![A person posing for the camera

Description automatically generated]()Nancy Wake – la souris blanche

Date of birth: 1912

Date of death: 2011 (98 years old) in UK

Family: Born in New Zealand and moved to Australia when 2yr

last of 6 children

Father: abandons the family when she was only 2 years old

Mother: struggles and the children have a tough childhood

Actions: Nancy Wake was the Allies’ most decorated servicewoman of WWII, and the Gestapo’s most-wanted person. They code-named her ‘The White Mouse’ because of her ability to elude capture. When war broke out she was a young woman married to a wealthy Frenchman living a life of luxury in cosmopolitan Marseilles. She became a saboteur, organiser and Resistance fighter who led an army of 7,000 Maquis troops in guerrilla warfare to sabotage the Nazis.

Nancy runs away from home when she is 16 to see the world, she trains as a nurse and then decides to go to London when she is 20. Two years later she comes to Paris. She starts working as a freelance journalist. In 1930s Europe she witnessed the rise of Hitler, Nazism and anti-Semitism. In 1940 she joined the embryonic Resistance movement as a courier, smuggling messages and food to underground groups in Southern France. She bought an ambulance and used it to help refugees fleeing the German advance. Being the beautiful wife of a wealthy businessman, she had an ability to travel that few others could contemplate. She obtained false papers that allowed her to stay and work in the Vichy zone in occupied France, and helped a thousand or more escaped prisoners of war and downed Allied fliers out of France through to Spain.

Her missions with the Resistance meant her life was in constant danger. She became a suspect and was watched. She was so good at evading the Gestapo they nicknamed her the “White Mouse”. By 1943, Wake was No.1 on the Gestapo’s most wanted. It was too risky for Wake to stay in France and the Resistance decided she should go back to Britain.

She said goodbye to husband and never saw him again. the Germans had captured him, tortured and executed him, because he refused to give them any information about the whereabouts of his wife.

She made six attempts to get out of France by crossing the Pyrenees into Spain. Finally made it to London. She continued to play a key role as a resistant fighter and spy. After the war her achievements were heralded by medals and awards: the George Medal from Britain for her leadership and bravery under fire, the Resistance Medal, Officer of the Legion d’Honneur and Croix de Guerre with two bronze palms and a silver star from France, and the Medal of Freedom from America.

Why I chose her: Her story is one of daring, courage and optimism in the face of impossible odds. I chose her because she is a very courageous, brave and active woman who has created, with her husband, their own network of resistance, saving numerous parachutists lives, but also cycling 300 kilometres in only three days non stop. She also inspires me because she managed to control and earn respect from the whole of the Maquisards. When she was younger, she grew up to be an exceptional person despite the fact that her father abandoned the whole family and her mother showed her no love as she bitter about her husband leaving. Also the fact that she managed to live and have fun with only a bit of money. She was prepared to risk her life to fight for what she believed in.