

ÉRIC NÉVÉ PRESENTS

SOPHIE
MARCEAU

JULIE
DEPARDIEU

MARIE
GILLAIN

DEBORAH
FRANÇOIS

MORITZ
BLEIBTREU

D-DAY DEPENDS ON THEM

FEMALE AGENTS

LE CERCLE ROUGE FILLS - DOLBY DIGITAL - SDDS - 5.1

MAYA SANSA

A FILM BY
JEAN-PAUL SALOMÉ

TF1
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JULIEN BOISSELIER

International Sales
TF1
INTERNATIONAL

9 rue Maurice Mallet - « Immeuble Central Park » - 92 130 Issy-les-Moulineaux - France
Tel: (33 1) 41 41 17 63 / Fax: (33 1) 41 41 17 69 - sales@tf1.fr - www.tf1international.com

1944: a crucial moment in the Second World War

The mission: a five-woman commando unit must eliminate the head of
German counter-intelligence in Paris

At stake: the Normandy Landings

synopsis

May 1944. A five-woman commando unit parachutes into occupied France on a daring and dangerous mission to protect the secret of the D-Day Landings and eliminate Colonel Heindrich, the head of German counter-intelligence.

Louise is a trained sniper and the widow of a Resistance leader.

Jeanne is a tough hooker who won't hesitate to kill.

Gaëlle is a young and brilliant explosives expert desperate to see some action.

Suzy is a stunning former showgirl and Heindrich's one-time lover.

Maria is an Italian *contessa* undercover with the French Resistance.

Female Agents is an action-packed tribute to the real-life espionage operatives whose exploits inspired the film.

Cast



Photos : Thibault Grabherr

LOUISE

Sophie Marceau

Anthony Zimmer

The World Is Not Enough

Braveheart

Belphegor

Midnight Summer Dream

D'Artagnan's Daughter

SUZY	Marie Gillain	<i>On Guard !</i> <i>The Bait</i>
JEANNE	Julie Depardieu	<i>A Very Long Engagement</i> <i>Poltergay</i> <i>Little Lili</i> – 2005 Cesar Awards, Most Promising Actress and Best Supporting Actress
MARIA	Maya Sansa	<i>Buongiorno, Notte</i> –2004 David di Donatello Award nomination, Best Actress – 2004 Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists, nomination for Best Actress <i>La Meglio Gioventu</i> – 2004 Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists, Best Actress
GAELLE	Déborah François	<i>The Child</i> - 2006 Cesar Award nomination, Most Promising Actress <i>La Tourneuse De Pages</i>

HEINDRICH	Moritz Bleibtreu	<i>The Elementary Particles</i> – 2006 Berlin International Film Festival, Best Actor – 2005 German Film Award nomination, Best Actor <i>Munich</i> <i>The Experiment</i> – 2001 German Film Awards, German Actor of the Year and Best Supporting Actor <i>Knocking On Heaven's Door</i> 1997 German Film Awards, Best Supporting Actor – 1988 Ernst Lubitsch Award
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PIERRE	Julien Boisselier	<i>Je Vais Bien, Ne T'En Fais Pas</i>
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BECKER	Volker Bruch	
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technical information

Wartime adventure shot in Paris and its neighborhood

Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- preparation starts October 2006- shooting starts on March 12th, 2007 - Paris and its region- delivery : early 2008
Written by	Jean-Paul Salomé and Laurent Vachaud <i>Arsene Lupin</i>
Director	Jean-Paul Salomé <i>Arsene Lupin</i> <i>Belphegor</i>
Producer	Eric Névé – La Chauve-Souris <i>Crime Insiders</i> <i>Spybound</i> <i>Dobermann</i>
DoP	Pascal Ridao <i>Arsene Lupin</i>
Editor	Marie-Pierre Renaud <i>Arsene Lupin</i> <i>The Kite</i>
Art director	Françoise Dupertuis <i>Arsene Lupin</i>
Costumes	Pierre-Jean Larroque <i>Tiger Brigades</i> <i>Arsene Lupin</i> : 2005 Cesar Award nomination - Best Costumes <i>Toulouse-Lautrec</i> : 1999 Cesar Award - Best Costumes <i>The Lady and the Duke</i>

