



Smaranda Brăescu ... A Romanian woman rose not only in the sky, descending countless times with a parachute, breaking European and world records, she also flew planes, flying over continents and seas and participated voluntarily on the front, but also faced many of the prejudices of her time and the misogyny inside some chancelleries, tenaciously promoting the Romanian aeronautics.

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*Smaranda Brăescu*



# SMARANDA BRAESCU - A STAR IN THE FIRMAMENT OF THE GREAT PERSONALITIES OF THE WORLD

Gl. fl. aer. r. Tudorel ENE

"How fortunate would mankind be if there were many nations that brought them,  
compared to its number of inhabitants,  
as much as the Romanian nation has brought in the last hundred years!" - *Henri Coandă*

A retrospective analysis of the last centuries of human evolution indicates an increase, in leaps and bounds, with obvious tendencies of acceleration in periods when humanity reached new peaks of knowledge, created new means to transform reality and conquer new spaces. The marine space, more than half a millennium ago, showed itself to the daring sailors on the seas and the oceans of the world in almost all of its immensity and richness, accelerating the technical progress. The airspace was conquered much later, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was of great significance; it is there that we can easily detach the pioneering period of aeronautics from, followed by a so-called "romantic" period in which limits that were once considered intangible, were overthrown records, and in aviation and skydiving "the distances were reduced, the horizons were compressed". The outer space, the last stronghold of human adventure, does not seem that far away nowadays. Today's man and his profile, which can already be seen in the bright canvas of the future, seems to be ready to find a new and exciting destiny among the galaxies.



The conquest of the sky beyond the limits of the Earth's atmosphere measures only a few decades, and we are already talking about "space tourism" and the

colonization of other planets. None of these conquests would have been possible without visionary, daring, and tenacious people, who were accustomed to the study of science, and were capable of many sacrifices. Their names are inscribed in golden letters in the panoply of the great personalities of the world. Smaranda Brăescu is one of them, a Romanian woman who not only uplifted to the high skies and "descended" countless times, but also broke European and world records. She flew airplanes, flying over continents and seas and volunteering on the front, but she also faced many of the time's prejudices and misogynistic bias from different chancelleries, tenaciously and proudly promoting the Romanian aeronautics.

We find her among other famous aviators of her time such as Lena Bernstein, Madeleine Charnaux, Amelia Earhart, Amy Johnson, Elisabeth Boselli, Jacqueline Auriol, but she also broke world parachuting records, in an almost exclusive male-dominated field.



Amelia Earhart

In a top of 60 women who changed the world, made by Lucian Ronkov, we find her along five other Romanian women, in second place, ahead of Ana Aslan and Nadia Comănești. But the rankings, in this case, no matter how elaborate, remain only a scalar expression of numbers and do not fully contain the impression left to posterity by an amazing personality.



## Smaranda Brăescu

In the consciousness of Romanians, Smaranda Brăescu is a successor of great female personalities such as Ana Ipătescu, who released the provisional government led by Nicolae Bălcescu and saved the Revolution of 1848, and Ecaterina Teodoroiu, the heroine of Jiu, in the war for the Nation's Reunification. In aeronautics, we remember her along with Mariana Drăgescu, a well-known aviator from the "white squadron", Elena Caragiani, one of the first Romanian aviators, with a pilot's license obtained in France, on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1914, Ioana Cantacuzino, the Romanian who obtained the first tourism pilot license in the country in 1930, Marina Știrbei, Bâză Cantacuzino's cousin, winner of an aviation competition that took place in Romania in 1936, Irina Burnaia, the second patented aviator in Romania, the director of a civil flight school during the Second World War and many others.



Mariana Drăgescu

It is amazing that Smaranda was not born in a princely or magnate family from the heyday of capitalism, but she saw the light of day for the first time on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1897, in a village called Hănțești, in the Buciumeni commune of a Moldavian county, Covurlui.

Her greatest chance came in 1928, at an air rally in Bucharest, attended by several German paratroopers including Heinecke, an engineer and inventor of a high-performance parachute. She was invited by him to Germany, where she learns the basic technique of parachuting and, on July 5<sup>th</sup>, the same year, she makes her first jump, from 600 meters high. After graduating from the courses led by Heinecke, she gained the international parachuting licence. She thus became the first Romanian parachutist, putting Romania on the map of female parachuting, as the fourth country in Europe after France, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland.

She returned to the country to two years full of events following: over ten jumps, organized by the R.A.A.P. (Romanian Association for Aviation

Propaganda, forerunner of the A.R.P.I.A.), but also suffered two accidents, one by plane and another by parachute, which kept her on hospital beds for more than six months.

