical education and military preparation. She immediately returned to Katowice and received an order to go to Lvov. In Lvov, along with other girls from the PWK and scouts, they filled bottles with gasoline for days and nights and distributed them to anti-tank points. They experienced a lack of food and fatigue.

After the liberation of Lvov, Elżbieta reached Warsaw, where, thanks to one of her friends from the PWK, she was drawn into underground work. Her first mission was to organize a network of underground military services for women in Silesia. Thanks to contacts with the PWK, she managed to organize a network of 300 women in a short time to work in diversion, sabotage, military intelligence and counterespionage. During her work in Silesia, Elżbieta gained extensive experience as a courier. Her perfect German, her 'Aryan look' and her self-confidence worked well in the courier profession.

Elżbieta Zawacka (Liz), age 18. Photograph courtesy of Elżbieta Zawacka's index (FGEZ collections)

Her frequent, free travels from Silesia to various cities were quickly noticed by the leaders of the Association of Armed Struggle. Elżbieta Zawacka was informed that she would soon be removed from Silesia and sent to work in another department.

In December 1940, the long-awaited telephone call arrived. A woman's voice on the other end of the receiver said, 'The white dress is ready'. It meant that Elżbieta had received her assignment to work at the Foreign Communications Department of the Polish Home Army called Zagroda. The Foreign Communication Department was responsible for contact between the headquarters of the Home Army and the Commander-in-Chief in France and later in London. Couriers in 'Zagroda' used routes to the south, west and north. Initially, the main route was the south section, which ran from Warsaw through Krakow, Slovakia, Budapest and then through the Carpathian Mountains to Romania, and from there to Paris. After the Polish government moved from France to London, people started to organize the 'west' route and it was on this route that Elżbieta Zawacka was recruited to work on in December 1940.

For her work in Zagroda, Elżbieta adopted the pseudonym 'Zo' from the name of her tragically deceased sister Zofia. Elżbieta's main task was to work on the Western route as a courier. Using false surnames, but always using her real first name, she cross back and forth over the border over a hundred times, carrying mail, money and weapons. In 1942 in Katowice, she organized the 'Cyrk' international communication facility arranging for couriers to travel on the following routes: from Poland to Berlin to Stockholm in Sweden; from Poland to Lorraine to Paris in France; and from Poland to Bern in Switzerland.

During her missions, Elżbieta Zawacka came close to death many times. In May 1942, while she was travelling in Silesia , there was a so-called 'set up' that resulted in the arrest of numerous workers from Zagroda including her sister Klara. Elżbieta returned to Katowice and discovered that the Gestapo were looking for her. As a result, she fled with a suitcase full of money, staying with friends. The next day she went to the train station and left her baggage in the station's storage room. She was not concerned with the danger to herself and instead her main focus was on the safety of her co-workers so she started to circle the station to warn other couriers arriving at the station about the arrests. When she realized she was being followed by a spy, she tried to lose him by travelling around the city by tram and then she jumped on a train to Krakow. In Krakow, she went to Celina Zawodzińska and informed her that she was being followed and then returned to the train station in order to travel to Warsaw. At the station in Krakow, she accidentally met the head of 'Zagroda', Maria Wittek, and she discreetly handed her a card with information about the 'set up', before getting on the train and travelling to Warsaw.

On the train, Elżbieta felt that she was being followed, so she left her coat in the compartment and went to the toilet. She opened the window in the toilet and jumped out of the slow moving train in the middle of the night. It was her first jump into the night. Although slightly wounded from the jump she managed to run away from the railway line. She had on her a gold ring with aquamarine that she had received as a gift from her mother and she

traded it for a scarf and some bread. She managed to extract some change from a passer-by on the street and used it to travel to Warsaw. In Warsaw, she checked in with 'Marcysia' who personally travelled to Katowice to retrieve the suitcase with the money (dollars) that Elżbieta had stored at the station. A warrant was issued for 'Zo' and all her family members were arrested. Her sister Klara was taken to Ravensbruck concentration camp for women and children. As a result of the Silesian set up, over 100 people lost their lives, including twenty people from the group run by 'Zo'. She managed to survive and could have withdrawn from military operations at this stage but she did not, she was strong and not easily broken.

After returning to Warsaw, Elżbieta was given another mission, to travel to meet with and report to the Polish Government in exile in London. Elżbieta had to courier a parcel containing reports and statements to the exiled Polish government in London, provide them with oral reports on the situation in Poland, and to report on how well the communications system of the home army was functioning as well as to report on the regulations of rights for women soldiers.

For four months, Elżbieta studied the operations of military and communication structures and courier routes and spent time studying French, English and Spanish to use on her travels to London. She set out on December 20, 1942, as Elizabeth Kubica, a representative of a German oil company that had branches in Warsaw and Paris. She was dressed very elegantly - she later said that she had never been so elegantly dressed as she was at that time during the war. In her jacket pocket, she carried a small brass lighter, in which she had hidden 500 pages of microfilm. She reached Paris, where she changed her name to Elise Riviere. At this stage the plan was to continue on to the South of France which was occupied by the Vichy government, however she learned that another courier Aleksander Stpiczyński, who was travelling before her using the same designated route, had been arrested. Unfortunately it turned out that the route Elżbieta was to take, which was by water, had been comprised and was no longer safe so she had to return to Poland.

On February 17, 1943, Elżbieta set out again on a mission to London. This time the microfilms were hidden in a key shaft. Similar to her previous trip, she arrived in Paris and the plan was to then travel south. This time she travelled with eight French army soldiers who wanted to get to Vichy France before moving on to join the French army in Africa, and happily, this time they all arrived safely by train into Toulouse. The French army soldiers had no money and wanted to stay with Elżbieta, who had cash and was travelling under the false name of Elise Riviere. After arriving in Toulouse, they then travelled on to Tarascon, a mountain village in the Pyrenees. Elżbieta went to stay at a small hotel in the village and her travelling companions offered to find a guide who would take them over mountains, for which Elżbieta would pay. The French soldiers found a Spaniard called Bonnet Paquo. However, when they tried to pass through the Pyrenees, the young French soldiers were arrested, and Elżbieta and Paquo managed to escape, but she lost her personal belongings.

Elżbieta managed to get over the mountains with the help of another Frenchman Gilbert Haering, who wanted to join the army of Henri Honoré Giraud, a French general and leader of the Free French forces during the Second World War.

It was now April 1943 and after a 200km trek over the mountains, Elżbieta reached Barcelona and then travelled by train to Madrid. From there, as Elizabeth Watson, she went by train to Gibraltar, where she managed to get on board a ship sailing for England disguised as an English woman fleeing the bombing of Malta. A convoy of ships sailed along the shores of Africa, across the Atlantic Ocean to Ireland, and then on to the port of Bristol. The trip lasted eight days. On May 1, 1943, Elżbieta Zawacka left the ship as the last passenger and stood on English soil. She was picked up by an English policewoman and taken to a prison in London, where she was interrogated. She continued to use the alias Elizabeth Watson as she did not trust the police. After two days she was transported to the Hotel Rubens in London, and during her stay she met with many representatives of the Polish government in exile. She attempted to explain to them the various problems that her country was experiencing however she felt they misunderstood her. For politicians who had lived in exile for several years, the situation in occupied Poland was now unbelievable. Elżbieta wanted to return to Poland and she undertook parachute training in England during which she dislocated both ankles.

Nevertheless, on September 9, 1943, with two sore ankles, she was one of 316 'Cichociemni' – silent and unseen Polish guerrilla fighters who were trained in England and then, from 1941 on, were parachuted by night into occupied Poland behind Nazi enemy lines, to lead the resistance movements against the Nazis occupiers. Elżbieta once again jumped into the dark night. She landed in the fields in Mazovia and on October 10, 1941, she reported to the Home Army Headquarters.

Elżbieta or 'Zo' returned to work in 'Zagroda', which was terminated in March 1944 by the betrayal of Rudolf Zazdel or 'Jarach' who turned out to be an agent of the Gestapo. Over 100 soldiers were arrested, and Elżbieta fled, hiding in a convent for four months. In mid-July, she heard about the upcoming Warsaw Uprising, a major resistance attack to be launched by the Polish resistance home army (the AK). She left the monastery and travelled to Warsaw on foot. During the uprising

she performed various duties including work as a contact officer, as well as working in a field hospital, and assisting soldiers coming out from the canals. The Warsaw Uprising lasted from August to October 1944 and was an insurrection in which the Polish people attempted to drive out the Nazi occupiers and take back control of their city before it was occupied by the advancing Soviet army. There was a lack of support from the Soviet, British and American allies and the Uprising failed. Over 200,000 citizens of Warsaw were killed with over 800,000 expelled from the city, with many shipped to Germany as slave labour or sent to concentration camps including Aushwitz.

After the fall of the uprising, Elżbieta managed to get to Krakow where she continued working as a Courier. In December 1944, she organized the transfer to Switzerland of Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, a courier from Warsaw and a long-time director of the Radio Free Europe. In February 1945, after the dissolution of the Home Army, Elżbieta was demobilized.