Music

Bruno Coulais

Chorists - 2005 Academy Award nomination - Best Music; 2005 BAFTA Award nomination - Anthony Asquith Award for Film Music ; 2005 Cesar Award - Best Music; 2004 European Film Award - Best Composer

Spybound

Belphegor

The Crimson Rivers - 2001 Cesar Award nomination - Best Music Award

Vidocq

Winged Migration - 2002 Cesar Award nomination - Best Music

The Himalaya - A Chief's Childhood - 2000 Cesar Award - Best Music

Microcosmos - 1997 Cesar Award - Best Music

Harrison's flowers

Running time

around 110 minutes

French distributor

TFM Distribution

director's note

While I was working in London, I read the obituary in *The Times* of a Second World War heroine who had died at the age of 98.

As a member of the Resistance, this young Frenchwoman had chosen to escape to England to join the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Created by Winston Churchill the SOE included a French Section headed by Colonel Buckmaster. Over fifty women from all over Europe had joined from 1940 on with the resolute aim of becoming British intelligence agents.

Most of them were parachuted into France to work with the Resistance on sabotage and intelligence-gathering operations. Many were captured, tortured and sent to Hitler's concentration camps.

After the Liberation of France, General de Gaulle neglected the role played by these female agents, many of whom had given their lives for the cause, in order to highlight the heroes who had fought alongside him in the Free French Forces.

I set out to make amends for this injustice by turning a spotlight on the women who, in the shadows, had worked to defeat the Nazis.

By reading the biographies of these heroines, I realized that this wouldn't be yet another war movie, but a film about women in war, in which I would depict the intimate and painful daily lives of these forgotten fighters.

Working with the historian Olivier Wierviorka and screenwriter Laurent Vachaud, I used real events and people to construct a spy thriller set in the final months of one of the most terrible conflicts in human history.

For this project, which I intend to be more realistic than my two previous films, I wish to combine action, suspense and psychology so that, in an elegant but edgy visual style flirting with documentary, my camera remains as close as possible to the characters.

I viewed the first colour newsreels shot by war reporters. The green of the uniforms and the red of the flags stand out. With my Director of Photography, we will ensure these tints dominate by carefully "de-saturating" the other colours while keeping the flesh colours warm.

The action scenes will most often be shot with a handheld camera to alternate with more flowing descriptive scenes without an excess of shots in order to emphasize the talent of the actresses.

In terms of sound, the emphasis will similarly be on authenticity and realism - not systematically resorting to music to underscore the action scenes. On the contrary, we will use music sparingly so that its impact is much greater.

The films that serve as my artistic markers are *The Army In The Shadows* for its elegance and sobriety, and *Saving Private Ryan* for its efficiency and veracity.

**Article in the Times,
one of Salomé's source of inspiration**

OBITUARIES

LISE VILLAMEUR

Special agent who ran her own operation in wartime France, but was denied a gallantry award

LISE DE BAISSAC had a special place among the women secret agents sent to France to work for SOE (Special Operations Executive) because she went not as a courier or a wireless operator working under a circuit leader, but to set up her own small circuit. The commandant at SOE's Beaulieu "finishing school", which prepared agents for the clandestine life, wrote that she was "quite imperturbable and would remain cool and collected in any situation... she was very much ahead of her fellow students".

De Baisac was one of the first two women agents to be parachuted into France on the night of April 24-25, 1942 — Yvonne Rudellat had arrived by boat two months earlier. She dropped with the 22-year-old Andrée Borrell south of the Loire. Her mission was to establish a safe house in Poitiers where new agents could be settled into the secret life. Her cover was that she was a widow, Madame Irene Brisse, seeking refuge from the tension of life in the capital. With characteristic nonchalance, she moved into a flat on a busy street near the Gestapo HQ, and even became acquainted with the Gestapo chief — Grabowski — "hated by everyone" she said.

