

# French Defender Of Dien Bien Phu Faces Crucial Time In Colorful Career

SAIGON (AP)—A gallant French army officer sits in a rain-soaked bunker on the plain of Dien Bien Phu, seeking the key to victory in the darkest hour of his career.

Brig. Gen. Count Christian Marie Ferdinand de la Croix de Castries, commander of the little pot-shaped valley position, is surrounded by tens of thousands of Communist Vietnamese troops. They are trying to strangle his isolated fortress. The grip has been tightening for days.

Against them stand about 14,000 French, North African, Foreign Legion and Vietnamese troops, crowded into a circle less than a mile in diameter.

In the hands of the six-foot De Castries, a champion horseman who wears a red African cavalry cap instead of a steel helmet, is the decision whether they—and he—will leave the position alive.

"He was meant to be a medieval knight, a cavalier in mail and armor," said one of his intimates recently. "Falling that, he did the next best thing—he became a cavalryman."

Jacqueline, his tall blonde second wife, lives in Hanoi—187 miles from the battle—and talks to him by radio-telephone every day at noon. It was she who told reporters that her husband was threatening to resign if he weren't promoted immediately from year-old colonelcy in the midst of the battle.

The French government denied he had made any such threat, and attributed her statement to overstrain. Nevertheless, the promotion came through within hours after the denial, despite a French tradition against promotions during a battle.

"You know," she says now, "the general has never doubted even for a moment the possibility of holding Dien Bien Phu. If it falls it will be because the defenders have died to the last man, destroying with them most of the Vietnam."

The situation must remind De Castries of his experience in the battle of France. Tank and dive-bombers supported the 2,000 Germans who surrounded him and his 60 men in 1940. After three days of fighting he tried a breakout, was wounded and taken prisoner. He made three unsuccessful attempts to escape, succeeded on the

fourth try, and two years later was fighting on the Garigliano in Italy. De Castries was born in Paris Aug. 11, 1902, to a family of the old French nobility—and to the cavalry. One of his ancestors was the Marquis Charles de Castries, who fought under Louis XV, became minister of the navy, and went into exile under Louis XVIII. His son Armand served under Lafayette in the American Revolution and died a lieutenant general.

Instead of going to St. Cyr, the French West Point, young De Castries chose the cavalry school at Saumur. One day he saw a beautiful horse galloping in the pastures of a cousin's estate. The animal suddenly made a prodigious leap, clearing a hedge more than six feet high. De Castries had to have that horse. In 1933 he took the unknown jumper—named Vol Au Vent—over the barrier to a world record jump of 2.38 meters (7 feet 10 inches).

When he dismounted the crowd hoisted him on its shoulders and paraded him around the track of the Grand Palais in Paris.

De Castries has carried over three habits from his jumping days. Once is to brandish a riding crop wherever he goes. The sec-

ond is to bounce back fast from a fall, or any other blow, no matter how badly he is hurt. The third is to chew gum. He chews while riding and he chews when the going in battle is toughest.

In his younger days, he valiantly

upheld the cavalry tradition of charm. Well built, handsome in a rugged way, his soft brown eyes peering from under big black eyebrows, he was surrounded by the Paris beauties of his time.

His gentle manners, his imper-

able dress, his love of expensive cars and his position in the best French society made him particularly sought after. He married first outside the circle and the marriage ended in divorce. His second wife comes from a noble family.

He went to Indochina in 1946 and stayed for 2½ years to command the Spahis, an African light cavalry unit whose cap he still likes to wear. It was with the Spahis that he was wounded for the third time and received his 18th citation for valor. He returned to Indochina

for a second tour of duty after a year in France. In December of last year, after several hard campaigns, he was sent to Dien Bien Phu. He asked for a unique Christmas gift—at least one tank. He got two, parachuted in sections.

Once he told a superior he needed a division to do a cleanup job in the Red River delta. "But since I only have a regiment, that will do," he said. He still is making do with what he has, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

## Camera Chatter



"Mother's Day"

By DAL SWIGGER

Every day is Mother's Day, but this coming Sunday we will all celebrate the good things Mother has done for us by making this "HER" day. What better time could there be to celebrate and record in home movies the cheer and warm thoughts of "Mom"—to record for future months the happy days that we have had together. So be sure to have plenty of film on hand, for with the swell weather we've been having, color film will be the thing to use to record the Spring color and to retain the activity of our "Mother's" Day.

### SOME POINTS TO REMEMBER IN HOME MOVIES ARE:

1. Be sure to have the camera lens "set" properly (usually f8 at 16fps).
2. Have the subject well lighted.
3. Hold the camera steady and move or pan your pictures slow and easy.
4. Make your scenes an interesting length, not too long or too short—average 5 to 6 seconds.
5. Use variety to add interest, such as some close-up individual pictures along with some group pictures of a number of the family together.
6. Make a story of your movies to add interest, as "Mother's Dinner," or "Mother's Visit," or other activities to give your movies a central theme.
7. Have fun and enjoy your pictures.

For Mother's Day, as for all other days in taking pictures, be sure to be prepared. Have your cameras and equipment in good working order. If you have not taken pictures for awhile, you might look back on the book of directions. And finally, be sure to have enough good film on hand for taking the pictures you want. For any help I can give you or questions to answer, as well as for any of your photo needs . . . drop in and see Dal at

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