

VILLEFRANCHE le 8 OCTOBRE 1985

TRANSLATION  
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JOSEPH CALDERONI  
Maire de Villefranche/Mer

to

Madame ROSY ASTOR  
\*PALAIS MASSENA\*  
23, Boulevard des Moulins  
MONTE CARLO (Pté.de Monace)

Dear Madame,

By the present I am in possession of your letter of 18.9.85; concerning Madame EDITH DUHAMEL, heroine of the resistance in which you remind the memory also relating the hommage which every year Mr. JERRY AHERON american citizen deposits a bunch of flowers in front of the badge of the street which bears the name of Mme. DUHAMEL .

I must let you know that very wonderful gesture contributes an honour to your FRIEND and therefore I would be very happy to receive him during his next sojourn in order to evocate with him the life of Mme. Duhamel and on this occasion to remit to him the " " MEDAL of the CITY VILLEFRANCHE sur MER " " "

As to the biography of Mme. DUHAMEL I can only indicate you the acts of her life which have lead the Municipal COUNSEL to decide the 10 MAY 1967 to give her name to a street in VILLEFRANCHE : she was member of a net of information to the B.C.R.A. in LONDON member of a net to evacuate the allied aviators(american) who fell in the occupied territory; she was emprisoned by the Germans (gestapo) in 1943 and deported to Germany . She has received the BRITISH CROSS of WAR, the FRENCH CROSS OF WAR and she was promoted KNIGHT of the LEGION of HONOUR for military services and exceptional services given during the war. Retired in Villefranche sur Mer she was occupied actively of the social situation of the members of the ancient combatants deported, resistant, prisoners of war interned also their families. Her action by this was appreciated unanimously by all these societies who named her \*GODMOTHER\* Mme. DUHAMEL died on JULY 12 1966.

I am in contact with y the President of the local section of the French Union of Combatants and victims of war for more ample information which I shall communicate you if occasion presents .

Please receive dear Madame my sincerest regards

The Mayor  
J. CALDERONI





## WW II French Hero

Recently I had a chance to talk with Jerry Aheron, a fellow resident of Seaview Village. The conversation turned to Veterans Day, November 11<sup>th</sup>. He brought to my attention his unique story of Madame Edith Duhamel.

Madame Duhamel was a friend of Mr. Aheons whom he met when he was stationed in VilleFrance while serving in the U. S. Navy. She was a hero to many Allied soldiers. She helped to evacuate Allied aviators (many American) who were shot down in occupied territory of France.

She was later imprisoned by the Germans for her actions and aid to the Allied forces and then deported. Because of her heroism, she became the recipient of the British Cross of War, the French Cross of War and was promoted Knight of the Legion of Honor for Military Services, the highest award awarded to any individual. After the war she continued to work for the resistance, prisoners of war as well as their families. Her actions were appreciated unanimously by all, as she was named Godmother by these societies. After the war she returned to VilleFrance where she sold flowers. Madame Duhamel died on July 12, 1966.

A street in VilleFrance was named in Madame Duhamel's honor. Mr. Aheron, revisited VilleFrance and especially the street named in her honor. On his first visit he noted there were no flowers in the flower urn at her memorial. He placed flowers in the urn then and continued to do so for many years. Because of this kind gesture of honor, he was given an audience with the Mayor of the City VilleFrance and awarded a special medal of appreciation. (picture attached). Which he accepted in 1988. This audience with the Mayor was a result of the endeavor of Madame Rosy Astor to bring to the attention of the Mayor and citizens of Monte Carlo Mr Aheron's loyalty to a true World War II hero. Enclosed is a copy of the letter received from the Mayor that was sent to Madame Astor.

A gigantic figure of a woman, knotted with muscle, Bloody Mary is said to have the strength of a man. Hands the size of hams lend living proof to the fears which she is said to have accomplished. Visitors to Ville gaze upon her with awe when they pass her on the tree-lined streets. Heads turn and eyes look upon her with an admiration reserved only for those who stand above the others.

Jovial Queenie, the owner of Queen's Bar, will tell you that the village folk are afraid of Mary: and that Bloody Mary is said to be quite not right in the head. Queenie speaks hushed tones of the pugnacious figure. But the younger people speak of her more freely. They look upon her with a sort of hero worship. Taunting her, they delight in the bearish hand shake and the booming voice of Bloody Mary.

The legend holds that Bloody Mary was a plain French housewife before the coming of the hated Nazis. Almost unknown amongst the villagers she went about her household tasks while her husband sailed with the fishing fleet from Ville.