In Poitiers she made many friends, entertaining them at her flat, so agents visiting her would not seem unusual. She had presciently chosen a ground-floor flat in a block without a concierge and even her cleaning lady, there every morning, never suspected her clandestine work. As well as receiving new agents, she organised reception committees for arms drops.

Being without a wireless she had to travel to Paris to send and receive messages and collect funds, or to Bordeaux where her brother Claude was building up the large scientist circuit, organising sabotage and providing copious reports on submarines and shipping.

On August 16, 1943, she returned with her brother by Lysander to London, just as her circuit in Poitiers had been penetrated by the Germans, though a second one she had established in Ruffec remained intact.

She was dropped back into France on the night of April 9-10, 1944, to work with the active and successful Pimento Circuit run by the SOE agent Anthony Brooks. However, in one of those seismic quarrels that occasionally broke out among agents, she found herself completely at odds with her new colleagues. Brooks thought she was far too smartly dressed to fit in with the railway and industrial workers in his circuit. She thought they were militant socialists with political aims and was not willing to work simply as, she put it, as their postman.

Instead "black with rage" she joined her brother Claude who had gone to Normandy to reconnoitre large landing grounds that could be held for 48 hours while airborne troops established themselves. Now with the code-name Marguerite, de Baisac found herself living in a village beside the Germans. One day she found a German soldier sitting on her sleeping bag — made from a parachute. Fortunately he had no idea what it was.

For her brother she cycled twice to Paris, going through numerous check-

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Villameur risked her life daily, running a safe house for new agents and carrying wireless material and documents

points and heavy German formations, escaping detection even when frisked, thanks to her sang-froid.

Captain Blackman, the leader of an SAS party that parachuted behind the lines in July 1944 wrote that "she risked her life daily" carrying wireless material and secret documents adding: "The part she played in aiding the Maquis and the British underground movement in France cannot be too highly stressed and did much to facilitate the Maquis preparations and resistance prior to the American breakthrough in Mayenne."

She organised several groups in Normandy and continued liaison until liberation, contributing with zeal to the provision of military information for the Allied forces. "She was the inspiration of groups on the Orne and by her initiative caused heavy losses to the Germans with tyre burners on the roads near to St Aubin-le-Desert, St Mars, and as far as Laval, Le Mans and Rennes.

She also took part in several armed attacks on enemy columns," runs a re-

sumé on her SOE personal file. Colonel Buckmaster, the head of SOE's French Section, proposed her in April 1945 for a George Medal. "A very courageous woman, very diplomatic... She did everything, sabotage, arms drops, receptions, looking after airmen and wireless operators, even guerrilla work." Instead a recommendation put forward for an OBE was downgraded in September 1945 to an MBE by the War Office.

The valiant work of SOE's women agents was first chronicled in M. R. D Foot's *SOE in France* (1966). De Baisac belonged to the impressive group of agents — many like her from old French families — who came from the island of Mauritius which had been British since 1810.

Before the war she had fallen in love with a dashing young artist, Henri Villameur, but her parents had refused to give their blessing to the match. After the war he married another girl, but they separated and Lise was soon reunited with him. Villameur by this time had become a fashionable decora-

tor and they lived in a flat that he created under the eaves of a block on the Quai de Rive-Neuve overlooking the port of Marseilles.

She quickly settled into normal civilian life after the war, making light of her war work (and never telling the full story of it), continuing to lead an active social life into grand old age.

Nonetheless she was extremely proud to be guest of honour at a parachute drop organised by the FANYs (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) in 2002 to commemorate her original drop 60 years before. She was granted her French parachute wings and entertained at the Château Nanteuil.

She was vice-president of the Association France-Grande Bretagne in Marseilles for many years. She was a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur and awarded the Croix de Guerre avec palme.

