NANCY WAKE
(1912-2011)

Nancy Wake’s story starts in 1912 in Wellington, New Zealand, far away from the war-torn Europe where she made her mark. Nancy and her family moved to Sydney, Australia, in 1914.

As a teenager Nancy longed to see the world. So when she received £2000 from a relative, she hopped on a boat and moved to London and then Paris, where she worked as a journalist. In 1935 during an assignment in Vienna, Nancy witnessed the impact of the Nazi regime first hand. The horrifying scenes made Nancy determined to fight the Nazis and led to her courageous role in the French Resistance.

Nancy was a force to be reckoned with; she helped to spirit over a thousand escaped prisoners of war out of France and through to neutral Spain. Her valiant contribution did not go unnoticed by the Nazis – she soon became number one on the Gestapo’s most wanted list. They named her the ‘White Mouse’ due to her ability to elude capture.

With a price on her head, Nancy escoped to London, where she trained as a spy. When she completed her training, she parachuted back into France. Her job was to supply the Resistance with weapons and establish covert communication with bases in England. On one occasion she cycled 500 kilometres in 71 hours to re-establish a coded wireless communication network. Her focus was rock-steady to the end of her epic journey, when she wept in pain and relief.

Nancy, you saved countless lives and fought against oppression and persecution with courage and strength in the face of impossible odds.

We will never forget your bravery.

ILLUSTRATION BY SYLVIA MORRIS