

Dentists, members of the French Resistance movement during the World War II

Sergiu Drafta¹, Mihai Burlibasa¹, Viorel Perieanu¹, Raluca Costea², Oana Eftene¹, Nicoleta Maru¹, Andreea Angela Stetiu³, Madalina Perieanu¹, Mirela Veronica Bucur¹, Irina Adriana Beuran¹, Madalina Malita¹, Magdalena Natalia Dina¹, Ioana-Cristina Neagoe⁴, Dana Cristina Bodnar¹, Radu Costea¹, Camelia Ionescu¹

¹ "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, Romania

² Private practice, Brasov, Romania

³ "Lucian Blaga" University, Sibiu, Romania

⁴ University of Pitesti, Pitesti, Romania

ABSTRACT

The Resistance was a reaffirmation of France's independence and individuality, as well as a struggle to regain freedom and, above all, national integrity. In fact, many historians appreciate that the French Resistance could have achieved more if it had been more effectively integrated into Allied plans and strategies. Thus, in this material we tried to present some short biographies of dentists who worked in the French Resistance against the German occupation troops, some of them even paying with their lives for the courage they showed.

Keywords: French resistance, dentists, German occupation troops

INTRODUCTION

They started living following dental studies, convinced that this is their purpose, they practiced this noble profession for longer or shorter periods of time but certainly the great events of the first half of the twentieth century (World War I, The Great Socialist Revolution of October 1917, the coming to power of the German National Socialist Party or the Nazi Party as it is known in history, a party led by Adolf Hitler and especially World War II) substantially influenced their destiny.

GENERAL DATA

These characters, whose activity we will describe in this bibliographic material, started their careers either as simple dentists without university studies or as dentists and then, during the Second World War, they fought in the Resistance Movements in Europe (the Shadow Armies, as they have been

called by historians), being considered heroes without uniforms, and who, during this huge conflagration led a continuous offensive against the German occupation, using all possible means. Some escaped, but most of them gave up their lives, some died in German concentration camps, others were killed by the sinister German secret police, whom we all know as the Gestapo. We will refer especially to dentists of French origin, the authors having access mainly to French bibliographic sources. We won't talk much about these heroes, we will probably describe their biography in more detail on another occasion in another material, but we consider that this is also a way to pay homage to all the dentists who gave their lives in during World War II.

1. Pierre Audigé (1908-1944) was a prominent French dentist from Toulouse. The French dentist attended the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, specializing in dentistry [1-7,21].

Corresponding author:
Viorel Perieanu
E-mail: viorelperieanu@yahoo.com

Article History:
Received: 18 January 2022
Accepted: 21 January 2022

Before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Dr. Pierre Audigé had the largest dental practice in the city of Nantes. All those who knew the French hero, and here we are talking especially about patients, claim that he was a brilliant dentist [1-7,21].

Unfortunately, with the outbreak of war, Dr. Pierre Audigé enlisted in the French Army and went to the front to fight against Germany led by Adolf Hitler. But with the surrender of France on June 22, 1940, the French physician was demobilized and returned to his hometown of Nantes, where he resumed practicing dentistry in his old office [1-7,21].

Pierre Audigé has never accepted the capitulation of France, for which reason he became a very active member of the local Resistance. Specifically, together with other dentists in the region, they formed a very well-organized group, specialized both in gathering information (it is known that through the patients in the dental offices, a very large flow of information was circulated both military and civilian information, extremely important information for the French Resistance and the Allies), as well as in helping and rescuing parachute Allied agents or Allied pilots shot down in French territory occupied by Nazi German troops [1-7,21].

However, his dental practice in Nantes was destroyed by British airstrikes in 1943. Meanwhile, the French doctor was reported to the German secret police, the Gestapo, and was forced to hide with his family in Caen. Here, Dr. Pierre Audigé opened another dental practice, continuing his work in dentistry. In parallel, he was very actively involved in the activities of the French Resistance, participating in several acts of sabotage against German troops [1-7,21].

On April 17, 1944, Dr. Pierre Audigé was arrested by the Gestapo, brutally tortured in German prisons, and on June 2, 1944, he was summarily executed by the same German secret police at the age of only 36 years [1-7,21].

In recognition of his merits, the French government posthumously awarded him the French Medal of Resistance (*Médaille de la Résistance*) on 30 January 1946 and the War Cross on 24 April 1950, while the local authorities in Nantes awarded the name it's a street in this extremely important French city [1-7, 21].