Her husband predeceased her. There were no children.

Lise Villameur, wartime SOE agent, was born on May 11, 1905. She died on March 28, 2004, aged 98.

treatment

Central France, April 1944. On a mission to blow up a train depot in wartime France, three Resistance men are caught and shot on the spot by a Wehrmacht patrol. From her position overlooking the depot, a sniper watches in horror as her comrades are gunned down. She is powerless to save them and very nearly gets captures herself. As she makes good her escape into the night, she turns for one final glimpse of the group's dead leader, her husband.

London, May 1944. Pierre Desfontaines, a smart, good-looking French officer arrives at the HQ of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), Churchill's covert operations unit. Colonel Buckmaster informs Pierre that his sister, Louise, has fled to London and applied to the SOE. She was a member of one of the most effective Resistance networks until its leader was shot on a mission. Pierre is clearly not pleased. He argues that Louise is too unpredictable, a loose canon. Unpredictability is a quality that wins wars, retorts Buckmaster.

Pierre and Louise meet for the first time since before the war. Their distrust is mutual. Her wealthy family disowned Louise after she fell in love with a Communist schoolteacher. And Louise suspected Pierre of backing Vichy like their collaborator father. Nonetheless, Louise is delighted to be given a mission even if it is under Pierre's command.

Buckmaster informs her that a British geologist has been wounded on a mission on the French Normandy beaches. Luckily, he was undercover in a German uniform. With four other women commandos, she must rescue him from a German military hospital before German counter-intelligence discovers his true identity, which would sentence thousands of Allied soldiers to death. Louise presses Buck for more details, but he remains enigmatic.

Pierre and Louise begin recruiting from a file of likely candidates provided by Buck. They arrive just in time to save the first one from the gallows. Jeanne is a tough cookie, an ex-hooker on death row for the murder of her pimp. Only when Louise promises her a full pardon does she agree to join the mission.

The next candidate, Gaëlle, is an explosives expert. She rejects Louise's offer out of loyalty to De Gaulle's Free French forces. In desperation, Louise turns to Pierre for help. Reluctantly, he seduces Gaëlle into joining the mission. The last candidate, the stunning Suzy, was a Parisian showgirl. Pierre has a photo of her in the arms of a German officer. He explains to her that this is her only chance to return to France as a hero, rather than a collaborator.

Meanwhile, in France, the head of German counter-intelligence, Colonel Heindrich (the officer Suzy was about to marry) presents army generals with disturbing evidence that the Allies may be planning to attack in Normandy, not Calais where German troops are concentrated. They laugh at him. As he leaves, Heindrich swears that he will find proof of his theory.

June 1, 1944. After a couple of days' training, the commandos parachute into France, where they meet the last member of the unit, Maria, an Italian-Jewish *contessa*, whose family perished in the death camps. Tension is high. Suzy would rather be anywhere than back in France. Gaëlle tries in vain to get them all to pray together. Jeanne greedily eyes the suitcase full of cash that Buckmaster gave Louise. And Louise suspects that Pierre is keeping something from them.

Next morning, they head for the hospital. Unfortunately, in his delirious state, the Geologist began mumbling in his sleep. In English. Heindrich arrives at the same time as the commando unit. Pierre mutters to Louise to keep Suzy out of Heindrich's sight. Disguised as nurses, Maria and Louise locate the room where Heindrich is torturing the Geologist. When Heindrich is distracted by noises from downstairs, they dispose of the sentries. Louise tells Maria to wait with the Geologist and heads after Heindrich.

Downstairs, the whole hospital has gathered in the main hall. Jeanne and Suzy are performing a sensual striptease. When Heindrich enters, Suzy is removing her bra with her back to the audience. Heindrich snorts in disgust and stalks off to the bathroom, where he escapes Louise's attempt to shoot him by a hair's breadth.

After the show, Gaëlle sets off smoke bombs to cover their escape. Pierre and two local Resistance men help Maria and Louise to get the Geologist into an ambulance. They screech away while booby-trapped cars explode all around them. Heindrich is furious.