Instead of giving up and returning to the duties women were expected to do at the time, highlighted by the rule of the "3 K" (Kinder, Kuche, Kirche - Children, Kitchen, Church), Smaranda Brăescu aims for parachuting records, performing, at October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1931, in Slobozia, a jump from 6,000 meters, evolving in the air only between the suspensions of the parachute, for more than 21 minutes.



Smaranda before her 6,000 meters jump, smiling and believing in her success – October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1931

At that time, the women's record in Europe was 4,000 meters and it was set by a parachutist from Dresden (Germany), and in America, it was about 5,400 meters. For this record, which, in Romania, was both a record for men and women, our daring Măndița, as she was called in the family, was decorated with the Golden Cross of Aeronautical Virtue.

Success brings along more success, so the following year, on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1932, on the field in Sacramento (California), Smaranda Brăescu makes the magical leap from 7,233 meters, with which she sets a world record, both for men and women, amazing the entire planet.

We are in the times when cinema was nostalgically parting ways from the silent films, and the big screen made actresses like Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Vivien Leigh and other beloved female famous, making their faces known all over the world.

*Smaranda Brăescu*



Smaranda Brăescu was decorated by King Carol II of Romania after her world record of 1931

In 1932, the Summer Olympics takes place in Los Angeles, crowning the laurels of sports victory as Helen Madison, with three gold medals in swimming, Mildred (Bebe) Dridikson, with gold in two athletics events (80 meters fences and spear) of the five she took part in, and at Lake Placid, where the Winter Olympics took place, Sonja Henie becomes the Olympic champion for the second time and Edward Eagen wins the bobsled, after becoming an Olympic boxing champion three Olympics prior. Romania did not participate in the Summer Olympics. At the Winter Olympics Romania presented a delegation of 17 athletes, who competed in bobsleigh and ski. The best result was the 7<sup>th</sup> place in the bobsled event, with 5 participants. But the country was successfully represented in that fabulous year of 1932, in both sports and media, by Smaranda Brăescu, with world records in skydiving also won in America, on the West Pacific coast.

We are now part of a time that is marked by a competitive spirit, the world was reborn, just like a Phoenix bird, after the first great world conflagration known in history, when America would offer Smaranda almost everything she wanted. The celebrity surrounded her, but instead of succumbing to the attraction of high social circles, the "Queen of Heights", as she was named after the amazing leap, also learns the secrets of piloting and gets her civilian pilot's license, thus becoming the first woman without an American citizenship to achieve such a performance.

The years that follow, Smaranda Brăescu dedicates herself almost exclusively to aviation. With the money she got from donations, she buys her first plane, a Hawk Milles model, painting the fuselage in blue and

the wings wore the Romanian flag. She names it after her brilliant predecessor, Aurel Vlaicu, thus showing that fame could not break her Romanian roots, which carried her all over the world, promoting her as few have been able to do. A flight from London to Bucharest followed, with a stopover in Paris, in severe weather conditions. The event was front page of the newspapers, especially due to the fact that the flight was made by a woman, all alone on her own plane.

PAGE 1	FORM AB-54	PAGE 2
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA		Subject to prior suspension or revocation, this
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE		License expires
AERONAUTICS BRANCH		OCTOBER 15 1933
PRIVATE PILOT'S LICENSE		
Issued to	SMARANDA BRAESCU	
Date issued	OCTOBER 8 1932	
Age	27	
Weight	135	
Height	5' 4 1/2"	
Color hair	BLACK	
Color eyes	GRAY	
<i>Smaranda Brăescu</i>		
PILOT'S SIGNATURE		
This Certifies, That the pilot whose photograph and signature appear herein is a Private Pilot of "Aircraft of the United States". The holder may pilot all types of licensed aircraft, but may not for hire, transport persons or property, nor give piloting instruction to students.		
HARWOOD		
<i>Clarence M. Young</i>		
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE		
Note: All provisions of the Air Commerce Regulations are made a part of the terms herein.		
LICENSE RENEWALS	INSPECTOR'S ENDORSEMENT	EXPIRATION DATE

On April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1936, she crossed the Yugoslav Mountains with her plane, and on May 19<sup>th</sup> she carried out a raid, all alone on board, between Rome and Tripoli. The distance was over 1100 km and crossed the Mediterranean Sea, thus uniting, by air, with a single-engine plane, the continents of Europe and Africa. We should not forget that the first woman to fly in a straight line across the Mediterranean Sea was Lena Bernstein, and this occurred only on the third attempt, showing us that non-stop long-haul flights over the sea presented a high risk for a small aircraft of the sports-tourism category.