2. Georges Paulin (1902-1942) was a dentist who fought in the French Resistance and was executed by the Germans in 1942.

Unlike Dr. Pierre Audigé, Georges Paulin practiced dentistry for a short time, being best known for his achievements in the automotive industry of the time (he was one of the most acclaimed French automobile designers of his time) and then in aeronautics. He has collaborated with the most famous

car companies in France, Citroen, Renault, Peugeot, but he has also had very important collaborations with famous car companies in England and the USA [2,8-11,21].

In the following, we will present very briefly the biographical activity of the French dentist.

Georges Paulin was born in Paris, the capital of France, on May 20, 1902, into a modest family of French intellectuals. After the death of his mother during the First World War, more precisely in 1918 after the bombing of Paris by German troops, Georges Paulin was marked for life by this tragic event [2, 8-11, 21].

As a child, little Georges distinguished himself by his special drawing skills, as a result of which he initially pursued a career in dental technique, soon becoming a highly regarded dental technician. Georges Paulin continued his university studies in dentistry in Paris, becoming a highly regarded dentist (surgeon-dentist) [2,8-11,21].

Unfortunately, his real passion was in the car industry, so the French hero gave up dentistry and focused on car design, where the gains were much faster and much more consistent. But World War II and the surrender of France to Adolf Hitler's German troops on June 22, 1940, found George Paulin active in the Kellner-Béchereau aircraft factory [2,8-11,21].

After being recruited by the British Intelligence Services, George Paulin became active in the French Resistance against German occupation troops. The French hero was arrested by the German secret police - Gestapo - in March 1941 and executed by the German authorities a year later, on March 21, 1942 [2,8-11,21].

3. Danielle Casanova (1909-1943) was an eminent dentist, a member of the French Communist Party, who died in 1943 in the Auschwitz concentration camp, a camp on the territory of today's Poland [2,12-18,21].

Danielle Casanova was born on January 9, 1909 in Vincentella Perini, Ajaccio, on the same island where the great French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, Corsica, was born into a family of teachers with 5 children. In the first stage, Danielle Casanova attended school in the city of Ajaccio (Corsica Island) and then in the town of Luc in the Department of Var, France [2,12-18,21].

Next, Danielle Casanova did not want to follow the family tradition and work in education, but opted for a liberal profession, namely that of dentist (surgeon-dentist). As a result, she enrolled in November 1927 at the Faculty of Dentistry in Paris, a college on the rue Garancière at the time. Since entering college, Danielle Casanova has joined the Federal Students' Union, becoming the representative of dental students here very quickly [2,12-18,21].

But throughout her studies, in parallel with her university studies, Danielle Casanova also carried out an intense political activity so that, in 1928, she joined the French Communist Party, becoming an important representative of the French Communist Youth, being known as “Danielle” [2: 12-18, 21].

After graduating from the Faculty of Dentistry in 1933, Danielle married Laurent Casanova. Danielle Casanova continued her professional activity, having distinguished herself as a successful dentist, being highly appreciated by her patients [2,12-18,21].

With the outbreak of World War II, her husband, Laurent Casanova, was mobilized in the French Army, and with the surrender of France to German troops led by Adolf Hitler on June 22, 1940, he became a prisoner of war. Laurent Casanova managed to escape from German captivity in the late 1940s, becoming an important member of the French Resistance [2,12-18,21].

Dr. Danielle Casanova also became a member of the French Resistance, and it is known that it is well known that the French Communist Party was one of the first parties in France to oppose the German occupation forces in a direct gun fight. Dr. Danielle Casanova was arrested by the German Secret Police - Gestapo on February 15, 1942, and deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp a year later, on January 24, 1942. The French physician died on May 9, 1943, exactly 2 years before the official end of World War II, on May 9, 1945 [2,12-18,21].

4. René Maheu (1899-1980) was an important member of the French Resistance during World War II, an excellent dentist, who took part in the clandestine struggle waged by this important organization against the German occupation troops of Adolf Hitler [13,19-21].

In fact, the existing information about Dr. René Maheu during this time, 1930-1940, is not very generous, most of the details on the activity of the renowned dentist (surgeon-dentist) can be found since 1940. Dr. René Maheu graduated as a dentist in 1930 in the United States from the University of Philadelphia [13, 19-21]. After graduating as a dentist, Maheu enlisted in the U.S. Army, but later practiced dentistry in the United States and then in France, more precisely in the city of Tour, where he had opened a dental practice [13, 19-21]. However, it seems that after the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Dr. René Maheu was mobilized for a short time in the French Army, participating in the fighting against Adolf Hitler's German troops, who had attacked France [13,19-21].

But in July 1940, with the occupation of France by the German Army and its demobilization from the French Army, René Maheu resumed his work as a dentist in the city of Tour. He practiced dentistry

only for a short time, because in the same year 1940, the French doctor sold his dental practice and moved with his parents to the city of Rennes [13,19-21].