The Geologist informs Pierre of Heindrich's suspicions about the Normandy landings. He must be eliminated. The ambulance pulls up in a clearing to await the plane that will take them back to Britain. But Pierre has new orders for Louise. Her unit must head to Paris to kill Heindrich. The women are angry and feel betrayed, but Pierre is adamant. The plane flies off with only the Geologist on board and the women set off through the woods to a safehouse. Back in the clearing, Heindrich arrives too late to stop the plane taking off, but not too late to capture Pierre.

In the safehouse, Jeanne and Suzy rebel. At her most authoritative, Louise persuades them to continue the mission. Just then, gunshots are heard outside. Louise goes to investigate and is attacked by a wounded German with a knife. As he is about to deliver the fatal blow, Gaëlle shoots him dead.

June 2, 1944. The four women are on a train to Paris. Maria has gone ahead. Louise is taken sick and collapses in a car packed with German soldiers. A military doctor takes her to his compartment and congratulates her. Louise is pregnant with her dead husband's baby! Meanwhile, Jeanne tries to run off with the suitcase of cash while the train is stopped. Gaëlle forces her back onto the train.

They arrive in Paris. Gestapo agents are checking all passengers from Normandy. The women split up. The German doctor escorts Louise through. Jeanne and Suzy sail through flirtatiously. Behind them, Gaëlle panics and is an easy prey for the sharp-eyed Gestapo men.

Across town, Maria "accidentally" bumps into Eddy, a sleazy black-marketeer who brings Heindrich women dressed up to look like Suzy. Meanwhile, Heindrich is grilling Pierre about spy plane photos taken over the English coast that suggest the landings will take place in Normandy. He needs evidence to convince Field Marshal Rommel. Pierre remains stubbornly silent.

Louise, Maria, Jeanne and Suzy rendezvous at the Institute for the Blind. Maria tells Louise the plan. Eddy will take Suzy to meet Heindrich at the Regina Hotel where the two former lovers use to meet. Jeanne will have hidden a gun there and Suzy will shoot Heindrich. Louise looks at her in dismay. Suzy? Kill Heindrich? Maria has to be joking. Maria retorts that Louise must find a way to convince Suzy.

Heindrich marches triumphantly into Pierre's cell with Gaëlle. She panics when she sees Pierre's bruises and wounds, and breaks down as soon as Heindrich gets a little nasty. Within hours, Heindrich is raiding the Institute for the Blind. Louise and the others escape through a tunnel. The Institute director is not so lucky.

Louise sees a chance to kill Heindrich without relying on Eddy and Suzy. Gaëlle must have told Heindrich about the backup plan if one of the women couldn't make it to the Institute. Louise contacts the Resistance and gets hold of a sniper's rifle. She plans to shoot Heindrich in the Paris Metro, on the platform where the women were supposed to meet. He will be using Gaëlle as bait to lure Louise and her unit into the open, but he won't be able to resist being there himself. Especially if he is given a tantalizing glimpse of Suzy. It's a long shot, but Louise has to give it a try.

June 3, 1944. Everything goes to plan. Louise is concealed in the Metro tunnel. Maria and Jeanne are in position. Gaëlle arrives and sits on a bench. Then, Suzy and Eddy appear on the opposite platform... Heindrich leaps forward. But Louise can't get a clear shot. Maria takes over, only to be gunned down by Heindrich's men. In the ensuing chaos, Jeanne and Suzy get away. But Louise is captured.

Heindrich is exultant. He knows that Suzy, the love of his life, is back in Paris. All he has to do is call Eddy. And with Louise in his hands, he is sure that Pierre will now talk, if only to spare his sister horrible pain. Three months' pregnant, Louise prepares to face the wrath of the man she has twice tried to kill. She seems powerless to stop him discovering and delivering the secrets of the Normandy Landings to German High Command. But, unless she stops him, Allied troops will die in their thousands...