



## The Death of H el ene Vagliano

**Some of the experiences on this page may cause distress.**

H el ene Vagliano was the daughter of a Greek shipowner. She was educated in England then went to live in Cannes. The family were forced to remain there when the German armies invaded France. H el ene became the leader of the Maquis at Cannes and worked at the Aid to Prisoners Centre in the town, where a colleague betrayed her to the Gestapo.

She was interrogated, tortured and killed by the Gestapo. Her body was recovered and she was given a public funeral on 3 October 1944. She has since been accorded the title of 'Heroine of France' and was awarded a posthumous Legion of Honour.



Childhood photograph of H el ene Vagliano

Attestation regarding my daughter's murder by the Gestapo and on ill treatment by the same.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1944 at 11.30, five Gestapo agents arrived at the 'Centre d'Entr'Aide pour les Familles et pour les Enfants des Prisonniers' situated in the Rue Teissere, Cannes (Alpes Maritimes) France and arrested my daughter, H el ene VAGLIANO, who had worked there since 1941. My daughter was an active member of the Resistance and also an agent for the Allies.

These men belonged to the anti-Bolsheviq ue Legion WSS and were employed by the Gestapo, their Leader was Chief Torturer and was completely without mercy.

My daughter was denounced and these men were aware that she knew the names and addresses of many of the Resistance Organisation. Also that she had sent letters by her agents abroad and to various places in France. My daughter was taken by these men to the Gestapo Headquarters at the Ville Montfleury, Cannes. She was put in solitary confinement in a small cell. Every half an hour, these men came to her cell to question her. As she refused to speak, they beat her unmercifully with canes and with three thronged whips. Prisoners in neighbouring cells heard her sobbing all night.



Childhood photograph of H el ene Vagliano



The Gestapo agents came to our house on the same day, July 29<sup>th</sup> at 12.30. they arrested my husband and myself. We were not allowed to take a bag or clothing of any kind with us, only our handkerchiefs! My mother, aged 80, who was in a bad state of health was not allowed by the chief of these Gestapos to see a Doctor. Two armed agents remained in the house! My daughter's room was ransacked and all her most precious belongings were stolen by these men. We were also taken to Gestapo's Headquarters at the Montfleur and put in a cell with seven men.

On Monday, the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, we and our daughter and other prisoners were taken in a lorry to Grasse (near Cannes) to the main prison.

I was put in solitary confinement in a foul and filthy cell just under the room where the interrogation took place. This was done on purpose as from there I could hear everything through the open windows. They thought that later I would induce my daughter to denounce her fellow workers.

During the whole afternoon, by intervals of half an hour, I heard my child's voice saying; "I don't know" then I heard her say "Oh! Don't do that" then screams of agony. They undressed my daughter completely in front of ten men and their chief and burnt her whole body with red hot irons and marked her cheeks. When I was sent up she was not there. The Chief asked me to sign a piece of paper denouncing some friends of ours who were French but he imagined that they were Pro-Allies and also to give details concerning my child's work. All this I refused to do. Then this German brute hit me repeatedly on the face until I could hardly see. Later he sent me to my cell. My husband endured the same treatment. We were told we were all going to be shot the next day.

Next morning 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1944 we were all put in a closed lorry and taken to Nice to the Gestapo headquarters at Cimiez (Villa Trianon) above Nice. We had no food the day before, 31<sup>st</sup> of July, and none on the 1st August either. No water was given to us though it was hot and stuffy in these cells.

We were kept at the Villa Trianon from 2.30 until 6.30. We all had to sign our names. At 6.30 we were conveyed in a lorry guarded by a man with a small machine gun to the big prison at Nice (Nouvelles Prisons, section allemands). We were put in different cells. These were filthy, full of bugs. For beds we had sacks of straw, full of fleas and vermin. No hygiene systems at all, only a pail, a small rusty tap and a small basin under it for washing purposes and also for drinking. Hardly any nourishment except a black liquid and sour bread three times daily. No criminal in England or America could live long in such foul conditions. The prisoners had to clean their cells without soap, cloths or pails of water, only half a broken broom. No clergyman was allowed to see the prisoners or any visitor allowed. At night, by intervals, soldiers came and flashed a torch in our faces.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, my husband and I were released. Before leaving the main prison we were taken to the cell at the Villa Trianon, Cimiez, to wait. There I found



my daughter. Her arms, legs, thighs and neck looked like raw beef and were frightfully swollen. Her legs were also in a fearful state, as they had been terribly beaten at the Cannes Gestapo and severely burnt at Grasse, the next day. Two burns in her small shrunken face were terrible to see! I was ordered to leave the cell and not allowed by the Gestapo soldier to kiss my daughter. We never saw her again! We returned to our house in Cannes and a few days later we were informed by a frantic letter from my daughter that the Gestapo was going to retake us until the end of the war as we had complained of bad treatment. We had not done so but we returned to Cannes in a bus and the people in it saw our black and blue faces and general condition and had talked about it. (My daughter's letter had been smuggled out). She was never given my letters.



The Vagliano family home in Cannes



H el ene Vagliano

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August my daughter heard that the Allies had landed. The lady in her cell told me this afterwards. This lady was a hostage as her husband had joined the Resistance group in the mountain. It seems that a voice outside the Prison announced the news that the Americans had landed at Frejus. My daughter and her cell mate were wild with joy. "Now we are liberated" they said. My daughter seemed transformed though she had been interrogated nearly every day. Often she had to spend the whole day there (at the Villa Trianon). There no food was allowed so as to weaken the prisoner's morale and lower his vitality. My daughter had during this time refused to give any names or any addresses to the Gestapo interrogator as she knew that if she did so hundreds of men belonging to the Resistance and other services would have been found, tortured and shot! She could not betray them her strength was failing, and she was very weak but her mind was clear.

On that same 15<sup>th</sup> of August, at three o'clock, a soldier came to fetch my daughter. Later a man who has a piece of ground and a small house near the Ariane, a small hill above Nice, saw a black lorry drive up. This man retired to his house. Then he heard the sound of machine-guns then revolver shots. The lorry drove away and the driver informed the police at Nice that some bodies were at the Ariane.

Meanwhile the man who had the house near the field came out and saw twenty three bodies lying there, my daughter after being machine-gunned had a bullet hole at the



back of her neck to finish her off. Near her were the other victims: a Priest whose only crime had been to bury two men of the Resistance, two boys of 16 and 18, two young women of the Resistance, a cousin of General de Litre de Tassigny, aged 57, a retired Major taken as a hostage for his son who had joined the Resistance and other Martyrs.

My daughter left our house on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July at 10.30, happy, healthy and full of the joy of living for she knew the landing would be soon. She returned to Cannes on 30<sup>th</sup> of September in her coffin covered with the French flag.

In the grave yard near the Ariane, there are rows and rows of graves and on each of them is written:

Murdered by the Gestapo1 (Assassiné par la Gestapo).

I certify that all these facts are true! And not exaggerated. We do not need to exaggerate for our loved ones are dead and at peace after their agony!

Signed: Danaë VAGLIANO

(Madame M. VAGLIANO)

The above attestation was circulated to the friends and staff of the Vagliano family. This particular copy was given to their chauffeur, Mr Wicks. The Second World War Experience centre also holds various photographs, documents and letters, some written by Hélène and Danaë Vagliano to the Wicks family.



The Centre's copy of Madame Vagliano's attestation.