

# Memory of Ukrainians in Stone at Peynier, France

*By Ihor L. Kurok*

Third Annual Commemorative Ceremonies at the Ukrainian Memorial Rock of Peynier, France, November 2, 2009.

Four to five years ago, the young Ukrainian-French born generation learned that there was a memorial rock in the South-of-France (in the Town of Peynier) where the Ukrainian Legionnaires who fought the Nazis along with the French Underground Movement (*Forces Francaises de l'Interieur*). Under the guidance of Professor Jacques Chevtchenko, President of the French Ukrainian Union (French People of Ukrainian Origin), and Mrs. Annick – Denat – Bilobran, the initiator and orchestrator of an annual commemorative event held at the rock, today's Ukrainian French men and women found out about the rock through the translation of the Ukrainian book by Myroslav Nebeliuk – “Under the Foreign Flags” printed in 1951 by *Premiere Imprimerie Ukrainienne en France* (PIUF), *Ukrains'ke Slovo* or *La Parole Ukrainienne (en France)*. Carved into the memorial rock is a *tryzub* or trident with the inscriptions in Ukrainian on the left and in French on the right “Ukrainian Foreign Legion – In Memory of 900 Ukrainians – July 16, 1940”.

My father John Kurok was the sole and unique carver of the project on this rock, called “Rocher de la Garenne a Peynier”. He was a well-known artist-sculptor and inventor who in fact was one of the first subscribers of *The New Pathway* when it was printed in Winnipeg years ago. Modest and discrete, my father told M. Nebeliuk not to mention (in his book) him by name as the sole carver but that the carving was done by the Ukrainian Legionnaires.

The story of the Legionnaires is full of patriotism, Ukrainians whom the French wanted to enrol by force under the Polish Flag. Some of them rebelled and thanks to people like my father – J. Kurok, D. Yavorsky, U. Izio, A. Babij and other patriots – the three or four thousand Ukrainian Legionnaires were allowed to form their own Ukrainian National resistance units against the Nazis occupying France.

The Mayor of Peynier sent me an invitation in 2008 to attend the commemorative ceremony at the memorial rock but I could not make it then. This year, I was present at the memorial service and it was a touching experience. Present at the ceremony was the Consul General of Ukraine in Marseille, Mayor and Assistant Mayor of Peynier and other important figures from the government and from the French

Foreign Legion, including a Legionnaire with trumpet. The French and Ukrainian anthems were sung by the 50 plus participants. There are few of us left - the sons or daughters of those Ukrainian Legionnaires. I had the honour to stand beside this famous rock holding the Ukrainian Flag, being born in France and the son of J. Kurok. After the ceremony, all the Ukrainians who came from all over France including me from Canada were invited to the French Foreign Legion's beautiful big hall, where wines and excellent meals were served to the 150-200 or so people attending. Ukrainians and French Legionnaires in mixed seating and mingling together, sang Ukrainian songs as well as French Foreign Legion tunes.

The Ukrainians have acquired a good name and *renommee* among this French community, the Mayor of Peynier and the French Foreign Legion in particular.

Now, this commemorative ceremony at the Rock of Peynier will be held every November 2<sup>nd</sup> for years to come. My son Lev-Anatoly who was born in Canada, having seen the photos of the memorial service at the Rock of Peynier, was moved to tears, and would also like to be present at next year's ceremony as the grandson of J. Kurok.