



MANOCH “NANOCHÉ” GORGAN

(Louvain, Belgium, March 08, 1895 – Gardelegen, Germany, April 13, 1945)



Identity photo of Manoch Gorgan
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Manoch Gorgan (nicknamed “Nanoche” by relatives), was born on March 8, 1895, in Louvain (Belgium), into a Roma family of boilermakers and tinsmiths¹. His parents, Pierre Gorgan and Marie Elle, travelled between France and Belgium. At the age of 18, he married Marra Demestre, daughter of French Roma parents, and began to travel almost exclusively in France, where the authorities categorised him and his family as “nomads”. Between 1914 and 1933, Gorgan and his wife had eleven children.

The decree of April 6, 1940, which prohibited the movement of so called nomads on French territory, profoundly **changed Gorgan’s life**. Where he used to change location with his caravan every 48 hours, **Gorgan was placed under house arrest** in Pierrefort in the Cantal region. He was no longer allowed to leave his town of residence, neither to get supplies nor to work.

At the end of 1943, Gorgan and his family were assigned to a new town, Maurs, also in Cantal. The fairground square was designated as the new location for his family’s caravans. Quickly, as he had done in his previous compulsory residence (Pierrefort, Cantal), Gorgan warned

many people interned in the Saliers internment camp, near Arles, of his change of residence and continued to send parcels to his relatives there. Several **internees from the Saliers camp escaped** in a bid to reach Gorgan. They knew that **Gorgan had the means to hide them, and provide them with food**, helping them to survive. Gorgan, therefore, organised one of the largest Roma rescue networks in France.

On May 12, 1944, at 6 a.m., SS soldiers from the “Das Reich” division surrounded the town of Maurs, cut off telephone communications and disarmed the gendarmes. This was a reprisal against the local *maquisards* (members of the French resistance movement). The Germans ordered all men between the ages of 14 and 60 to go to the town square. They also arrested eight Jewish men, a resistance fighter by the name of Marius Aymar and four other so-called nomadic men, including Gorgan, his son and two men who had taken refuge in his trailer. After their arrest by the SS, the thirteen men were beaten and forced to lie face down on the ground, their hands behind their heads. Women from the village were also arrested, including the daughters and daughters-in-law of Gorgan.

Denise Dedenis, who was there, remembered having come across three young girls who had been arrested by soldiers, begging her “to go and reassure their parents who were in caravans in the Champ de Foire

¹ This biographical notice is based on historical research carried out by Lise Foisneau and Valentin Merlin (French Departmental Archives, French Defence Archives, International Tracing Service).

Square.”² She hastened to go and warn the inhabitants of the caravans: “I knocked on the windows of all the caravans, but nobody answered me [...] Then I started shouting that the Germans had taken their three daughters, but that they would release them at noon. I saw curtains moving, the message had got through.”³ The women were released, but not the men.

Gorgan, his son and the two other “nomads” were transferred to Montauban, then to Compiègne, from where they were deported to Nazi camps on June 4, 1944. Gorgan was sent to the Neuengamme concentration camp where he was assigned to the Hanover-Stöcken Commando. He was murdered during the Gardelegen massacre on April 13, 1945, when more than 1,000 prisoners were burned alive in a barn two days before the arrival of the US Army.

To this day, **Gorgan does not appear on the commemorative plaque** that was placed in Maurs in 1994 in honour of the “Dead for France” on May 12, 1944.

Sources and further information:

1. Lise Foisneau and Valentin Merlin, “French Nomads’ Resistance. 1939–1946”, in Angela Kóczé and Anna Lujza Szász (éd.), *Roma Resistance during the Holocaust and in its Aftermath. Collection of Working Papers*, Budapest, Tom Lantos Institute, 2018, p. 57–101.
2. Lise Foisneau, *Ethnographie des kumpanji de Provence. Rencontres, séparations et retrouvailles chez les Roms « Hongrois »*, Doctoral thesis defended on December 19, 2018, Aix-Marseille University, under the supervision of Dionigi Albera.

This biography has been written by Lise Foisneau

2 Testimony of Denise Dedenis, *De mémoire de maursois. 12 mai 1944, la rafle, afin que le souvenir demeure*, Brochure distributed by the Maurs town council in 2004.

3 Ibid