After the war, Elżbieta Zawacka returned to Toruń. However, after a week she left for Warsaw to join the independence movement. During this time, she completed her studies in Social Pedagogy, which she had started in secret during the war. She returned to the teaching profession and began work on her PhD. Unfortunately, the post-war period turned out to be unfavourable for former Home Army soldiers repressed by the communist authorities. Just before the exam, the dissertation of Elżbieta Zawacka was seized and destroyed during the search in her apartment on September 5, 1951. On this day, Elżbieta Zawacka was arrested. Accused of spying for foreign intelligence, she was sentenced to five years in prison. However after, she, the defendant, was removed from the court her sentence was reviewed and changed to seven years. After another appeal, she was sentenced to ten years in prison for carrying out an activity that would damage the Polish state. That is how the Polish state treated its heroes during the Stalinist period.

She was released in 1955 under an amnesty, after spending four and a half years in prison. In Poland, the 'Stalinist' period had ended and the 'thaw' was coming. After being released, she returned to her teacher's job and resumed her research, working towards a doctorate which she achieved and defended in 1965. She became assistant professor at the University of Gdańsk.

In 1972, after securing employment as a professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Elżbieta once again returned to her hometown. Working at the university, she set up and developed a Department of Adult Education. She was invited to the International Council on Correspondence Education, and in 1976 for scientific purposes, she travelled to England.

On her return to Poland she was stopped by the authorities at the airport and her journals and books were confiscated. The Department of Adult Education that she had set up was now closed down and she was prevented from becoming the director of the Polish Centre for Documentation and Scientific Information ICCE. As a result of these abuses, in 1978 Elżbieta Zawacka retired. Her health gradually declined but she did not give up her political activities and decided to dedicate her time to commemorating those who fought and died for Poland.

In 1995, in a new, free Poland, the president of the country Lech Wałęsa awarded her with the Order of the White Eagle. It took 50 years for Elżbieta to finally be recognized in her own country for the work she had done fighting for that country.

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Helena Marusarzówna (1918-1941)

By Paulina Adryańczyk-Linard and Kamila Witerska

When asked what would you do if you found treasure from a robbery hidden in the Tatras, the young eight year old Polish child Helena Marusarzówna is reported to have said 'I would buy skis'. Indeed, as she grew up, skiing became her greatest passion and to this day she can be described as one of Poland's most outstanding sportswomen. Her young life was tragically cut short at the age of 23 and the reason for this was the Nazi occupation of Europe and Helena's involvement in the Polish resistance as she stood up against totalitarianism. This slim, good looking, smiling young woman with magnetic eyes worked as a courier, crossing back and forth from Zakopane in Southern Poland through the Tatras Mountains to Slovakia and Hungary and on to Budapest in the early years of WWII.

Helena was born on 17 January, 1918, in Zakopane in Southern Poland at the foot of the Tatras mountains, as one of six children of Helena and Jan Marusarz. Her grandfather had been a Tatra guide and was one of the first members of the Tatra Volunteer Rescue Service. Her father worked as a forester and her mother took care of her home and children. Helena had two brothers and three sisters. It is easy to imagine that her childhood, in such company, was extremely interesting, full of games and ideas, and of course sports.

Speaking on Polish radio in 19732, Zofia, the eldest of Helena's three sisters in the Marusarz house, reflects on her childhood and remembers 'from a very young age, we loved to have fun, it was full of madness. We often went to the forest. Many of these expeditions ended in a big argument because many of our clothes were left on stumps and trees. From the very beginning, Helena showed a great temperament, she was a brave, fierce girl. She had been riding on the boards since her childhood'. [104]

Helena took part in numerous competitions in Lipki, which were initiated and organized by Kornel Makuszyński, an author of children's books. Her first pair of skis were made for her by her brother Stanisław. On several occasions she won and received prizes in the form of books autographed by the writer Kornel.

The financial situation of her parents did not allow Helena to continue her studies after completing seven years of primary school in 1932. It was not possible for Helena to travel to another city to continue her studies as this was too expensive for the family. As a result, Helena helped out on the farm for the following number of years. During this time, she devoted herself to skiing. In the summer she regularly wandered through the mountains, practising her climbing and in the winter she went skiing.

As a young child, Helena often looked on with jealousy at her two older brothers, Jan and Stanislaw, as they pinned wooden planks to their shoes and then later, using professional skies, they started skiing on the mountains. They were Helena's first trainers and in 1935, they signed her up to the Skiing section of the Polish Ski Association. After only a month working with a trainer, and equipped with her first professional set of ski equipment, Helena Marusarzówna won the title of Polish runner up in the alpine combination during the XVI Polish Championships in Zakopane. At the same time, she was the third in the slalom and downhill race. Further successes on the slopes quickly followed.

A year later she became a champion. Six athletes finished the race in the ladies Alpine combination for the Polish championship title and 'on the basis of yesterday's run and today's slalom, the champion of Poland became Marusarzówna Helena - sister of Stanisław.[105] The following year, 1937, she once again won the championship in the slalom and alpine combination. In the downhill race, she was second. The third triumph in Marusarzówna's life was in March 1939. Although the press disapproved of the level of female skiing, Helena was complimented for her efforts and persistence. Interestingly, another surprise in the competition, was the presence of Helena's cousin Józio Marusarz who, at the age of 13, took 15th place in the slalom and alpine combination. Helena was seven times a Polish champion in Apline skiing races.

Because of how well Helena was doing in the competitions, everyone had high hopes for her to take part in the FIS competition in Zakopane in 1939. However, during the training at Hala Goryczkowa, she rode into a hut and broke her wrist. Taking part in the competition was now impossible. However, that same year and despite the injury she had received, Helena took part in the German Feldberg international ski championships, in the Black Forest (Schwarzwald). After two competitions Helena took second place, with Christl Cranz, the German multiple world champion, in first place. The winner herself appreciated the tal-

The Beauty of Courage - Helena Marusarzówna in 1935, National Digital Archive

ent of Marusarzówna, and in conversation with Polish skier Jan Kula she stated that Helen 'is very talented, she just needs to get an international routine. [106]

On the eve of the outbreak of World War II, the Third Reich made an electrifying impression on Helena. Her brother Stanisław Marusarz recalled 'We were in the following squad: Kula, Zając, Stopkówna, my sister Helena and me. Anti-Polish moods were quite clear, although they were not provocative. On the train to the sound of Polish speeches, the Germans moved away in a silent boycott. The welcome of our team at the station in Feldberg was very cold. The town was flooded with swastikas. One could see many brown uniforms and the marching units of the Hitler Youth. [107]

Soon, the whole Marusarz family, like many Polish people, were fully aware of the dangers of the Third Reich. Helena and her siblings became involved in the activities of the Polish resistance movement. From October 1939 on, she acted as a secret courier working for the communications department of the 'Zagroda' unit of the underground Polish Home Army (AK). Her work involved transferring mail, reports, documents and money and bringing people through a mountain trail to and from Poland to Slovakia and Hungary. On December 31, 1939, Helena Marusarzówna led two young men, Tadeusz Schiele and Marian Zając, through the Tatra Mountains. Today we know them as famous aviators from the English air squadrons who were decorated with the Cross of Valor and the Order of Virtuti Militari. According to various reports, as they were taking a sleigh on the trail through the Kościeliska Valley, the men freely boasted that they were going to France. Everyone, including the German patrol guards, treated it as a joke.

An important element of this type of conspiratorial work however, was keeping what you were doing secret, even from your loved ones, so as not to expose them to potential danger or to the threat of arrest and interrogation. Helena believed in this principle. In December 1939, when Stanisław Marusarz was taking three men through the Tatras he stopped at a shelter at Hala Pyszna.[108] There, to his great surprise, he found two of his sisters, Helena and Bronisława together with a group of thirty-four soldiers that the two women were guiding over the

104 Quotation from: https://naszahistoria.pl/nie-bala-sie-lawin-i-niemcow-piekna-sportsmenka/ar/11654490. You can listen to Zofia here: https://www.polskieradio.pl/39/247/Artykul/763645,Odwaga-Heleny-Marusarzowny-dorownywala-jej-urodzie
105 Przegląd Sportowy, no 18, 2 March 1935, p. 2. quotation from: http://sportowcydlaniepodleglej.pl/helena-marusarzowna-piekna-i-odwazna/
106 Ibid.
107 Zakopiańska Drużyna im. Heleny Marusarzówny. O Helenie Marusarzównie mówi Stanisław Marusarz i jego żona Irena, stare.zhr.pl/-mlp.16zdw/wspom.htm, 24 March 2018, quotation from: http://sportowcydlaniepodleglej.pl/helena-marusarzowna-piekna-i-odwazna/

mountains. In a short time, these soldiers along with the three men being led by Stanisław were soon over the border and travelled safely through Slovakia and Hungary reaching France and the Polish army. [109]

According to reports, during one of the crossings at the Slovak-Polish border in the winter of 1940, Helena, carried a piece of luggage from Budapest that was full of banknotes and she was unwittingly helped by German soldiers. As she descended on skies from Kasprowy Wierch, the large and heavy backpack made her ride difficult and aroused the interests of a German patrol. The soldiers, upon seeing this young and beautiful skier, did not suspect anything and they stopped her and offered to help. Helena remained perfectly calm so as not to arouse suspicion and the soldiers took her backpack and travelled with her to Kuźnice while admiring her skiing style.

