

Lt Roland Eugene Jean Alexandre 306148
AKA - Roland Esnault
Code Name - Astra

Roland was born on 30 June 1921 in Jouy-en-Josas, Ile-de-France, France, the son of M and Mme Marie Alexandre.

Educated in England, Roland was employed as a fitter by General Aircraft Ltd, Feltham, Middlesex, before he was recruited by F (France) Section, Special Operations Executive (SOE), in December 1943.

Recruited due to his linguistic skills and knowledge of France, in February 1944 Roland was appointed to establish and lead a new French Resistance group - the "Surveyor" circuit - in the Brittany region, and was given a list of targets to sabotage which included locomotive sheds, railways and roads. Roland and his fellow agents were to be dropped to a reception committee from the "Phono" circuit.

At 20:58 on 8 February 1944, despite increasing certainty that the "Phono" circuit had been exposed, Roland and the team of three other Agents departed RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire in 138 Sqn Halifax II L9613 (NF-V).



Successfully dropped at a site near Sully sur Loire, the Gestapo were waiting. The operation and reception on the drop zone had been arranged by the Germans as part of their "*Funkspiel*", using the captured radio set and codes of Noor Inayat-Khan.

All four Agents were arrested immediately and taken to Gestapo HQ at 84 Avenue Foch, Paris for interrogation. After interrogation, Roland was imprisoned at 3 bis place des Etats-Unis until he was transferred to Rawitsch Prison, Poland, in June 1944.

In the period 24 June to 4 September 1944, after orders were received from Berlin for the execution of the SOE agents at Rawitsch, they were taken by SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Wilhelm Scharpwinkel, head of the Breslau Gestapo, from the prison to the KZ Gross-Rosen concentration camp, 100 km SW in German Silesia. Roland was executed and his body cremated.

Also killed : Captain Francois Adolphe Deniset, Royal Canadian Artillery; Capt Jacques Paul Henri Ledoux, Highland Light Infantry; Lt Robert Bennett Byerly, Essex Scottish Regiment, Royal Canadian Infantry Corps

Roland has no known grave and is commemorated at the Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey

Roland is commemorated on Wall Panel (NYE)

Photo Source: www.tracesofwar.com