

# Michel Hollard

## Hero of the WWII French Resistance "The Man Who Saved London"

Born July 10, 1897 in Épinay

Died July 16, 1993

Buried in the cemetery of Gornières (Hérault Region)

Son of Auguste Hollard, professor for nuclear physics at the *École de Physique et chimie de Paris* and at the Sorbonne University in Paris, and Pauline Monod

Cousin of Théodore Monod and of Nobel Prize Winner Jacques Monod

Married on April 21, 1922 to Yvonne Gounelle

Children: Francine, Florian and Vincent

Colonel Hollard forms the secret resistance group AGIR ("ACT") in 1941, which is attached to the British Secret Intelligence Service (S.I.S.).

The group consists of about a hundred agents. After having informed the Allies about the composition and the troop movements of the enemy forces in France from 1941 through 1943, he discovers the Germans are planning to build a great number of launch pads for their V1 bombs, Hitler's secret weapon. These military installations consist of ramps directed towards London and they are situated in the French Regions of the Nord, the Pas-de-Calais, the Somme, the Seine-Maritime and the Cotentin. These constructions are arranged in the shape of a crescent, following the shape of the South-Eastern coast of England. Michel Hollard communicates these developments to the British through their Embassy in Bern (Switzerland). Michel Hollard himself has clandestinely crossed the border between France and Switzerland over a hundred times.

Not only does he identify the locations of about a hundred of these ramps under construction in the coastal areas facing the British Isles, but he is also able to forward all the characteristics of the V1 weapons which are being stored by the enemy in a warehouse at the Auffay (Seine-Maritime) railway station. The rocket bomb V1 is a flying explosive body, resembling a small airplane weighing 2 tons, and is 8 meters long and 5.88 meters wide. It is powered by a reaction motor, holding 500 kg of explosives and can reach a distance of 260 km (at a speed of 600 km/hr). All this information is

immediately exploited by the R.A.F. and the integrated group "Lorraine", under the command of General Michel Fourquet, then *Squadron Leader*.

Towards the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944, the Allied Forces undertake bombardments of such precision – thanks to this transfer of information – that by the end of the hostilities one is able to estimate that the potential of the V1 has been reduced by 90%. For this reason, in numerous British publications about Michel Hollard's achievements, he is called "The Man Who Saved London".

In February 1944, Michel Hollard and two of his subordinates are arrested by the Gestapo in Paris. He is tortured, imprisoned in Fresnes and condemned to death. He is then deported to the concentration camp of Neuengamme. After the liberation of Buchenwald through the American Troops, the camp of Neuengamme is evacuated by the Germans and the prisoners are moved to the naval vessel "Cap Arcona" and its accompanying cargo ships (including the "Thielbeck", where Michel Hollard is held) setting sail through the Baltic Seas. Michel Hollard escapes the death trap organized by the SS for these ships thanks to the intervention of Count Bernadotte (vice president of the Swedish Red Cross), who – informed by the British secret services – sends a speedboat and negotiates the liberation of a handful of French speaking prisoners. Most of the captives (8,000) who are held in these floating prisons are killed in May 1945, three days after Hitler's suicide, through the bombs of the Allied Troops who think they are destroying vessels filled with enemy troops.

## Decorations

Commander of the Order of the French Legion of Honor

Rosette of the Résistance

Cross of War 1914 – 1918

Cross of War 1939 – 1945

Distinguished Service Order (DSO)