Helena Marusarzówna was captured in March 1940 by Slovak military police who were collaborating with the Nazi regime as she crossed the Hungarian-Slovak border. Together with other courier colleagues she was ambushed and handed over to the Gestapo. Helena was transported to several different prisons where she was detained, interrogated and tortured. From the headquarters in Kissak, she was transported to Prešov, Muszyna, Nowy Sącz and Tarnów. Helena managed to resist the horror of what she had to endure and refused to provide any information or names. In November 1940, she was sentenced to death. She stayed in the death cell until September 12, 1941. Together with five other prisoners, she was shot in a forest in Wola Podgórska, near Tarnów.

. . It was 1941, a sunny, warm day. My mother worked in the fields 30 metres from the place where the Germans carried out death sentences on prisoners from the Tarnów prison. She noticed that the grove in the forest was freshly dug, quite a large hole. She guessed that the Germans would bring more than one person this time. She did not sleep all night. It was fear, or perhaps ordinary human curiosity. On September 12, the German car stopped on the road . . Six women were brought out of the car by the Germans. They grouped them in twos and led them to the place of execution. The women sang a song to the Holy Mother. After a while, my mother heard two salves from a machine gun . . . After a week an unknown man came to Podgórska Wola but no-one would show him the place where the Germans had buried the recently executed women. People were terrified. He came to our house. My mother, with great fear, showed him the place of execution. He knelt on the ground and said 'My beloved wife, you are here'. He was Mr Zientkiewicz, the husband of one of the executed. He placed a white metal plaque on the pine tree, just above the grave, and on it, there was an inscription: 'The most beloved wife and mother, Maria Zientkiewicz, a teacher from Krakow and her five friends'. Among the names was Helena Marusarzówna.[111]

In 1958, Helena's body was exhumed and buried in the cemetery on Pęksowy Brzyzek[112] in Zakopane. From 1946 on, ski competitions in Zakopane were held in memory of Bronisław Czech and Helena Marusarzówna and from 1949 on, they gained international status. Helena was posthumously awarded the Virtuti Militari Order and the Cross of Valor.

At the end of this story about a brave young woman, it is worth mentioning another aspect of her life. As a sportswoman, Helena posed for advertising shots and also found herself on the silver screen. In 1937, as a 19-year-old girl, she was elected as a stand-in for Liliana Zielińska in the film Halka - a film adaptation of Stanisław Moniuszko's opera. In autumn 1938 she appeared as a model during a show of new ski clothing on display for international competitions. She was awarded the first prize. Remembering his sister Helena, Stanisław Marusarz said

As a representative of the opposite sex, she caught some attention. My sister was a beautiful, tall, shapely blonde with beautiful legs. She had a warm look, and her girlishness was emphasized by knee-length braids, pinned up in a bun. Men gave her seductive looks, they did not skimp on words of adoration. (...) Helcia took this attention from her colleagues with great pleasure, but she always felt better with them as a friend than as a partner for flirting. She had a great sense of humour and never-ending sense of fun. It was no different during our stay in the Black Forest. For example, she changed around our signs that had been put outside the door of our hotel room for cleaning; another time she sewed shut me and my friend's legs in ski pants and sleeves (when we went down to dinner in civilian clothes). [113]

Helena Marusarzówna was a brave and courageous woman who, despite her young age, deserves an important place both in the history of Polish skiing and in the history of standing up to Nazi oppression demonstrating tremendous bravery in her work with the courier movement in the Tatras during the WWII Nazi occupation of Poland.

108 He ran this hostel till the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939. During the occupation, it became a transfer point for Tatra couriers.
109 A. Filar, Opowieści tatrzańskich kurierów, Warszawa 1977, p. 42-43.
110 K. Szafranek, Helena Marusarzówna (1918-1941), Przegląd Historyczno-Oświatowy, 2011, no 3-4, p. 172.
111 Relation of Emilia Zając, a retired teacher from the Primary School in Podgórska Wola, depicting her mother's memories https://www.watra.pl/zakopane/wiadomosci/2016/01/18/rocznica-urodzin-heleny-marusarzowny-18-stycznia-1918-24-wrzesnia-1941
112 The first cemetery in Zakopane, founded in the mid-nineteenth century. From 1931, signed into the register of monuments and at the same time called the Graveyard of Distinguished Citizens. There are graves of many outstanding figures associated with Podhale and Zakopane, including Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, Kornel Makuszyński, Tytus Chałubiński, Władysław Hasior, Jan Długosz and many others.
113 Quotation from: https://z-ne.pl/s,doc,2697 1,1,1767,piekna_helena.html

Stanisław Marusarz (1913-1993)

By Paulina Adryańczyk-Linard and Kamila Witerska

Brother and sister
Ski jumping and downhill skiing
Eighty and twenty-three years
So much in common and so many differences.

Stanisław Marusarz was a Polish Nordic skiing competitor born in Zakopane in Southern Poland at the base of the Tatras Mountains on June 18, 1913. He was five years older than his youngest sister, Helena Marusarzówna whom he called Helcia and whose story is told in this book. Helena went on to become a champion skier as well as a member of the Polish resistance before her tragic murder by the Nazis at the age of 23. Stanisław Marusarz took the same route as his younger sister using his talent and skills not only to become a Polish ski jumping champion but also to serve his country during World War II. Stanislaw survived and after the war he returned to his passion of ski jumping. He wrote that 'sport was my life and life was the sport' [114] and he went on to shape a new generation of young athletes.

Stanisław Marusarz. Source: The Tatra Museum

Stanislaw was determined to pursue his goals in life despite the family's limited financial circumstances. As a young child he was interested in skiing and in the beginning, he made his own skis or boards out of planks of wood, attaching them to his boots with wires. He practiced skiing, running and later ski jumping which he was most passionate about. Ski jumping is a competitive sport in which the competitor aims to achieve the longest jump after descending from a specially designed ramp on their skis.

He took part in his first competition at the age of 10 and for first prize, the organisers awarded him a pair of gloves. He jumped from Krokiew for the first time on February 6, 1927 and ranked third amongst the junior age group. Two years later, he joined the Polish Tatra National Ski Association Section and competed in Czechoslovakia, in Stary Smokovec. He went on to achieve numerous successes in national and international competitions. He participated six times in the FIS World Ski championships during the years 1933 to 1939. He was the world runner-up in the ski-jumping competition in Lahti, Finland, which took place on February 27, 1938 and world record holder in Planica, Slovenia which took place in 1935 with a score of 95 and 97 metres.

The outbreak of the second world war finds him in a mountain hostel at Hala Pyszna. As a skier and mountaineer Stanislaw had skills that would be useful to the resistance. From October 1939 on, after the German attack on Poland, he becomes involved with the Resistance through a friend Jozef Berestko, the leaseholder of the hostel at Hala Pisana. Stanislaw becomes a courier on the route between Zakopane, Slovakia and Hungary. Unbeknownst to Stanislaw, his sister Helena Marusarzówna had also joined the Polish Home army that was formed to resist the occupation of Poland. As part of his underground activities, Stanislaw, like his sister Helena transferred people, information and other materials along the escape routes. The hostel at Hala Pyszna where Stanislaw had stayed becomes a transfer point for Tatra couriers. He said 'more and more 'civilians' appeared at the shelter . . with a small amount of luggage, and often equipped with a small weapon. They gave the password and after resting, I led them to the Slovak side, and here I had my people take them - Slovaks who helped refugees to get through to the Hungarian border. [115]

Stanislaw's knowledge of the Tatras mountains and his excellent physical condition made him an ideal candidate for working as a courier on the escape line however, the successes he had enjoyed as

part of his ski jumping competitions meant that he was easily recognised and he was widely known by many Germans as well as Slovakians. He was captured twice by the Slovak border services but on both occasions he managed to get away. On the first occasion in March 1940, he was caught by Slovak military police from the station in Štrbské Pleso, and the guards discovered that he was carrying 100,000 zlotys. The guards would not take any bribe and instead they informed the Gestapo. However Stanislaw stunned one of the guards and managed to jump out of a window and flee into the forest. He hid with a Slovakian friend and later returned to Zakopane. His experience as a ski jump had obviously played a key role in this escape!

Stanislaw was caught for a second time together with his wife Irena, as they were attempting to flee to Hungary. They were caught at the Hernád River which flows through Slovakia and Hungary. This time Stanislaw and his wife were delivered to the Germans and imprisoned in Prešov, then in Muszyna (at the same time as his sister Helena was there) and then at Nowy Sącz. Irena pretended to be pregnant and after three months she was released from Nowy Sącz. Then Stanislaw was went to the 'Palace', a Gestapo police station situated in the Palace Hotel in Zakopane and finally to the prison at Montelupich Street in Krakow. At every stage, he was brutally interrogated, and endured beatings and other forms of extreme punishment. They also tried to bribe him by offering him a job as a trainer in exchange for his testimony. They said 'you will be a trainer, you will go to Garmisch-Partenkirchen to teach our athletes how to jump, and later, when the communist war begins, you will train our soldiers who will go to the front to fight for Great Germany'.[116] In the end, he was sentenced to death and put on death row together with other convicts. At every stage, he thought about escaping.

