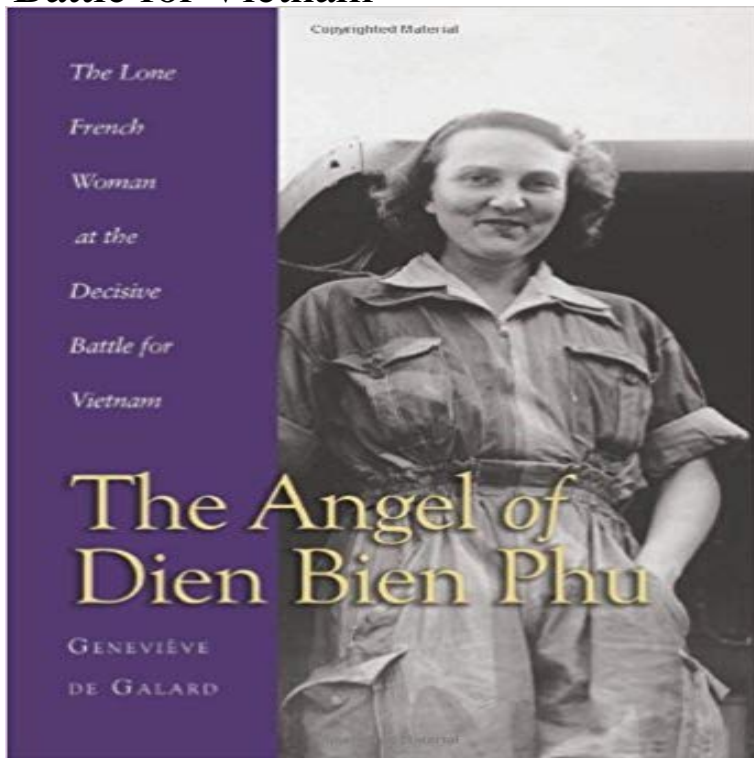


The Angel of Dien Bien Phu: The Lone French Woman at the Decisive Battle for Vietnam



Genevieve de Galard was a flight nurse for the French Air Force who received the name of the Angel of Dien Bien Phu during the French war in Indochina. She volunteered for French Indochina and arrived there in May 1953, in the middle of the war between French forces and the Vietminh. Galard was stationed in Hanoi and flew on casualty evacuation flights from Pleiku. After January 1954 she was on the flights that evacuated casualties from the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. Her first patients were mainly soldiers who suffered from diseases but after mid-March most of them were battle casualties. Sometimes Red Cross planes had to land in the midst of Vietminh artillery barrages. On March 27, 1954, when a Red Cross C-47 with Galard aboard tried to land at night on the short runway of Dien Bien Phu, the landing overshot and the plane's left engine was seriously damaged. The mechanics could not repair the plane in the field, so the plane was stranded. At daylight Vietminh artillery destroyed the C-47 and damaged the runway beyond repair. Galard went to a field hospital under command of doctor Paul Grauwain and volunteered her services as a nurse. Although the men of the medical staff were initially apprehensive - she was the only woman in the base - they eventually made accommodations for her. They also arranged a semblance of uniform; camouflage overalls, trousers, basketball shoes, and a t-shirt. Galard did her best in very unsanitary conditions, comforting those about to die and trying to keep up morale in the face of the mounting casualties. Many of the men later complimented her efforts. On the 29th of April 1954 Genevieve de Galard was awarded the Knights Cross of the Legion d'Honneur and the Croix de Guerre. It was presented to her by the commander of Dien Bien Phu, General de Castries. The following day, during the celebration of the French Foreign Legions annual Camerone,

de Galard was made an honorary Legionnaire de 1ere classe alongside Lieutenant Colonel Marcel Bigeard, the commander of the 6th Colonial Parachute Battalion. French troops at Dien Bien Phu finally capitulated on May 7. However, the Vietminh allowed Galard and the medical staff continue to care for their wounded. Galard still refused any kind of cooperation. When some of the Vietminh begun to hoard medical supplies for their own use, she hid some of them under her stretcher bed. On May 24, Genevieve de Galard was evacuated to French-held Hanoi, partially against her will. The American press gave her the name Angel of Dien Bien Phu. She was given a tickertape parade up Broadway, a standing ovation in Congress. On 29 July 1954 President Eisenhower awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom during a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden. She currently lives in Paris with her husband.

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