

Pretty French Newsgirl Leads Adventurous Life

By JOHN RODERICK
SAIGON (AP)—At 30, petite, brown-haired Elizabeth (Brigitte) Friang has lived many lives.

When she was 20 she won the French Legion of Honor, the country's top decoration, for heroic work as an underground resistance leader.

Today she is a newspaperwoman who disdains ordinary means of covering a war. She doesn't ride, walk or sail into battle. She jumps in.

She has been one of the best known women in Indochina, but few of the thousands of French Union and Vietnamese troops at Dien Bien Phu and elsewhere knew her real name. To them she was simply "Madame Parachute."

In May 1953 she realized a girlhood dream. She made her first parachute jump. It was to cover a paratrooper operation at Xuyen Moc, on the border of Annam and Cambodia. Since then, pencil and pad in her hip pocket, she has jumped 10 times. Six of them were during military operations, including Dien Bien Phu.

Now she's about to realize another childhood dream. She's off to visit the United States, where she is due in San Francisco this week.

Americans who meet her will get a surprise. Despite the heroism which runs through most of her young life, she is no tomboy. She is as feminine as a Jacques Fath model. She weighs barely 88 pounds, and her pert little nose wrinkles with amusement when she recalls her hundred and one adventures.

Brigitte is the name she got while serving in the underground in France. She was barely past 15 when the Germans conquered her country. But even then, her rebellious nature wouldn't stay still in face of the enemy. She was only 17 when the Germans arrested her the first time and jailed her for three days. Her crime was taking part in a student parade on Armistice Day, 1941, honoring France's dead at the Arch of Triumph.

At 19 she had become secretary of the underground resistance organization which operated throughout western France.

She and she alone held the keys to the code used to contact London and the Free French forces of Gen. Charles de Gaulle.

"We were the Cook's Agency of the resistance," she added. "It was our job to bring paratroopers and agents in, dispatch them to various bases in the country. It was while doing this job, seeing so many people drop out of the air, that I got the desire to make a parachute jump."

There were many narrow escapes, but Brigitte managed to survive for months under cover of her normal life as a medical student at the University of Paris. But one day, a fellow worker, wracked by torture revealed her rendezvous with one of the underground. The Gestapo closed in on

her March 21, 1944, in the gardens of the Trocadero, within view of the Eiffel Tower.

She bowed over one of the Nazi agents and started to run. A bullet in her back stopped her.

The next thing she knew, she was staring into the eyes of a burly German, saying: "Madame, excusez moi. Si grand calibre. C'est la guerre." ("Excuse me, madame, for using such a large caliber bullet. That's war.")

The sentence and the situation were so incongruous Brigitte burst into hysterical laughter.

The Germans didn't wait long to quiz her. She was still on the operating table when the first face-slappings began. But she refused to talk. Later, they broke her jaw, but still there was nothing but silence.

Two attempts to help her escape fell through before she was shipped off to Ravensbruck concentration camp. From there she was dispatched to Czechoslovakia, still undergoing hospital treatment.

One day, her name appeared on a list of several hundred women being sent to the gas chambers of Dachau. It was a mistake, since hospital patients were not to be moved. But the mistake saved her life. She never reached Dachau.

U.S. planes blew up the tracks, and the doomed women were forced to march. Meanwhile, the remaining hospital patients were taken into a quarry and blown to pieces with hand grenades.

The long walk to Dachau—450 miles in three weeks—saw her make three futile escape tries. But the fourth succeeded. Ironically, it was May 8, the day the war ended.

She weighed just 61 pounds. Back in Paris and reunited with her family, she collapsed from excitement then she entered her old room and found the Croix de Guerre on her pillow.

Since then she has won the Croix de Guerre twice.

In the two years that followed she threw in her lot with her old hero Gen. de Gaulle and helped

him form the Rally of the French People (RFP), which he headed. She served as his press officer until the 1951 elections. Embittered by the defeat of the RFP, she decided to go to Indochina.

"I felt I might find some real Frenchmen there," she said. De Gaulle sent her off with his blessing.

In Indochina she became correspondent for the Paris publication Samedi Soir and the magazine Sud-Est Asiatique.

Her first jump was accomplished

without prior training. And it nearly cost her her life. Instead of jumping straight out in the conventional manner, she tumbled head first. When the chute opened she found herself twisted in the cords.

With quick presence of mind, she seized and stretched the strings, stopping the spinning motion of her body.

Her next jump also was operational. Then, carrying things out in reverse, she took four practice jumps and in between times submitted to a medical examination

to determine if she was physically fit to parachute.

She says jumping is fun. Halfway to earth in her first attempt, she broke into shouts of exultation. "C'est formidable, c'est formidable!" ("It's terrific, it's terrific!") she screamed.

She hasn't suffered a single serious injury so far, she says, reaching over to knock on wood.

One of her jumps—in November last year—was into Dien Bien Phu when it first was taken from the Vietminh. She returned to the jungle fortress in February of this

year, waiting for the expected assault. It was there on Feb. 23 that she celebrated her 30th birthday with Brig. Gen. Christian de Castries, then a colonel. There were champagne toasts, and the troops lobbed a mortar shell bearing the

word "Brigitte" into the Vietminh positions in honor of the event. "Not there while they fought for 'They were our best,'" said their lives."

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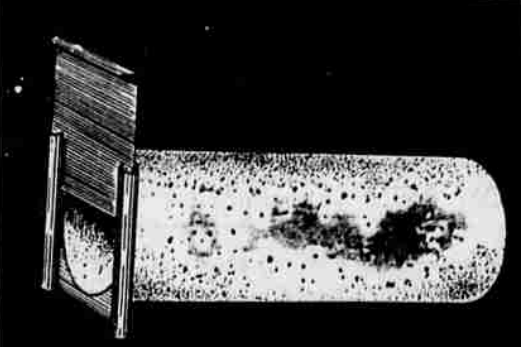
And they all go for everyone—little ones and grown-ups alike.

For an after-theater party, younger-set gathering, and such, pull this one on the crowd. Serve with cool, refreshing milk, and you'll be in from there on!

INDIVIDUAL
STRAWBERRY ALASKAS
Sponge cake, one inch thick
4 egg whites
Dash of salt
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 teaspoon vanilla
1 pint strawberry ice cream
Cut 3 1/2 inch squares of cake, place on 2 1/2 thickness heavy brown paper on baking sheet. Beat egg whites with salt to foam, then begin adding sugar a teaspoonful at a time until meringue stands in peaks. Add vanilla, cut ice cream brick lengthwise, then crosswise, making 4 cube-shaped pieces. Place one cube ice cream on each piece cake so cake extends at least 1/2-inch beyond ice cream. Spread meringue thickly over entire surface of ice cream and rim of cake. Bake in very hot oven (450 degrees) for three to five minutes or until slightly browned, then serve immediately. Serves four.

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