He created a plan with fellow prisoner Aleksander Bugajski, a former NCO in the Polish army and together they managed to stretch the bars in the window of a cell in the Montelupich prison using the leg of a stool. Once they had done this, up to six prisoners managed to jump out including Aleksander who went first and Stanislaw who was the sixth and last prisoner to jump out. The jump was high, on the second floor and some of those who tried to escape were injured in the jump and were unable to flee. Apparently he got stuck as he climbed out and was hanging head down. His fellow inmates pushed him out and as he fell he managed to spin his body and land on his two feet, probably using techniques he had learnt from his ski jumping days to protect him in case of a fall.

Once out, he ran through the prison yard and climbed a four-metre high wall, using the handles of the locked gate, and once at the top he managed to jump, using barbed wire as a support. At this stage the alarm was sounded and the SS fired, hitting Stanislaw in the thigh. Although Stanislaw was the last to jump out and despite the injuries he sustained, he managed to escape. Stanislaw and his friend Alelsander were the only two to survive as the others were shot. They fled through the streets of Krakow which were filled with people and in the crowd, Stanislaw managed to hide. He ended up in a forest and, after many days of hiking, and thanks to the help of a fisherman who had provided him with clothes and food, he finally returned to Zakopane.

After this daring escape from the Krakow prison, Stanislaw managed to get to Hungary and he waited there until the end of the war, returning only once to Poland on a courier mission. During his travels on the Tatra trail, Stanislaw met with Józef Krzeptowski, another excellent courier and Wacław Felczak, the head of the Budapest transfer point. During the courier expeditions Marusarz used his skis whenever he could, and Krzeptowski recalls 'Advancing from the Polish side to the hut, I noticed the slalom swirls. Only a champion could do that. Well, someone who was so crazy about skis that even during a courier trip he did not resist the devil's temptation to remember the good times on the planks. And so who else could that be but Stasek Marusarz. [117]

Using a different name, Stanisław Przystalski, Stanislaw trained the Hungarian athletes and downhill skiers, thanks to the support of another ski runner Guyla Beloni who was an employee of the Hungarian Ministry of Internal Affairs. In January 1944 Stanislaw took part in a competition on the ski hill in Borsafüred where he met a pre-war ski jumper called Sepp Weiler who was German. Weiler immediately recognised Stanislaw who was terrified and wanted to run away. Instead of denouncing him, Weiler approached Stanislaw and shook his hand and said 'Hello, I have never seen you before, but I heard that you are jumping really well, I hope for a high level of competition'. While in Hungary Stanislaw also went on to participate in the design of the ski jumps in Košice and Borsafüred.

Towards the end of the war, Stanisław Marusarz was in Budapest, which was occupied by Germany. The SS caught him and he was ordered to be shot. The execution however was stopped by a sudden offensive of the Soviet army and the explosion of artillery shells. In the confusion, Stanislaw took the opportunity to escape. At the end of the war, he returned to Zakopane in 1945 to his wife who had also survived. He ran a tourist hostel on Hala Ornak and more importantly, he returned to sports going on to achieve many successes both in Poland and at international competitions.[118] In 1957, he retired from his career at the age of forty-four. Stanislaw received numerous awards for his activities during the war and for his achievements as a professional skier. Awards included The Cross of Valor, the Medal of Victory and Freedom, the Golden Cross of Merit, the Silver Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari, as well as the Knight's, Commander's and the Great Order of Polonia Restituta (the latter was awarded

posthumously). In 1989, Wielka Krokiew, a ski jumping hill in Zakopane was named after him. Stanislaw wrote that:

when practising skiing, even at the beginning of my career I did not experience the feeling of fear of a dangerous hill or route. I challenged fate, which was exciting for me . . The sport was my life, life was the sport. Skis were the content of my life, my greatest passion. It was claimed that I have a unique talent. If that was the case, then talent alone is not enough to become a champion. You have to learn and constantly work on yourself. Do not be put off by initial failures. Successes do not come easily. When I look back, it seems to me that I have achieved a lot. For myself and for our sport. Fighting and rivalry with the best for the highest trophies for Polish colours I have always considered my patriotic duty. And that is why I truly believe that the red hat will not remain the only memory of me. [119]

Stanisław Marusarz died of a heart attack on October 29, 1993 during a speech at the funeral of his commander during the occupation, the head of the Tatra couriers Wacław Felczak. The next day, coverage of his death in the papers stated that 'the courier died at the courier's grave, he died as he lived, standing.[120] A few days later he was laid to rest at the Zakopane Cemetery in Pęksowy Brzyzek near his wife Irena and sister Helena or Helcia, as he called her.

Stanislaw regularly wore a red cap when competing and he had a number of nicknames including Legend, Ski King and Marusar. He was an outstanding Polish ski champion and will be remembered for his many achievements including his work during WWII as a courier on the Tetra mountains.

114 S. Marusarz, Skok, który uratował mi życie. Spisał Zbigniew K. Rogowski, Warszawa 1974, p. 33
115 A. Filar, quotation, p. 40-41.
116 A. Filar, quotation, p. 59.
117 S. Marusarz, quotation, p. 27
118 He became the first Polish champion after the war in a Norwegian combination and jumps. The success of 1946 was repeated four times. He represented Poland at the Winter Olympic Games in St. Moritz (1948) and in Oslo (1952).
119 Stanisław Marusarz, Na skoczniach Polski i świata, p. 221, 1955. Quotation from: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanis%C5%82aw_Marusarz#cite_note-nask-56. S. Marusarz appeared in competitions in a characteristic red hat, which was referred to as 'marusarka'
120 Quotation from https://www.olimpijski.pl/pl/bio/1437,marusarz-stanislaw.html

Józef Krzeptowski (unknown-1971)

By Paulina Adryańczyk-Linard and Kamila Witerska

In the middle of October 1939, a friend of Józef Krzeptowsk, came to his cottage in Krzeptówki in Zakopane in Southern Poland. She told him that two people were waiting at her home, ready to join the Polish army in exile that was forming in France to fight against the Nazis. They needed someone to guide them through the Tatras Mountains. The task was too dangerous to attempt alone and what was needed was an experienced man who knew the Tetras and who had already crossed the border illegally many times before. Józef Krzeptowski was needed as he knew the Mountains like the back of his hand and had crossed them many times and had helped to maintain communication with politicians who had already left Poland and gone into exile before the war.

The following evening two Allied air men came to see Józef Krzeptowski. They left that night and walked through the mountains. In the morning they hid in a mountain hut, then slept through the day and in the evening they went on their way again. After two hours they came to a place called Trzy Studnie. Here a friend of Krzeptowski, Slovak Kertesz, ran a mountain hostel. They came to the cottage and Krzeptowski looked through the window to make sure that only Kertesz and his wife were inside. He knocked on the window and Kertesz's wife brought them in and made tea and scrambled eggs and gave them some bread. Kertesz, having listened to the history of the airmen, wrote a letter to his friend Józef Lach who lived in Poprad and was a taxi driver. Then Krzeptowski and the two airmen went on their way. In the morning they reached the Štrbské Pleso, from where they went to Poprad.

Józef Lach, at the request of his friend Kertesz, took Krzeptowski and the two airmen in his taxi to the Hungarian border. They stopped by a grove and Lach showed them on a map the route they needed to take in order to cross the border safely. The two airmen said goodbye and walked away, and Józef Krzeptowski returned by taxi to Štrbské Pleso and from there on foot, using the same road through the Tatras, he returned home. Once back at his own house, he went around to the back and knocked on the window in a pre-arranged manner. His wife and seven-year-old daughter greeted him. At that time he was 35 years old with a wife and small daughter and if it were not for the war, he would be working as a tour guide and saving lost tourists on the Tatra Mountains.

From October 1939 to January 1940, Józef Krzeptowski led several dozen people from Poland to the Hungarian border passing over the Tatra Mountains. It was hard work, exhausting both physically and mentally. In addition, the Gestapo soon became interested in him. Krzeptowski together with another courier, his friend Andrzej Frączysty, decided to escape to Hungary, following a route that they themselves had repeatedly using when transferring other people across the border.

In Budapest, Józef Krzeptowski met with Colonel Giza whom he had, a year earlier, taken over the Tatra mountains. Krzeptowski told the colonel of his plans to join the Polish army in France. However, Colonel Giza said that unfortunately, he had a more important role for Józef. He wanted Józef to serve as a courier on the Budapest - Poland route. The fact that it was very dangerous and that the Gestapo were already interested in him was not relevant, he was needed there and he had to follow orders. This was now his role in life.

From May 1941, Józef Krzeptowski led various people across the courier route, as well as transferring money and mail. During all this time he worked in secret, at night. In Zakopane, he hid in various contact points. His friend, Staszek Szczepaniak who was mayor of Kościelisko, made sure that Józek was removed from the municipal register, which confused the Germans. His wife was interrogated from time to time, but she claimed she did not know what was happening to her husband.

In July 1941, the Germans arrested Krzeptowski's wife again and interrogated her for two days and then released her. Krzeptowski was afraid that they were releasing her so they could follow her to see if she would lead them to him and that, eventually they would arrest her anyway. So he decided to take his wife with him next time he crossed the border. He hid his daughter with friends outside of Podhale. The Gestapo had issued a warrant for his arrest, offering a prize of 50,000 zlotys for whoever would give information about his whereabouts. When the Nazis learned that Józek's wife had disappeared, they came to arrest his father-in-

law and brother-in-law, who noticed the Germans driving towards them in their vehicles and they managed to flee into the forest. During the escape, Krzeptowski's father-in-law was shot however they both managed to escape and hid with friends, fellow highlanders. The Nazis burned the Krzeptowski house. As a result of this, Józef Krzeptowski took his father-in-law and brother-in-law with him to Hungary.