September 5<sup>th</sup> 1935, Le Bourget

The return flight was destined for Athens, then following the road home over the high mountain peaks of the Rhodopes and the Balkans, landing in Bucharest. It was a flight of great endurance and performance for



those times, just a few months before Amelia Earhart's disappearance over the Pacific. The well-known American aviator who had crossed the Atlantic five years earlier had become a model for the youngest Amazons of the air, and Smaranda, used to the skydiving records, also dreamed of conquering new limits in aviation. It becomes especially clear to our daring aviator her desire to prepare for and execute increasingly longer flights, on unknown routes to those before her. This desire for performance and new records is what animated all her efforts.



Smaranda in Tripoli, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1936, after her Rome-Tripoli raid of May 19<sup>th</sup> 1936, with an Italian family

A few more flights followed, but the war was just beginning and it took away her chance of aiming for a new record. She became a volunteer in her country's army, an instructor in the parachuting school and a member of the 108 Light Transport Squadron on the Eastern Front, where she participated in various missions.



November 6<sup>th</sup> 1942, Marozovskia

Admired and loved for her courage and performance, Smaranda has the power to descend from the sky with the victims of war for whom every new minute became a life expectancy, and when the war is over, she continues the fight in a field considered

## *Smaranda Brăescu*

by the authorities to be subversive, supporting groups that opposed the new communist order and waiting, like so many other Romanians, for the arrival and help of the Americans.

Overthrown, like many other valuable people of our nation, by the Bolshevik persecution, our heroine was finally sentenced to prison, in absentia, choosing to live the last years of her life in complete anonymity, secretly, through monasteries and hermitages, fasting, being humble and praying for those she loved so much and to whom she gave everything she had: her glory, her tenacious work and an ocean of unfulfilled dreams.

How difficult it was for her, after years of being among the most important personalities, acclaimed all over the world, to give up everything and impossibly watch, from lonely and shabby cells, the establishment of a dictatorial regime in Romania, where the elites, the human values, the intellectuals were humiliated and wiped out, to make way for the "new man", we do not know.



We can only know that she left this world without offering any satisfaction to the Romanian authorities at that time. Her body was laid to rest in a cemetery in Cluj-Napoca, under a common name. Through the efforts of the A.R.P.I.A. association of this great Transylvanian city, which added on its frontispiece the name "Smaranda Brăescu", two years ago, in the Central Cemetery, a suggestive funerary monument was finally built.

*Smaranda Brăescu*



At the same time, the famous aviator was awarded, post-mortem, the title of Honorary Citizen of Cluj-Napoca. Her spirit still roams our lands, completing the collective consciousness of the Romanians who rediscover her spiritually, honoring her memory and recognizing her merits.



In 2022, on the 90<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the incredible leap that took place in Sacramento, Romania completes this huge effort of recognizing the merits and of honoring the memory of our daring aviator and parachutist, by declaring it the Year of Smaranda Brăescu.

The action is a corollary of a vast plan carried out over the past three years by A.R.P.I.A. Cluj, with numerous activities including the editing of this homage magazine you are now reading.

We are convinced that, in another ten years' time, on the Centenary celebration, we will succeed in other actions on a much larger scale, worthy of the scale and dream of unification through courage, love and flight of all continents of the World, such as: including the event on the UNESCO agenda, a tribute flight between Bucharest and Sacramento and many more.

May Smaranda Brăescu's name reverberate to eternity, offering a model of life and struggle to present and future generations, a successful role-model for those who love Romanian aeronautics.

By following it, they will be able to climb up to the wonderful constellation of personalities of the world.



## A LIFE IN THE NAME OF FLYING

**Gl. bg. r. Vasile ȘOMLEA**

A destiny... a chaining of all the things and deeds in our life, something we cannot change, because, according to the legend, the "horses of destiny", once left, do not return and do not step away from their path. Whatever happens to us, it does not mean that our destiny has changed, this is how it was drawn for us from the beginning. We are born and begin to fulfill our destiny, with many or fewer achievements, with ups and downs, with struggles and surrenders, guided by principles that we learn as we go through the years and as we form a vision of the world and life as a whole, adjusting our lives by always learning.

Smaranda Brăescu's "horses of destiny" carried her through a difficult and complicated life, through the turbulent times of the two World Wars, through the times when women were forbidden - explicitly or

unspoken - many rights and freedoms. She tenaciously managed to get through many of life's storms and, by paying a price that few others would be able to pay, she broke through to the other side.





## *Smaranda Brăescu*

Not anywhere else but in a field that was reserved, at that time, almost exclusively to men. She had the strength not to give up even when everything seemed to stand in the way of her dreams.

She struggled with the notion of prejudices of her time, she often overcame the short-sightedness of influential people and the inertia of the authorities, overcame everything and ascended, through everything she did, not only to the heights of heavens, but also into the memory of her people, writing an impressive page in the golden book of Romanian and world aeronautics' history. She loved her country more than anything, she was proud to be a Romanian and wherever her steps towards her winged dream led her, she dedicated all her achievements to her country. She wore with great pride the Romanian ia, the traditional clothing, she was proud of her origins.



