

Ginette Mars *alias* Claude Vaillant (1925 – 2013)

Ginette Mars was born and raised in Paris before her family moved to the town of Sainte-Néomaye (in the region Deux-Sèvres where the school of our former partners is located) in 1938.



Both her father, a police officer, and her mother were active in the resistance movement. At the young age of only 17 and a half, Ginette returned to Paris to join a group of resistance fighters and partisans called “Michel”. In order to hide her real identity she called herself Claude Vaillant from then on.

Ginette Mars / Claude Vaillant was a very courageous young woman, completing a large number of very dangerous missions:

- She wrote, printed and distributed resistance leaflets, and organized women’s demonstrations against supply shortages.
- After the Germans had introduced forced labour for all French men, she organized fake ID cards and papers and helped hiding a number of men.
- She also organized fake identities for the families of people who had been executed or deported to concentration camps – a very dangerous mission because these families were observed by the Nazis.
- As a member of the organization “L’Assistance Française” she kept track of the executions, deportations, tortures and other atrocities committed by the Nazis and the collaborating French.

In June 1944, while her father continued resistance in Paris (making use of his position as police officer), she and her mother returned to their house in Sainte-Néomaye. Until September she worked with the “Francs-Tireurs et Partisans” (irregular army and partisan organization that became a part of the regular army after WW II) as a liaison officer and was responsible for guiding allied parachutists to hiding places. And she took part in sabotage missions of blowing up railway lines and German trucks to cut supply lines.

After the region had been liberated by the allies in early September 1944, Claude Vaillant / Ginette Mars continued her valuable work in the French army as a secretary at the French army headquarters but returned to her civil life in June 1945.

Story on Ginette Mars’ life

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Preparing for a women’s demonstration against the Nazis

Ginette and a few other women in the resistance meet in a secret place in Paris to discuss what they could do to express their anger because the Germans have taken away basic human rights from the French. The women are courageous but at the same time hesitant because of their kids.

Woman 1: “So, what can we do to at least express our views and get as many people as possible to support us? Blowing up railway lines and throwing bombs is too dangerous for me. I have to think of my children.”

Woman 2: “I agree. On the other hand, I don’t think that the Germans will shoot at women and children.”

Ginette: “I wouldn’t be too sure about that. The Germans are brutal and they do everything to break us. But there must be something that we can do without risking everything. We have to show that the french people want freedom and peace... What if we organize a demonstration against them with as many women and children that we can get together?”

Woman 3: “Great idea! The more we are the more they will hesitate to shoot at us. The only thing they can do and certainly will do is dissolve the demonstration. But then it’s too late already. Because once we are all on the street we are already seen and heard.

Woman 1: “Yes, and we will probably gain a number of new members to help in the resistance.”

Ginette: “Okay. But in order to make a demonstration we need to make it known to lots and lots of people. Any ideas how we can do that?”

Woman 2: “Ginette, just think of your connections and possibilities of secretly printing things. Can’t you get into contact with your friend – that photographer guy ... what was his name?”

Ginette: “Ah, you mean Robert! Yes, that’s it! We will make a couple of posters and ask Robert to print them. And then we go out and place them everywhere in the streets so everybody can see them and then join in with the demonstration.”

Woman 3: “If we do it during the nights, the risk of being caught by the Nazis is relatively low, I guess. And we could take our children, especially the small ones. Put the posters in the prams to hide them.”

Ginette: “Alright. So let’s think about what the posters should look like... draw them and then I’ll take them to Robert tomorrow.”

After a while the women have drawn a couple of drafts. The next day, Ginette takes them to her companion Robert who makes professionally printed small sized posters. The women gather the following week to distribute the little posters and then stick them to walls, light poles and other places throughout Paris to make their demonstration known.