Courier work was becoming more and more dangerous and during one of the trips Józef was finally arrested, as he helped helping one of the emissaries Roman Stramek to cross the border. For this trip the courier had travelled with Stramek by train with each of them riding in a different carriage. This was a courier rule. While on the train, Krzeptowski was able to see through the glass doors into the next carriage where he discovered the police were causing a disturbance. He approached a Hungarian citizen who had just come from that carriage and asked what was happening. The Hungarian replied that they had arrested a Pole and were looking for another one. When the train slowed at the next station, Krzeptowski jumped out of the wagon. He knew he could not run to avoid suspicion, so he walked slowly toward the pile of wood chips. He buried himself in them and waited for some time. After the departure of the train, he left and hid in a nearby field of grain. He fell asleep from tiredness and hunger and woke up only at the sound of a scythe. It turned out that he was in the middle of the harvest. People were cutting the harvest and using scythes all around him, and when they got to him, he woke up and in the confusion he took out his pistol. Behind the harvesters stood two police who probably found him by following his trail. He surrendered and one of the police hit him with the butt of his rifle in the chest.

During the ensuing interrogation, he testified according to the truth that he was Polish living in a camp for Polish refugees in Ebed with his wife. His little daughter was left in the country, and he missed her, so he went back for her, but he took the wrong way. Because of tiredness he slept in the grain and that was where they arrested him. After several interrogations Krzeptowski was transported to Ebed for a meeting with the mayor who was, fortunately, a good friend of Krzeptowski and who confirmed that he, Krzeptowski, belonged to the village. Krzeptowski was released.

In the autumn of 1942, Józef Krzeptowski returned to working on the courier routes and once a month he returned to Poland to carry out important tasks for the resistance. On March 19, 1944, while Krzeptowski and his wife were staying in Ebed, news spread that the Germans had begun to occupy Hungary. Budapest was attacked by Nazi troops who carried out massive arrests of Hungarian patriots and Polish citizens. Krzeptowski along with his wife and several other Polish people managed to cross the mountains back into Poland following the courier route. During the winter they hid with friends in Orava and in the summer time they hid with friends in the Western Tatras. In January 1945, the Nazis were banished from Podhale and Krzeptowski returned to his home in Krzeptówki.

Józef Krzeptowski did not enjoy freedom for long. In February 1945 he was arrested by the NKVD (a soviet law enforcement agency) as a soldier of the Polish Home Army. He was deported to a camp in Siberia, where he faced a living hell. He returned to his beloved Zakopane after three years. After returning to Poland, Krzeptowski participated in the training of young Tatra guides. In 1957 and 1965 he was a member of the board of the Group of Tatra Guides in Zakopane. He regularly participated in rescue expeditions on the mountains and became a member of TOPR in 1934, a non-profit mountain rescue organisation in Poland . He participated in the difficult rescue mission during the winter of 1933 at the Gankowa Gallery. From 1949 he was also a member of the Alpine Club.

He was awarded the Cross of Valor and later in 1966, he received the Order of the Rebirth of Poland for his activities during the war and for all the work he had done on as a courier on the Tatra line. He died in Zakopane in 1971.

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Stanisław Frączysty (1917 – 2009)

By Paulina Adryańczyk-Linard and Kamila Witerska

Stanisław Frączysty was born in 1917 in Chochołów in Southern Poland close to the border with Slovakia. Until 1939 he helped his parents on the family farm. He practised athletics and winter skiing. Even before the outbreak of the war, in July 1939, he joined the underground military group organized by the General Staff of the Polish Army in Chochołów. In 1939 he was 22 years old. After the attack of Nazi Germany on Poland, he started his activity in the resistance movement, acting as a courier on the Budapest-Poland-Budapest transit route.

He left Poland in the evening, sometimes alone, sometimes with other couriers. On foot, they managed to get through the Tatras to the Slovak side - to Štrbské Pleso. There they waited in the cabin for Józef Lach, who took them to the Hungarian border. From Košice, they took a train to Budapest. Every month, Stanisław Frączysty transported money, small weapons, explosives, leaflets, and underground press newspapers. He crossed the route on a regular basis, travelling once, sometimes twice a month, alone or with a group of colleagues. Many of his friends, like Stanisław Marusarz, Jan Kula, and others were arrested. Some of them, like Staszek Marusarz, managed to escape while others were not so lucky. Helena Marusarz,a sister of Staszek Marusarza, was arrested by the Slovak military police, handed over to the Gestapo in Zakopane and shot.

In 1941, more and more people were relocating and leaving Poland for different countries. Frączysty regularly escorted officers and men from various resistance group in Poland to Hungary, and then further away to the Middle East or England. He regularly transferred various military people, mostly officers, as well as delegates of the London Government, from Budapest to Poland.

In October 1941, Stanisław Frączysty was informed to prepare well for the next trip which would take place in about ten to twelve days and this would be a very important mission that he was about to undertake. On the evening of 24 October 1941, a number of pre-war Polish dignitaries came to visit him and they took him by taxi to the castle of a Hungarian Countess, located in Buda, a very mountainous part of Budapest. They arrived at the castle and after passing through countless corridors, they reached a large, dark living room. Sitting behind a massive desk next to a small night light that was dimmed by the dark lampshade sat an older man in glasses. All those present in the room treated him with the greatest of respect and addressed him as Professor. The 'stranger' spread out a map on the desk and asked Frączysty how he would propose to cross two borders in order to reach Poland. Frączysty presented his plan and the 'professor' declared that the plan was accepted. Frączysty was given the job. He left Budapest by train, accompanied by the professor and a Hungarian lady. They all took their seats near the window on the train, facing each other. Frączysty sat by the door, and an associate Rogowski, pretending to be an undecided passenger, cleared passengers from the nearby compartments. In the daylight, Frączysty recognized the professor as Edward Rydz-Śmigły - the main leader of the clandestine Polish Armed Forces.

They arrived at Rožňava, where a familiar Slovak, Józef Hliwiak was waiting for them. They proceeded to leave the station as soon as possible when suddenly the 'professor' realized that he had left a package with ten thousand dollars on the train under the seat. They had to go back because such a pack could lead the Gestapo to them. Luckily, they found the train standing on the side-track and a package hidden under the seat.

After reaching the border, they said goodbye to the Slovak and Hungarian lady. Using familiar paths, they walked towards the border and at four in the morning, they reached the village of Poloma. Extremely tired, they hid in the bushes and waited over an hour for a pre-arranged car to meet them. Within a few hours, they reached the home of Józef Hudec in Twardoszyn. They waited until evening in the barn. The landlady brought them food and, exhausted by the journey, they slept that evening and all of the next day. At dusk, Hudec drove them to the Slovak-Polish border.

They continued on foot towards the border. They were dressed in white protective coats so that they could not be seen on the snow. They walked in a row, and every now and again laid down and watched behind and around them. On the bridge over the Czarny Dunajec, they spotted two figures, jumped to the side, and fell to the ground. This was a German patrol. After the patrol passed them, they crossed the bridge and ran across the field to the forest on the other side of the river. They arrived at the home

Stanisław Frączysty. Photo: PAP/L. Wróblewski. Source: dzieje.pl

of the brother of Stanisław Frączysty - Franciszek. There, they rested for a while before moving on. Another contact called Liszka was waiting for them with a carriage at a pre-arranged place and from here they travelled to Szaflary. From Szaflary they reached Krakow by train. In Krakow, they spent two days at a flat at Zalewskiego 42 Street. They eventually reached Warsaw without encountering any obstacles. After this adventure, Frączysty returned to Podhale. Two days later he was on his way again. For the courier, the only rest they have is waiting for their next trip.

In February 1942, during a raid in Chochołów, Stanisław Frączysty was arrested and tortured for several weeks in the Gestapo headquarters called 'Palace' in Zakopane. In the end, he was sent to a concentration camp in Oświęcim, and from there, in 1944, he was transferred to a concentration camp in Buchenwald. Luckily, he survived both concentration camps.

Stanisław Frączysty returned to Poland a few months after the liberation of the Buchenwald camp by the American army, on April 4, 1945. In 1949, he spent several weeks in the Safety Office prison suspected of collaborating with foreign intelligence. On his release, he returned to his home village. He was a farmer and for many years he was the mayor of Chochołów and the chairman of the local Volunteer Fire Brigade, as well as an activist for the Christian Association of Oświęcim Families. On May 28, 2006, Stanisław Frączysty was one of 32 former Auschwitz prisoners who met under the Wall of Death with Pope Benedict XVI. He died on February 7, 2009, in Chochołów at the age of 92. He was awarded the Silver Cross of the Virtuti Militari Order and the Chivalry Cross for participation in the battles against the Nazi invaders.

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Edith Cavell (1865-1915)

By Mary Moynihan

Edith Cavell (1865-1915) worked as a nurse during WWII assisting soldiers from all sides, and was sentenced to death by firing squad for helping over 200 Allied soldiers – British, French and Belgium - to escape from German occupied Belgium.

