

Mother Describes Nazi Torture of Daughter Who Died for France

BY DREW MIDDLETON, *New York Times*

PARIS, Nov. 25.—This is the story of the death of Helene Vagliano, who died that others might live and fight. It is the story of all those of the resistance movement who were caught and who will never parade down the Champs Elysees with bands playing. It is the story of the Germans who tortured them. It is a story that in 10 years the Germans will want us to forget.

Helene Vagliano was born of a rich Greek family and she lived in the south of France. She worked as a sort of postmaster for the resistance movement there, unknown to her father and mother. She forwarded messages and information and helped smuggle Frenchmen out of France to Africa, where they could renew the fight.

Nothing anyone can write about Helene Vagliano is as moving as a letter written by her mother, Danae Vagliano, to an English friend. It is a letter to be read over in the hour of victory and in the years after victory. Here it is:

"Dearest Netta: I have to tell you with heartbreaking grief that our beloved Helene was murdered by the Ges-

tapo at Nice on the 15th of August. A friend, a woman who worked with her (at an aid center for families of French war prisoners) betrayed her when she was arrested—from fear, I suppose—and said that her son, who had gone to Algiers, had been able to leave France because of Helene—that Helene was a 'letter box' and that she wrote to her son through Helene's organization.

"This put the Germans on her trail. They arrested my daughter three days after this woman, this 'great friend' of Helene's, had been taken by the Gestapo.

"We, Marino (Mrs. Vagliano's husband) and I were also arrested as witnesses, or rather accomplices, but Helene never told us about her work as she did not want to compromise us. We were taken by the most awful brutes, Frenchmen of the Vichy militia who were part of the anti-Bolshevik division of the Waffen S.S. They had a German chief, a cruel, sadistic brute.

"My daughter was taken by these men to the Gestapo prison at Villa Montfleury in Cannes. She was put in solitary confinement in a small cell. Every half hour German Gestapo men came to her cell to question her.

As she refused to speak they beat her with canes and three-thonged whips. Prisoners in neighboring cells heard her sobbing all night.

"My husband and I and Helene were then taken to Grasse to the headquarters of these savages of the anti-Bolshevik legion or, as this section was called, the Brandenburg Division. They put me alone in a foul cell for 18 hours without food or water. The cell was just under the third-degree chamber. There I heard at intervals during the whole afternoon my little daughter being tortured.

"I heard her saying 'I don't know, I don't know,' then 'oh, don't do that again, then screams of agony. They undressed my daughter completely in front of 10 men and their chief and burnt her whole body with red hot irons and marked her cheeks, her arms, her legs and her back. Her face was burned terribly.

"I was then called into the room. The chief sat at a table surrounded by men of the militia and the Gestapo. He questioned me about Helene, and when I told him I knew nothing he hit me violently on the face four times.

"He then asked me to sign a paper acknowledging that a number of my friends were anti-German. The woman who had betrayed Helene had given the names of 24 of our friends as people who were either anti-German or were working against Germany. When I refused to confirm this he hit me savagely on the face and mouth and the ring he was wearing cut open my cheek.

"Next morning at dawn he called Marino and me before him and said that my daughter had confessed everything and was to be shot immediately and that my husband would be shot the following day when more evidence would have reached him.

"At 7 a.m. I heard two shots fired. But it was a bluff and we were later taken from Grasse to Nouvelle Prison at Nice."

Mrs. Vagliano and her husband were kept in prison for about a week. On Aug. 5 Mrs. Vagliano saw her daughter for the last time.

"There I found my daughter, her arms, legs, thighs and neck looked like raw beef and were frightfully swollen.

Mother Relates Gestapo Torture of Daughter

Parents in Cell Above Third-Degree Room Hear Suffering of Girl Resistance Worker

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Her legs also were in dreadful state as they had been terribly beaten at Cannes by the Gestapo and severely burned at Grasse. Two burns in her small, shrunken face were terrible to see. I was ordered to leave the cell and was not allowed by the Gestapo to kiss my daughter. We never saw here again."

On the morning of the Allied landings in the south of France (Aug. 15) Helene and the other prisoners learned of them. Helene seemed exalted, another prisoner wrote her mother. "Now I don't care what happens to me," she said.

Priest Also Shot

"That day the Gestapo went mad with rage," the letter continues. "At half past three Helene and 22 other prisoners, including two women, were taken from the prison to an open space five miles away near Pasteur Hospital and shot. The prisoners were tied one to another and shot through the back of the neck and left on the ground for the French police to find.

"With the poor child was shot a priest who blessed all prisoners, not caring what was their religion, and he asked to be shot last so that he could say prayers to the end for them. He was, we were told, magnificently brave, and I hope he gave courage and a little consolation. His only crime had been to bury three boys of the Maquis and say prayers over them."

Well, that is the story of Helene Vagliano whose years in the land were 20 and who died on the battlefield. That is the story save for one comment made by a member of the underground who knew her.

"We were a little nervous when she was taken—you never know what will happen when they start to use the electric needle. But we should not have

PATTON DRIVES INTO SAAR

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pincers movement in the south nearing completion with the prospect of trapping the hard-pressed German rear guards in the Vosges.

Front-line reports are that almost all of Strasbourg at the northern point of the pincers has now been captured by Gen. Jacques LeClerc's French 2nd Armored Division of the Ameri-

worried. She never gave the Germans a single name or address and no one was arrested."

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