

## Some dentists in Nantes, France, who were Resistance fighters

by  
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*Intrigued by a memorial stone...*

One day, while I was strolling along the streets of Nantes with my wife and daughter, I became intrigued by a memorial stone located on a staircase of 9, rue Boileau. A few days later, I came back with a pen to write down the text engraved on it.

*“Here was Pierre Audigé’s dental office, a member of the Resistance movement, leader of the “Mouvement Libération-Nord” (a movement created to defend the North of France against the Nazi occupation) of Nantes and the “Basse Loire” region, then leader of the Cohors-Asturies network. Appointed in 1942 by Jean Cavallès, founder of these organizations, he was arrested, tortured by the Gestapo and died in the Nazi slammers in June 1944. He died for France.”*

*Who was Pierre Audigé?*

Pierre Audigé was originally from Toulouse. Yet, he decided to study at the University of Medicine in Paris. Then, he settled in Nantes where he opened the biggest dental office before the war. All those who knew him acknowledged that he was a brilliant dentist.

*The outbreak of the war...*

Pierre rejected the French capitulation under the Nazi forces and regime. When he came back from the front, he joined the Resistance movement (Audigé, 1990). *“The whale suckles its offspring”* was the secret phrase that they were using to acknowledge each other.

*Medical offices and the Resistance movement*

During the war, dental or medical offices were propitious locations to exchange information, due to the heavy traffic. Therefore, they were strategic locations where a continuous flow of information was circulating. Doctors and dentists actively participated in different networks of the French Resistance. Many among them were captured and just a few came back (Riaud, 2007).

*Pierre Audigé’s mission*

His mission was to locate parachuting fields (he also got involved in those parachuting missions), to warehouse and hide what was sent, to find deserted houses to shelter the last parachuted soldiers, to recruit young men who were highly likely to fight, to make food supplies for the soldiers and to gather information on the location and the strength of the enemy (Maheu, 1999 and 2003). Then, he also organized and directed networks by recruiting new members and isolating the gathering of information (Riaud, 2007).

*The flight*

He remained dentist in Nantes until the end of 1943. He witnessed the destruction of his dental office after the bombings of September. In Paris, the Gestapo searched the premises of a member of the Cohors-Asturies Network. The collected information allowed the Gestapo to return to Nantes, to Pierre Audigé's dental office. Fearing the danger, Audigé and his family fled in time in the Calvados area where the whole family lived for 9 months in Caen. There, Audigé practiced again as a dentist, reconstituted a network and had a power station blown up.

### *Arrest*

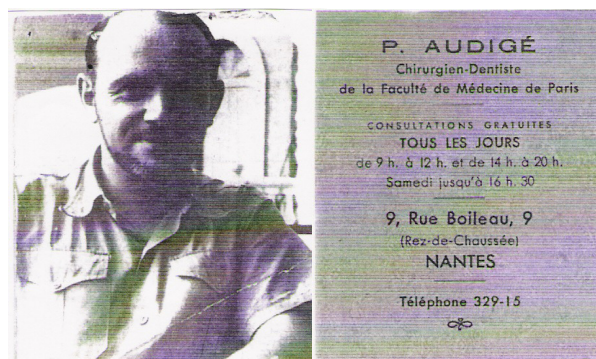
Pierre Audigé was denounced and arrested on April 17, 1944. He was tortured during the questioning. On June 2, 1944, he was executed on the road leading to the prison of Fresnes. He was 36. His body has never been found. He was possibly laid to rest in a communal grave.

### *After the war*

Dr Pierre Audigé received the Medal of Resistance on January 30, 1946 and the "Croix de Guerre" (the Cross of War) on April 24, 1950. Previously, he was posthumously appointed Captain by the army.

### *The other dentists of the Cohors-Asturies Network*

François Van Pée was a dentist who did not practice. He supplied his colleagues with equipment and supplies to help them practice. He was also a member of the Cohors-Asturies network in Nantes. On April 21, 1944, the Gestapo arrested Van Pée with his wife Léa, his brother René (who was also dentist) and the wife of the latter. He remained three months in the Prison of Nantes and was sent with his brother to Mauthausen where he acted as a guinea-pig for Nazi experiments at Schloss Hartheim. He and his brother died from these experiments. His wife Léa died in Ravensbrück. Pierre Palluel was a young dental mechanics of Nantes who also belonged to the same Resistance network. He was arrested in March 1944 and sent to a concentration camp in June. He succeeded in coming back but in an appalling state. He died while suffering greatly in 1946.



Dr Pierre Audigé (1908-1944) and the plate of his dental office in Nantes  
(© Famille Audigé, 2005).



François and Léa Van Pée (©Van Pée Family, 1996).

Pierre Palluel (©Audigé Family, 2005).

### *Conclusion*

Originally from Nantes, I wanted to pay tribute to a few unknown heroes of the French Resistance and who are too often forgotten. The dentist profession can be proud of those men and women who in many ways and times honored it. This article would not have been possible without the help of the Audigé family who now lives next to Caen and of the Van Pée family who had two laboratories of dental supply in Nantes and managed by René and François's children.

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