Edith Louisa Cavell was born on 4 December 1865 in the village of Swardeston, in Norfolk, England. Edith's parents were Louisa Sophia and Reverend Frederick Cavell, an Anglican vicar at the local church. Edith was the eldest of four children and had two sisters, Lillian and Florence, and a brother John. Her family environment was one of love and care and consisted of a strong religious faith. She was 'taught to always share with the less fortunate, despite her family's meagre earnings'. [121]

As a young girl Edith had a passion for painting and she 'and her sisters studied in the vicarage where they lived . . at around 15 years old, she enrolled at Norwich High School for girls and later went to three different boarding schools'.[122] Edith worked as a governess firstly in England and then in 1890 Edith moved to Brussels in Belgium for five years and worked as a governess for the François family. In 1895 Edith's father became ill and she returned to Swardeston to nurse him back to health. After this Edith, at the age of 30, decided to become a nurse.

In 1896 Edith trained at the Royal London Hospital 'in Whitechapel, under Martron Eva Lückes, a friend of Florence Nightingale'.[123] Edith worked in a number of British hospitals in Shoreditch, Kings Cross and Manchester, before returning to Belgium in September 1907 to work with a Brussels physician and Royal family surgeon Dr Antoine Depage looking after a sick child. In October 1907 Depage went on to set up a secular training school for nurses at the Berkendael Medical Institute called the Belgium School for Graduate Nurses. He invited Edith to become Matron and to run the new training programme, a new pioneering school in Belgium. Edith was excellent at the job and made the training a great success, 'after just one year, she was training and providing nurses to three hospitals, 24 schools and 13 nurseries'. [124] At the time of Edith's appointment there was no established nursing profession in Belgium at the time and 'her pioneering work led her to be considered the founder of modern nursing education in that country.' [125]

'Since nursing in Belgium was run mostly by nuns at the time, Depage saw Cavell's medical training as a major benefit. She quickly advanced while working at the school – L'École Belge d'Infirmières Diplômées– and by 1910 was the Matron for Berkendael hospital'. [126]

'As director of nursing at L'École Belge d'Infirmières Diplômées, Edith developed a five-year diploma curriculum for nurses. As word of Edith's excellent nursing school spread, hospitals from other countries began requesting Edith's well-trained nurses. Before long, Edith was running l'École Belge d' Infirmieres Diplomees, as well as a new hospital, St. Gilles, and at the same time training women for private duty nursing'. [127]

Edith returned to England in 1914 to visit her mother and other family members in Norfolk. On August 4, 1914 Germany invades Belgium and takes control of the country. Britain declares war on Germany. Edith says that 'at times like this, I am more needed than ever' [128] and makes plans to return to Brussels:

where her hospital had been converted to a Red Cross hospital to care for war victims. There, she encouraged the nurses to treat any soldiers that came through their doors, regardless of which side they were fighting on.

World War I, also called the First World War or Great War, was 'an international conflict that in 1914–18 embroiled most of the nations of Europe along with Russian, the United States, the Middle East and other regions. The war pitted the Central Powers – mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey – against the Allies, mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan and from 1917, the United States. It ended with the defeat of the Central Powers. The war was virtually unprecedented in the slaughter, carnage, and destruction it caused'.[129]

Edith was 'a devout Christian and she treated all wounded people on both sides of the fighting, regardless of nationality, and reportedly once said, 'I can't stop while there are lives to be saved'. [130] Edith was 'greatly criticised by many at the time for assisting the German and Austrian soldiers, when they were fighting against the British'. [131] However Edith's belief was to 'help soldiers of all nationalities who had been wounded in the conflict telling her nurses 'each man was a father, a husband, a son: the profession of nursing knows no frontiers'. [132]

As the war progressed, Edith decided to work with others smuggling out Allied soldiers to Holland which was a neutral country at the time. She became part of a network helping Allied soldiers escape as well as Belgians who were eligible for military service. Over the next eleven months she went on to save the lives of over 200 men – British, French and Belgium soldiers. They would shelter the men in the hospital until they were well enough to travel and then smuggle them out through a secret tunnel underneath the hospital and arrange for guides to take them over the border providing at times money and secret identity cards.

Edith begins to help Allied Troops to escape into neutral Holland. To do so Edith smuggles patients through her hospital in Belgium, finding them guides and organising papers for them to cross the border. Edith takes identity card photos of some of the soldiers on her box Kodak and some are told to disguise themselves as Romanians so their use of English and lack of German/French language is not seen as suspicious. At one time, around 85 soldiers were hiding in Edith's nursing school. Edith sends them out in the day into the town whilst the German officials carry out their inspections and then at night they crowd back in to the basement, corridors and beds, some even pretend to be patients. [133]

But the German officials became suspicious. Edith is urged to flee by her colleagues but she refuses. Eventually on 5 August 1915, Edith is arrested along with thirty-five other colleagues after a 'Belgian spy discovered the secret tunnel beneath the hospital and reported it to the authorities. When interrogated by German officials, she chose not to lie and instead confessed to everything.'[134] Edith is then transferred from police headquarters to Saint Giles prison in Brussels.

While in prison, Edith writes letters to her family and school on money matters and 'asked Sister Wilkins to send her 'blue and white combs from my drawer, a small notebook and some handkerchiefs - also my imitation of Christ, a little red book, and my prayer book'. Her cell was poorly furnished, containing a folded bed that turned into a table, a small cupboard and a basin of toilets, and her nurses send her flowers . She spends her time embroidering and reading her copy of The Imitation of Christ again and again. After so many years of activity, she saw her loneliness as a luxury. Later, she will say to Reverend Stirling Gahan, 'Life for me has always been in a hurry and full of difficulties, these weeks in prison have been a period of rest, I have had time to read, pray and reflect'. [135]

Edith was charged with smuggling Allied soldiers out of German-occupied Belgium during WWI. After a short trial, Edith, was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death by firing squad. There was an international outcry in response to the arrest and sentencing of Edith, with calls from different countries around the world urging the German authorities to release her and to show mercy particularly in view of the work she had done assisting both Allied and German soldiers. Tragically the German authorities refused to relent.

Edith was told of her fate at 8.30pm on October 11, the night before her execution, by the German military chaplain Pastor Le Seur. He arranged for the Anglican chaplain Reverend Stirling Gahan to come in and visit Edith in her cell. 'Stirling Gahan visits Edith and finds her calm. She tells him: 'Standing as I do in view of God and Eternity, I realise that patriotism is not enough, I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone'.[136] Edith tells him she is not afraid as 'I have seen death so often that it is neither strange nor frightening to me.' She speaks of the kindness she has received and takes communion with Reverend Gahan, sharing bread and wine 'before saying the words of the hymn 'Abide with me'. Gahan tells her before leaving that 'We will always remember you as a heroine and a martyr; to which she replied: 'Do not think of me like that, think of me as a nurse who tried to do one's duty'. [137]

Nurse Edith Cavall was executed by a German firing squad at dawn (7am) on 12 October 1915 at the National Firing Range, Tir National in Brussels. Edith was buried in Brussels on the grounds of the rifle range where she was shot and a plan wooden cross was placed over her grave. After the war in May 1919, Edith Cavell's remains were exhumed and returned to England for a memorial ceremony at Westminister Abbey in London by Queen Alexandra and the Princess Victoria. Thousands of people lined the streets for the event to pay their respects. At the family's request the coffin was then

121 www.cavellnursestrust.org/history
122 https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/general-history/edith-cavell/
123 https://www.cavellnursestrust.org/edith-cavell
124 https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/general-history/edith-cavell/
125 www.iwm.org.uk/history/who-was-edith-cavell
126 https://allthatsinteresting.com/edith-cavell
127 http://www.historyswomen.com/socialreformer/EdithCavell.html
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132 www.cavellnursestrust.org/history
133 www.cavellnursestrust.org/history
134 www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/general-history/edith-cavell/
135 http://www.edith-cavell-belgium.eu/fr/histoire-cavell.html#Theme1
136 www.cavellnursestrust.org/history
137 http://www.edith-cavell-belgium.eu/fr/histoire-cavell.html#Theme1

taken back by a special train to Norfolk where she was laid to rest at Norwich Cathedral near her home town of Swardeston.

Edith's execution was used as propaganda to encourage recruitment in England . 'She became a symbol of the Allied Cause and her memory was invoked in recruitment posters and messages in Britain and around the world'.[138] However 'many people argue that this was far from what Edith would have wanted'.[139]

Edith Cavell was a strong, independent woman who put the safety of others above her own and carried out her work with dignity and courage. She provided medical care to all, regardless of what side they were on, she risked her own life to save over 200 British Allied soldiers escape from occupied territory and she spoke of forgiveness against her own executioners shortly before she died.

Edith's actions inspired many during WWII including nurses that Edith had trained in the nursing school and who themselves went on to assist British soldiers in Brussels. One of the people inspired by Edith Cavell was 24 year-old Belgian woman Andrée de Jongh. Andrée herself talked about how she was inspired by stories her father told her of Edith Cavell which encouraged Andrée to go on and create the Comet Line, an escape network for Allied soldiers stretching from Belgium down to Spain during WWII.