As the Germans penetrated deeper and deeper into her beloved France, the country finally capitulated and Mary's husband and two sons joined up with the underground. Fighting furiously, this group of patriots wreaked havoc upon the invading forces. They struck everywhere, blowing up troop trains, supplies and ammunition depots. Usually the work coincided with an Allied air raid which enable them to escape the wrath of the vengeful invaders.

But odds were against this gallant band of French men and women. Eventually the Nazi hordes managed to capture most of them, among them Mary's husband and two sons. Reports seem to indicate that the methods of disposal of these members of Mary's family were none too delicate.

Bloody Mary was stunned at the news. From that day she underwent a change. Throwing aside her cloak of housewife, Mary joined the few remaining members of the underground and set out to avenge the deaths of her loved ones. From that moment on her family name forgotten and she became known only as "Bloody Mary."

Reports vary as to the number of Germans she is reported to have killed with her bare hands. But, after gazing upon her impressive figure, one has good reason to suspect that the highest figure is true. Always alone, and working always at night, Bloody Mary became a thorn in the enemy's flesh.

The Germans never knew where she would strike next. Countless graves mark her own personal resistance to the hated Boche. One time she would strike in the darkness of the sleeping waterfront with its clusters of fishing boats. The next time she would hurl herself upon a sentry patrolling a dark and lonely road. Out of the shadows on a flight of steps leading to the upper part of town she would grasp an enemy about the neck with her powerful hands and drag him back into the endless eternity of a pitch black alley.

Surviving solely through her own courage and cunning, Bloody Mary became a ghost-like figure. Never seen during the daytime and only, when it was too late, by the enemy at night. Bloody Mary carried the war to the invaders. Day by day, the legend of Bloody Mary grew. Her feats became increasingly heroic and unbelievable.

Castle often referred to as the "artificial home port" of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, Villabonche, a fishing village between Nice and Monte Carlo, perhaps the gay, smiling France. The French which the invading Nazis were unable to conquer. Subsequently, the village was the headquarters of the Allied forces. Some of the villagers were killed but they have learned to accept the past and they still maintain the pleasant thoughts of the future.

Flung on all sides of the shoreline, a horizontal strip of land, the people of the fishing village greet the weary sailor as he puts his feet on the beach. The people greet him on a scale. He knows that the people of Villabonche are not the same as the people of the other fishing villages. They haven't much to offer in the way of goods, but what they offer gladly. Here the sailor can leave his troubles at the door and relax with the friendly people of the quiet, old fishing village by the sea.

There it is also that the sailor-board sailor has one of his pet fancies shattered. He soon learns that most of the French women are predominantly blonde, either by nature or by choice. The popular misconception seems to be that the French are a dark and swarthy folk. While this may hold true in the more northern sections of the country, the American soon learns that it is not true in southern France. He soon finds that young blonde French girls, with laughing blue eyes, make mockery of the fallacy.

Artists, too, find Villabonche a paradise. French houses set snugly on the sloping foothills of the Alps and form a classic pattern for the painter. The narrow, winding streets of the town are jostled off at different levels, with long flights of ancient stone steps leading up to Jenny's Bar, the Victoria Hotel, Cassino and Monte Carlo, all part of the Villabonche scene.

It is here, in the midst of tradition, that you first become aware of the "Legend of Bloody Mary." Bloody Mary, forgotten by the older generation who prefer to forget the war and think of more pleasant things. Bloody Mary, an almost legendary figure, spoken of in hushed whispers by the younger folk of the village.

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With the coming of peace, Mary's work was done. Once more she looked into the eyes of the young men. But the young men were not the same as the young men of the village of Villabonche.

The American sailor Montano aware of Bloody Mary the moment he first sets his foot on the beach. Her huge figure can be seen daily greeting the weary sailor as they approach the quay at the fishing landing. Her left hand is usually holding a basket of flowers, while the right is extended in a friendly wave. As often as not, the sailor finds himself looking at the face of the woman of Bloody Mary's potential gift.

Mary delights in displaying her powers to the visiting Americans. Should a man not buy a bunch of her flowers, a reassuring wave on the back may send him speaking. But the wave has spread throughout the fleet and the boys almost always buy a bunch of flowers in preference to the wave on the back.

Bloody Mary, the legend of Villabonche-sur-mer. The young folk say she has no real and as you look at the compact figure with the wire-straight, brown hair, you are more convinced than ever, that it is true.