



Yvonne Cormeau

Dec 18, 1909 - Dec 25, 1997

BIRTHPLACE: Shanghai, China

SOLDIER DETAILS

DIVISION: Other, Special Operation Executive SOE - French Resistance

THEATER OF OPERATION: European

MILITARY HONORS: Order of the British Empire from the United Kingdom Legion of Honor and Croix de Guerre from France.

HONORED BY: The Eisenhower Foundation

BIOGRAPHY

Beatrice Yvonne Biesterfeld Cormeau, was born in Shaghia, China to parents of Belgium and Scottish decent, leading her to be educated in both languages. She married Charles Cormeau, an account, who joined The Rifles in 1940. Being wounded, Charles returned home only to be killed when their home was bombed. She avoided being hurt when a bathtub turned over to cover her head. However, she lost her unborn baby. Yvonne Cormeau decided to take her husband's place and joined the WAAF. She placed her two year-old daughter in a convent and declared, "she wanted to do something to save France from the Nazis." Cormeau soon got a promotion and took SOE (Special Operations Executive) training. Cormeau became a wireless operator who "night" parachuted into France on August, 22, 1943. She sent a record of 400 transmissions in 13 months - the highest of any SOE wireless operator. She could transmit 18 - 22 words per minute in morse code where an average operator would transmit 12 words. She was called a "Pianist" in operators slang. Cormeau used the code names, Annette, Fairy and Sarafari. She was acclaimed for the quality and quantity of her wireless transmissions. She made arrangements for arms and supplies to be dropped to allied forces and for cutting of telephone and power lines that isolated the Wehrmacht G Garrison near Toulouse. Cormeau often cycles miles between locations to transmit. The wireless machine weighing 31 pounds was cumbersome. Later she was provided with an 8 pound machine which fit in her briefcase. At one point, Cormeau transmitted from a remote village with no running water, for six months. It was an unusual practice for wireless operators as normally they kept moving to avoid detection heading to a new location every 3 days. The Germans became aware a female wireless operator was transmitting. She was almost arrested after being betrayed by another operator coded named "Rudolph" ; however, Cormeau continued to operate despite accurately sketched wanted posters of her posted in the neighborhood where she was working. Cormeau identified herself as a traveling district nurse. On one trip, she and her boss were stopped at a roadblock with guns pressed

to their backs. Cormeau was able to convince the troops her radio set was an X-ray machine and they resumed their travel. Cormeau worked a total of thirteen months evading arrest. At one point, she was shot in the leg by a German Patrol but escaped and saved her wireless. Her dress, with bullet hole and briefcase are displayed in the Imperial War Museum in London. After the war, Cormeau was reunited with her daughter and worked as a translator for the SOE for a time. Courtesy of IWM and This is Your Life show