There is a public monument to Edith Cavell sited at St Martin's Place near Trafalgar Square in London that was unveiled by Queen Alexandra in March 1920. The monument is made of carrara marble and grey Cornish granite and includes a three metre high statue of Cavell in her nurse's uniform. The inscription beneath the statue of Cavell reads:

Edith Cavell, Brussels, Dawn, October 12 1915. Patriotism is not enough, I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone

The above words are those that she spoke the night before her execution. The monument also contains the following four words – humanity, fortitude, devotion and sacrifice. A nurse's fund was set up in England which later became Cavell Nurses Trust and operates to this day and there is a mountain named after Edith Cavell in Jasper National Park, Canada.

138 www.iwm.org.uk/history/who-was-edith-cavell
139 www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/general-history/edith-cavell/

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- Who was Edith Cavell? ww.iwm.org.uk/history/who-was-edith-cavell
- Cavell Nurses Trust, www.cavellnursestrust.org/history

Bob Frost (1923-2019), British RAF Rear Gunner, WWII

By Mary Moynihan

Bob Frost (1923 -2019) was an RAF Wellington bomber rear gunner who evaded capture by the Nazis during WWII after his aircraft came down over Belgium in September 1942. His Wellington bomber was brought down over Belgium and aided by members of the Comète Line, he was able to make his way from Brussels through France to Spain and into Gibraltar before returning to England.

Aged 19, Bob's crew were making their way to raid the Germany town of Essen. He had flown '22 raids at a time when just one in six airmen lived to complete thirty flights. 'It wasn't a matter of if you'd get shot down. It was a matter of when', Mr Frost recalled.' [140]

'8.38pm on September 16, 1942, a Wellington Mk 3 took off from RAF Snaith, in East Yorkshire. Inside the aircraft was a crew of six, and a 4,000lb bomb destined for Essen in the Ruhr Valley – the most heavily defended site in Europe. Ten minutes' flying time from the target, German anti-aircraft fire smashed through the port engine, rendering the hydraulics and turrets useless. But the crew pressed on, dropping the bomb on the city and then turning for home. Over Belgium, the starboard engine ground to a halt. At 13,000 feet, the airmen bailed out.' [141]

Bob survived the jump and after reaching the ground, he managed to bury his parachute. He made his way towards a nearby village where he sought shelter. After seeing a V sign painted on a wall (a sign of the resistance) he knocked on the door of a nearby house and was lucky to be taken in by someone sympathetic to his cause. He was eventually put in touch with and received assistance from The Comète Line.

When Bob Frost crash landed, it was the Comet Line that supplied him with new clothes, a new identity, and guided him to safety. From Belgium, the local resistance took Bob to Paris, a key staging point for any escapee. He was given a false identity card, taken to a church, and told to wait until he saw someone leaving with a newspaper under their arm and to follow them . . . from the church Bob was led to a small flat where he lived for a week, hosted by a local couple, to await the next set of instructions. During this time, Bob was taken out and about in Paris by his hosts, right under the noses of the Germans. He recalls, 'I would go and walk about with Robert and Germaine in Paris quite cheerfully. 'Just behave normally, be careful what you're doing, maintain a very low presence' … why they never discovered it I'm damned if I know'. [142]

Despite advice to be careful and to maintain a low presence, Bob's hosts, Robert and Germaine enjoyed walking along in front of the Nazi soldiers, chatting away to Bob in French with Bob simply nodding as if he understood what was being said, and all the time, fooling the Nazi occupiers.

Bob travelled by train from Paris down to Bayonne near the border with Spain. He was taken to a farmhouse in the foothills of the Pyrenees and then Andree and the regular Comète Basque guide from Hernani, Florentino Goikoetxea, guided Bob and other escapees across the Western Basque Pyrenees into Spain. Florentino would lead them across the mountain terrain and rivers with Dédée encouraging them on. They arrived into Santander and from there took a car to Madrid and to the British embassy. Bob was taken to Gibraltar from where he was eventually flown back to England on 24 October 1942.When asked about Dédée, Bob Frost replied 'it was her eyes, they were absolutely burning and there was an air of supreme confidence about her'. [143] Bob asked Dédée 'why do you do it?' and she replied 'It's there to be done.' [144]

Speaking about the many people who worked on the Comète Line, Bob Frost said 'I have nothing but the utmost respect for the people who worked in the Comet Line. They knew the price if they were caught. It was heroism beyond anything I can tell you. When we got home we could go out, show off our air force wings and lead a normal life. These people could not. They had to remain quiet, carrying on with things and hoping there wasn't going to be a knock on the door.' [145]

140 https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/hero-bob-frost
141 https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/9930526/The-secrets-of-the-Second-World-War-Comet-Line-are-revealed.html
142 http://seadogproductions.co.uk/blog/wwiis-great-escapes-episode-four-the-pyrenees/
143 http://home.clara.net/clinchy/bulletin.htm
144 http://seadogproductions.co.uk/blog/wwiis-great-escapes-episode-four-the-pyrenees/
145 http://home.clara.net/clinchy/bulletin.htm

After the war Bob became a founding member of the Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS) to remember the role of civilian helpers during WWII. The Comète Line, between 1941 and 1944, helped over 800 escapes with the support of over 3,000 support volunteers 'of whom about 700 were arrested and, of these, 290 shot or otherwise killed on being deported to extermination camps'.[146]

Bob was originally from Camden town in England. After the war he married and became a head master in Kent and adopted two children. His wife Daphne died of motor neurone disease in 1995.[147] Bob was lucky to eventually find a new partnership and had a twenty-year relationship with Mrs Schutz, a widow whom he met after his wife passed away. Mrs Schutz had worked for the British Secret Service during WWII. Bob became good friends with Andrée Dumon (1922-) codename Nadine who was one of the main organisers and couriers for The Comet Line during WWWII, hosting re-unions of former airmen and comet line members. Bob passed away on 14 March 2019 aged 96. The following is a short interview with Bob Frost https://www.legasee.org.uk/oursecretwar/the-archive/bob-frost/

146 https://www.secret-ww2.net/single-post/bob-frost-tributes
147 http://home.clara.net/clinchy/bulletin.htm

Mary Lindell (1895-1986)

By Mary Moynihan

Mary Lindell (1895-1986) was a British born woman who lived in French during the Second World War and who risked her life working with the resistance movement setting up escape lines for members of the Allied armed forces attempting to escape from Nazi occupied Europe.

Mary's story featured in a four-part television series Women of Courage made by English television documentary maker Peter Morley in 1980 for Yorkshire Television. Women of Courage focuses on four women active during WWII who risked their lives to save others from the Nazi regime. The woman are Hiltgunt Zassenhaus from Germany who outwardly worked for the Nazis as a censor and spy and who became known as 'The German Angel' for helping to save 1,200 Scandanavian political prisoners. After the war, she became a doctor and started a new life in America. Maria Rutkiewicz's story is also told. She was from Poland and worked as a radio operator with the Polish resistance during WWII. She was captured by the Gestapo and imprisoned at Pawiak Prison where she gave birth to twins. Maria and her children survived the war but her husband and mother did not. The third woman was Sigrid Helliesen Lund, a Norweigan pacifist known for her resistance to the German occupation of Norway during WWII, bringing 37 children to Norway to save them from the Holocaust. The forth concerns a British born woman Mary Lindell. In his memoir, the director Peter Morley remembers the first time his research team met Mary Lindell in her apartment in Paris where she was living, aged eighty-five. When the team:

'discovered this fiercely patriotic, eccentric, arrogant, and very amusing eighty-five year-old, I agreed at once that she simply had to be one of the four in our Women of Courage quartet. Her story was, to say the least, bordering on the bizarre, and filming it became irresistible. Meeting her for the first time in her smart apartment in Paris, merely confirmed that her story had to be told. All of 5-feet tall, slightly-built and elegantly dressed, Mary Lindell greeted us, holding her dachshund 'Tommy' in her arms 'Oh, thank God, some Englishmen! Can't stand the French, you know, come in.' Yet she had lived in Paris for the past sixty-one years – since the end of the Great War – and considered her apartment to be on British soil, and she never let one forget it.' [148]

Mary Lindell was born in Surrey in 1895. Her English parents were wealthy and the following is a direct quote from Mary Lindell herself from the documentary:

'My mother was a Colls of the Trollops and Colls. It was her father who was a very well known architect. I think he'd built the Mansion House, and God knows what he didn't build, and of course he was stinking with money – made absolutely millions. I mean he was a very wealthy man. My mother was a very wealthy bit of works too, although nobody would ever have thought of it, and because she had the necessary, I was lucky. My godfather died and left me quite a nice little lot of money too, so I was really quite independent. That I suppose is why I've become arrogant and independent now, because from fifteen onwards I never knew what money was, do you see what I mean? It just was there'.