Very quickly, Dr. René Maheu reopened a new dental practice in a small French town, La Guerche-de-Bretagne, a small commune in the department of Ille-et-Vilaine, successfully practicing dentistry. [13,19-21].

In July 1943, Dr. René Maheu was recruited by the Intelligence Services of the US Army and so he began his risky anti-Hitler activity in the French Resistance, an activity that would take the renowned French doctor to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Dr. René Maheu's mission was to take over the secret agents parachuted by Allied troops into occupied France, to find conspiratorial homes for them, and later to secure their departure from the German-held territories [13,19-21].

On December 27, 1943, Dr. René Maheu was arrested by the German Secret Service, known as the Gestapo in the city of Rennes, he was severely tortured, and one month later, on December 27, 1944, he was deported to the Buchenwald concentration camp [13,19-21].

Miraculously, the renowned French doctor survived the terrible conditions in the German concentration camps. He was released by Allied troops on May 1, 1945, from the Buchenwald concentration camp, weighing only 45 kilograms at a height of 1.82 meters [13,19-21].

After the end of World War II, on May 9, 1945, Dr. René Maheu was unable to practice dentistry due to the severe health problems he had accumulated during his detention in German concentration camps. Instead, he opted for a career as a civil servant in the French Health Insurance House, a Paris branch. The French hero died in 1980 [13,19-21].

5. Bernard Holstein (1890-1943) was also a French dentist of the Jewish religion, who paid with his life for being a Jew [13,19-21].

Unlike the other 4 French doctors we discussed earlier, who were and are considered heroes of the French Resistance, Dr. Bernard Holstein was not even part of this clandestine army, but was deported with his family to the Auschwitz concentration camp, just because they were Jews. Such were the terrible laws imposed by Adolf Hitler on the entire population of the Jewish religion in the territories occupied by German troops, with over 6,000,000 Jews losing their lives in that sad period of time.

Dr. Bernard Holstein was born in 1890 in Kovno, then part of the Tsarist Empire, in present-day Lithuania [13,19-21].

In order to get rid of the very frequent pogroms carried out by the Cossack units of the Tsarist Army,

Dr. Bernstein's family immigrated to France, obtaining in a very short time the French citizenship [13,19-21].

During the First World War (1914-1918), Dr. Holstein led the Military Sanitary Service in the French city of Rouen, obtaining on this occasion several extremely important distinctions both military and civilian [13,19-21].

After the end of the First World War and until the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945), Dr. Holstein worked as a dentist (surgeon-dentist) also in France, more precisely in the city of Rouen, a city in which his family had established after emigrating from the Tsarist Empire [13,19-21].

But with the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Dr. Holstein was enlisted in the French Army Medical Service as a reserve officer [13,19-21].

After the occupation of France by German troops in July 1940, Dr. Bernard Holstein was demobilized. The end of the French campaign in June 1940 found the Holstein Family in the city of Avignon, a city at the time in the French area still unoccupied by German troops, an area under the administration of the Vichy Government, led by Marshal Philippe Petain [13, 19-21].

But in this area, the anti-Jewish laws imposed by the La Vichy government, a government considered to be a traitor by Modern France, did not allow Dr. Bernard Holstein to practice dentistry unless he mentioned on the doorstep that he was a Jew. Or, Dr. Bernard Holstein did not do this, and he was forbidden to practice dentistry [13,19-21].

As a result, the Holstein family managed, after many attempts, to return to German-occupied France (theoretically, the law did not allow Jewish doctors to return to the territories occupied by Adolf Hitler's German troops), namely in the city of Rouen, where they were surprised to find their home occupied by order of the German authorities. With great difficulty, the Holstein family regained their home, and Dr. Bernard Holstein resumed his practice of dentistry, being in that percentage of 2% Jewish dentists who had the right to practice dentistry in the occupied France [13,19-21].

In the next 2 years, the life of the Holstein Family was not easy at all, both the house and the dental office being searched many times by order of the

German authorities. Thus, on May 6, 1942, Dr. Bernard Holstein was arrested by order of the German authorities, but was released shortly after, due to the distinctions obtained during the First World War (1914-1918), while being allowed to further practice dentistry [13,19-21].

Unfortunately, on January 15, 1942, the Holstein family was arrested on the grounds that all members of the family were Jewish, and being a Jew in Adolf Hitler's German-occupied territories was equivalent to a death sentence by deportation to concentration camps [13,19-21]. After his arrest in February 1943, Dr. Bernard Holstein and his family were sentenced to deportation to a concentration camp, and on November 20, 1943, the entire family arrived at the already famous Auschwitz concentration camp located on the territory of today's Poland. In the same year, 1943, Dr. Bernard Holstein was killed in this concentration camp [13,19-21].

