**Violette Szabo**

Violette Szabo was a British secret agent in World War II and is argued by some as being one of the bravest women in history. Her life was immortalised in the film ‘Carve Her Name with Pride’ in 1958.

Violette was born Violette Reine Elizabeth Bushell on 26th June, 1921 in Paris, the daughter of a French mother and an English father. The earliest part of her childhood was spent with her aunt in Picardy, France as her parents moved to London during The Depression. Finally, when Violette was eleven years old, the family were reunited in South London where they settled. Growing up with four brothers, Violette enjoyed playing a wide range of sports with them and her father taught her to fire a gun when she was young. School days were spent in Brixton and she was very popular. She was described as a very headstrong young lady who, although much loved by her family, would not shy away from an argument.

At the outbreak of WW2, Violette joined the Land Army in 1940, picking strawberries. After a short time, she then began working in an armaments factory in London. One day, her mother asked Violette to bring home a French soldier to celebrate Bastille Day (a popular French holiday). This was how Violette met her future husband, Etienne. The couple instantly fell in love and married after a short time of knowing each other when Violette was 19 years old. Whilst Etienne returned to ‘the front’, Violette gave birth to their baby girl, Tania. Unfortunately, three months after his daughter’s birth, Etienne died at the Second Battle at El Alamein in October 1942 after bravely trying to protect his men.

Devastated by her husband’s death yet inspired by his sacrifice, Violette soon joined the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in February 1944 in order to become a field operative. She was extremely useful to the SOE due to being bilingual. Eventually, Violette learned how to parachute out of a plane, passing the second time around after spraining her ankle badly during her first attempt. She was well respected in the SOE because she had a zest for life and never gave up.

Violette was sent on two main missions during the war. The first one was as a courier to a member of the French Resistance. It was to be a dangerous mission, but that did not faze her. She travelled to Rouen alone under a false identity in order to investigate the Gestapo and soon safely returned to England with the information she needed. Her second mission, however, was to prove fatal. Violette bravely volunteered to parachute into Limoges, France the day after D-Day where she was to help build up a new line of resistance. Unfortunately, whilst she was travelling to her destination, she fell on her bad ankle and was captured by the Second SS Panzer Division after bravely fighting with her Sten gun so her partner could escape. She was subsequently taken for brutal interrogation and then transferred to a concentration camp in Germany where she was eventually shot and killed in February 1945 at the age of 23. She never revealed the details of her missions.

Highly decorated for her bravery and contribution to the war effort, this incredible woman was posthumously awarded the George Cross by Britain and the Croix de Guerre by France. A blue plaque marks her former family home in South London.