She was awarded the Croix de Guerre for her work during WWI. She was aged nineteen at the outbreak of the Great War 1914-1918 and she:

'volunteered for the VAD Nursing Service, but left, after a run-in with her superiors. Instead, she went over to France and volunteered for the Secours aux Blessés Militaires, the aristocratic division of the French Red Cross. Joining the French troops in the trenches on the Western Front, she worked for the next four years in forward dressing stations and hospitals, where she was known to the wounded as the 'Bébé Anglaise'. There were many recorded acts of sheer bravery when she went with small medical teams to tend the wounded only a short distance from the German trenches, once suffering a gas attack. And this was recognised by the Croix de Guerre awarded to her in 1918. [149]

After the war Mary stayed in France, married a French Count becoming Comtesse de Milleville, and she had three children. When the second world war came and France was occupied by the German army, Mary became involved in supporting Allied personnel trapped in the occupied territories. According to Mary in the television documentary The Courage of Women 'what gave me the idea was what Edith Cavell had done in the last war, and it was therefore necessary that something had to be done in this war':

148 A Life Rewound, Memoirs of a freelance Producer and Director by Peter Morley, 2010. Bank House Books. Part Four. Page 245
149 A Life Rewound, Memoirs of a freelance Producer and Director by Peter Morley, 2010. Bank House Books. Part Four. Page 245

'With the help of her son Maurice, she organised an escape route to ferry soldiers and refugees past the heavily guarded checkpoints, marking the demarcation line between German occupied France and Vichy France. She put escapees up in her flat, and when the coast was clear, ferried them in her car across the border. She flaunted her Red Cross Uniform, and managed to intimidate high-ranking officers in charge of the German army in Paris, declaring that she was an officer of the Red Cross and demanded petrol coupons for humanitarian reasons. She was fearless, and they simply did not know what to make of her. She said that 'the Jerries simply loved titled people, especially in uniform with lots of medal ribbons'.[150]

In London the British secret service heard about the work Mary and her son were doing from one of the British escapees they had saved. Mary continued the work until her arrest by the German army, receiving a nine month prison sentence which she served in Fresnes Prison outside Paris. After this she escaped back to England in 1942 in a journey that took nearly six months. Back in France the Germans put out a death warrant on Mary. In London Mary met with a Colonel jimmy Langley and his assistant Colonel Airey Neave who were involved with a unit in M19 responsible for organising the escape lines in Europe. Mary was referred to as a 'loose canon' [151] and would argue about doing things her own way however they agreed to train her and 'arranged for her to be flown back to Vichy France in a Lysander, to set up an escape network for shot-down British airmen. They were both much relieved to see the back of her'. [152]

Under the name Marie Claire, Mary set up a new escape route called the Marie Claire Line 'centred in the small town of Ruffec, just inside Vichy France. Escaping allied pilots were contacted over a wide area of Northern France, collected at Ruffec, smuggled into Vichy France, and then escorted, normally by train, to Foix. Pyrenean guides then led them over the mountains to Spain, and most of them finally got back to England'. [153] During this time Mary's son Maurice was arrested and imprisoned in Lyon where he was tortured but refused to tell where his mother was or give away any information on the new escape line. Mary 'paid a huge ransom for his release'. [154]

In November 1943 Mary herself was arrested by German security police operating in Vichy France. She was put on a train under armed escort heading for Paris to face her death sentence. According to Mary:
'As I didn't want to go to Paris, I thought the best thing to do was to get off the train and I chose my spot, and when I got there I told my guard that I usually felt sick on the train and when I'm going to be sick, I'll just hit him on the knee so as not to do it in his lap. So I hit him on the knee where I got where I wanted to get off the train and went in the corridor. Unfortunately, I walked a bit too quickly because I wanted to get a move on, you see. He followed me, and he immediately began shooting. I thought, oh, the bastard, he's shooting. As I turned to go through, he got me in the cheek. I didn't even feel it. And I opened the door on to the rail and there, when you do that, you can't jump at once because you have to be careful of the telegraph poles, because if the telegraph pole hits you, it's nasty. And as I jumped, he fired. He got me twice in the head, which, of course, helped me getting along a bit. It really was a hell of a jump.' [155]

The train was stopped and Mary was recovered from the embankment still alive. She had survived the attack and was taken to a military hospital where she recovered. She was then taken to Dijon Jail for interrogation and then taken in September 1944 by train to Ravensbrück Concentration Camp for women situated about ninety miles north of Berlin. Ravensbrück was the major Nazi concentration camp for women with the prisoners coming from over 30 different countries. According to SS documents the prisoners included 'political prisoners, 'asocials' including Roma (gypsies), Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, criminals, 'work-shy'' and 'race defilers'. [156] It is estimated up to 132,000 women and children were incarcerated in Ravensbrück over its lifetime and that up to 92,000 women were murdered through disease, starvation, torture and executions.

Women from all over France and other countries were incarcerated in the camp, amongst them a group of British prisoners who were working with the British Secret Service assisting the French resistance, In the camp Mary was assigned to work in the camp hospital where she would take risks smuggling medications out for British prisoners. According to Mary:

'The conditions in Ravensbrück were pretty dim for the general public. But you must remember I got there in a British uniform, with a couple of rows of British decorations, with my identity papers proving my title, which you know, the Germans love. The political officer was completely lost from the very beginning, and, of course, when I realised this, I threw my weight about, as you can imagine. They used to call me the arrogant English woman, 'Die arrogante Englanderin'. I'd say 'You're a lot of bastards.' I was arrogant and I consider we had the right to be arrogant, don't you? After all said and done, we were winning the war and if ever there were any discussions with them, I used to say right at the beginning, 'You've lost it, you know perfectly well you've lost the war.' And they knew they had too. Didn't stop them. They were beastly. The weaker the people, the more beastly they were.' [157]

As the war progressed, camp officials 'selected' large groups of women to be transferred to other camps including the Auschwitz-Birkenau Killing Centre where they were murdered by the gas chambers and other methods. During the last months of the war, and due to the rapid advance of the Russian Army, the SS decided to exterminate as many prisoners as they could, in order to avoid any testimony about what happened in the camp. For example, 130 babies and pregnant women were gassed in March 1945'. [158]

'The staff also murdered prisoners in the camp infirmary by lethal injection... in early 1945, the SS

Constructed a gas chamber in Ravensbrück near the camp crematorium. The Germans gassed between 5,000 and 6,000 prisoner at Ravensbrück before Soviet troops liberated the camp on 30 April 1945'. [159]

Less than 3,500 prisoners remained in the camp made up of those who were sick and unable to walk. As stated above many women had died by gassing and executions or were removed to other centres for killing. Prior to the Russians arriving, the SS leadership had ordered all those physically capable of walking, over 24,500 prisoners, to leave the camp on a death march. Survivors of the death march were liberated in the hours following the liberation of the camp by a Russian scout unit. In addition 500 women were handed over to officials of the Swedish and Danish Red Cross shortly after the evacuation. According to reports the list of names was drawn up by Mary Lindell in the camp after the officials claimed there were no British or American women there. The release of these 500 women was arranged by the Swedish diplomat Count Bernadotte (1895 -1948) who was running the Swedish Red Cross at the time and he had negotiated with Nazi SS leader Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) for the release of the prisoners from camps still under Nazi control. One of the foreign women included in the 500 to be released from Ravensbrück was Mary Lindell.

The Swedish Red Cross took the women back to Sweden. Mary arrived at Malmo on April 28, 1945 and staying in quarantine at the Malmohus museum. Later she returned to Paris to live in her old apartment. Mary remained in Paris until her death. Her son Maurice also survived the war. However Mary's marriage ended. In addition to having her story feature in Women of Courage, Mary's life also featured in a film called One Against the Women based on the biography Story of Mary Lindell: Wartime Secret Agent by Barry Wynne. Her life story is told in the book Lindell's List by Peter Hore published by History Press in 2016. She was awarded a second Croix de Guerre by the French government and an Order of the British Empire (OBE) by the British for her work in France for the RAF escaping society.

When Peter Morley made the television documentary on Mary's story he interviewed members of the Marie Claire line who worked with Mary to save the allied airmen. He also interviewed the Canon of Metz Cathedral, Abbé Blanchbarb, who was leader of the Pyrennes section of the Marie Claire escape line and 'he declared triumphantly: 'Pour une femme, Marie Claire est un grand homme' (meaning, for a woman Marie Claire is a great man). [160] At the end of the documentary Mary says:

'When they say I'm a heroine, I am most embarrassed and I think it's ridiculous. I mean, after all said and done, one does a job – it's a job. A lot of people say, oh, how courageous, how brave, and I say, no. Luck, I was lucky. And I was wounded three times and they all said, you'll never recover. Luck. My number wasn't up. But a heroine? All twiddle rot. What is a heroine? Joan of Ark? I'm certainly nothing like that. Edith Cavell? Phew. When people say that it makes me mad. I'll tell you, in my little tupenny-ha'penny mind I represented Great Britain, who was standing up against the world and fighting for it, and I wasn't going to let Great Britain down. It just didn't enter my head. And I wasn't frightened. I mean to say, if you're shot, well, you're shot, and that's the end of the story, isn't it?'

In his memoir talking about Mary Lindell and the other three women whose stories are told in The Courage of Women television documentary series, Peter Morley refers to the 'triumph of the human spirit' :

'In getting to know these four exceptional people, I learnt that courage breeds a special form of modesty – a reluctance to admit that they had done anything out of the ordinary. Instinctively, they took it upon themselves, in spite of all odds, to make a stand against an evil regime. It would have been unthinkable for them to have acted in any other way'. He refers to the crucial difference between a soldier and the lone resistance fighter. . . While these women had to face the enemy on their own, make their decisions on their own, take personal responsibility for every action, big and small, on their own – we, on the other hand, were protected, cosseted in effect, by a well organised military machine acting in unison with thousands of others. This memory alone underlines my unbounded admiration for these four Women of Courage'. [161]

Mary was brave and very committed to the work she had taken on. She disliked being told what to do. She was at times controversial in her use of language and very much insisted on doing things her way. She died in 1986 aged 91.

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