CONCLUSIONS

As has always been mentioned, the French Resistance fought not only for the liberation of the country, but also for the minds and hearts of the French. At the same time, it started from the idea that all members of the French Resistance were working underground.

This information is incorrect, not all members of the Resistance went underground. Many of them remained in their jobs, using them to discover important information, to protect the activities of the Resistance and to sabotage the Germans. It is important to remember that not only the Germans were the target of the Resistance's operations, but also the French, who were considered to be collaborators with the German occupation forces.

But whether they acted underground or acted in the light of their jobs, all the dentists we discussed in this article paid dearly for choosing to fight the German occupier, or for the simple fact that they were Jews: either they paid with their lives, or they survived with great difficulty the appalling conditions in the German concentration camps. In either case, we are dealing with real heroes who have sacrificed everything in the name of an ideal.

Conflict of interest: none declared

Financial support: none declared

REFERENCES

1. Riaud X. La baleine allaite ses petits. Available at: <http://www.histoire-medecine.fr/seconde-guerre-mondiale/audige.pdf>
2. Riaud X. Des dentistes morts pour la France. Available at: <http://www.histoire-medecine.fr/seconde-guerre-mondiale/des-dentistes-morts-pour-la-france.pdf>
3. MemorialGenWeb. AUDIGÉ Pierre Jean Jacques 1939-1945. Available at: <http://www.memorialgenweb.org/memorial3/html/fr/complementter.php?id=5886712>
4. Musée de la Résistance en ligne 1940-1945. Pierre Audigé. Available at: <http://museedelaresistanceenligne.org/media2685-Pierre-AudigA>

5. Caen et la SGM. Resistance Pierre AUDIGÉ (1908-1944). Available at: <http://sgmcaen.free.fr/resistance/audige-pierre.htm>
6. Riaud X. The dental service of the French Army in 1940. *Modern Approaches in Dentistry and Oral Health Care*. 2018;1(1):1-5.
7. Riaud X. Some Dentists in Nantes, France, Who Were Resistance Fighters. *J Dent Probl Solut*. 2017;4(1):001-002.
8. En.Wikipedia. Georges Paulin. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Paulin
9. Riaud X. Georges Paulin (1902-1942): A Legendary Dentist, a Resistance Hero. *J Dent Probl Solut*. 2017;4(1):003-005
10. Peugeot Vorkriegs-Register. Georges Paulin (1902-1942). Available at: <https://vorkriegs-peugeot.de/peugeot-geschichte/personen-die-wichtig-fuer-die-geschichte-von-peugeot-waren/georges-paulin-1902-1942/>
11. Simanaitis D. GEORGES PAULIN: STYLIST, SPY. Available at: <https://simanaitissays.com/2013/02/19/georges-paulin-stylist-spy/>
12. En.Wikipedia. Danielle Casanova. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danielle_Casanova
13. Riaud X. Trois destins tragiques de chirurgiens-dentistes: M. Bernard Holstein, Mme Danielle Casanova et le Dr René Maheu pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Available at: <http://www.histoire-medecine.fr/trois-destins-tragiques-de-chirurgiens-dentistes.php>
14. Encyclopedia.com. Casanova, Danielle (1909-1943). Available at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/casanova-danielle-1909-1943>
15. Heroines of the Resistance. Danielle Perini-Casanova (1909-1943). Available at: <http://resistanceheroines.blogspot.com/2015/09/danielle-perini-casanova-1909-1943.html>
16. LA MEMOIRE AN MARCHE. Danielle Casanova (1909-1943). Available at: <https://www.lamemoireenmarche.com/2017/03/danielle-casanova-1909-1943.html>
17. Téry S. Du soleil plein le coeur, la merveilleuse histoire de Danielle Casanova. Paris: Éditeurs Français reunis, 1952
18. Durand P. Danielle Casanova, l'indomptable. Paris: Ed. Messidor, 1990
19. Memoire de guerre. René MAHEU Déporté résistant (1899-1980). Available at: <http://memoiredeguerre.free.fr/biogr/maheu/maheu.htm>
20. Riaud X. History of the dental station of Buchenwald (1937-1945): witnesses, archives, statistics. Available at: <http://www.histoire-medecine.fr/seconde-guerre-mondiale-history-of-the-dental-station-of-buchenwald.php>
21. Burlibaşa M, Dumitru SG, Costea R et al. Medici stomatologi, renumerați militari în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial (1939-1945), In: Probleme în medicină și biologie, Vol. VII, p. 177-210, coordonatori: Burcea CC, Dumitru SG, Costea R et al. Bucharest: Ed. Ars Docendi, 2017.