Her first steps taken to enroll in a military piloting school were met with refusals. Disappointed, but not defeated, Smaranda Brăescu moves from her native village to Bucharest, where she enrolls in the Fine Arts' Academy courses of ceramics and decorations department and she is hired, according to her biographers, at the Romanian Astra. Years of trials passed, along with tireless requests addressed to those who could facilitate her access to the aviation career. She led a modest life, which she accepted quite

serenely, because what she wanted with all her soul - flying - exceeded her need for comfort and well-being.

After the end of the First World War, the world met a great boom in the aviation industry, doubled by a fierce competition for aviation records. In parallel, a new specialization appeared in this field, which was skydiving. Conceived as a means of rescue from aircrafts unable to fly, the parachute starts to be a new challenge to be conquered for many daredevils. The parachute jump, through its particularly high risk, through its spectacular approach, aroused the public's interest and was more and more often included in the programs of aviation shows. Smaranda Brăescu was also touched by this "bug", or maybe she saw, by approaching this field, the opportunity to take a step closer to the group of aviators where she eagerly wanted to be part of. There are still debates concerning this idea.

It is amazing to think of the enormous risk she serenely took when she began her documentation in the field. As she will always choose in life - and as she has stated publicly on numerous occasions – she took the chosen path with no hesitation or doubt, determined to succeed regardless of the price paid.

Her chance was meeting the German Otto Heinecke, a parachutist and parachute manufacturer. By receiving the acceptance of initiating the parachute jump he promoted - at a skydive school in Germany, where he worked as an instructor, Smaranda begins to gather the money she needed. Out of respect for the truth, it should be noted that as she has often struggled to overcome the obstacles posed by less sensitive and cooperative people, it is equally true that in the many heyday moments of her life, she also managed to find bright, warm, cooperative and generous people around her, people who understood and admired her personality and aspirations. With a lot of effort and the support of certain amazing people, she manages to raise the money for purchasing a Schröder parachute and takes introductory courses under the direct guidance of Heinecke, in Berlin.

On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1928, Smaranda Brăescu performed the first parachute leap from a height of 600 meters. She gets the international patent and begins her fabulous life story that will turn her into a legend. She is the first woman in Romania to obtain a parachute license and skydives from above, under a fragile silk dome.

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1928, she participated in the aviation rally in Băneasa, where she performed the first jump of a woman with a parachute in Romania's history. It was a tandem jump, together with the instructor Otto Heinecke and the American Leslie Irving - another legend in the field, a world known parachute

# Smaranda Brăescu



manufacturer and promoter. The event is making headlines in the magazines of the time.

**Aviația se afirmă**

**MEETINGUL AERIEN DELA BANEASA**

**Avantajul a plăcut. Se poate spune că succesul popular a fost**

**D. IRVINS, parafusat**

**D.-RA BRAESCU, parafusat**

**D. HEINEKE, parafusat**

**8-Caricatură a Smarandei, apărută în ziarul Curentul din 1928 (colecția Bibliotecii Academiei Române) alături de cele ale lui Irvin și Heineke, doi célébri parafusatisti și inventatori din acea vreme. Iată ce scria Curentul despre spectaculoasele lansări ale acestor parafusatisti:**

**"Eri la orele 2 1/2 d.a., a avut loc un mărăc miting aerian, datorită inițiativelor de organizare a Aero-Clubului Regal al României. Acest miting a plăcut. Se poate spune că succesul popular a fost imens: .....**

**De remarcat și excelentul parafusatist română, care a făcut o frumoasă săritură cu parafusat din avionul românesc "Avia", cu o parafusată Heineke de la 600m înălțime. Deasemenea și d. Heineke, inventatorul parafusei cu același nume, a sărit de la 700m. ....**

**De remarcat și excelentul parafusatist Irvin, a cărei parafusat inventată de acesta a fost adoptată în Anglia și Statele Unite, făcând o frumoasă impresie aruncarea sa din avion."**

Short-lived celebrity does not satisfy her. Those who believe that "Miss Brăescu" has fulfilled "a fad" of hers are sorely mistaken. Smaranda is, beyond the discreet, modest, slightly shy appearance, a fierce fighter. To the surprise of many, she proves that she has a competitive spirit to admire.



Brașov, July 21<sup>st</sup> 1929

Convinced that she has enough resources, she asks for support to achieve a national record and - why not? – a European record. She is aware that the simple confirmation of her ability to overcome her fear and to launch herself with a parachute is an ephemeral achievement.

A record brought to her country, on the other hand, means so much more - recognition, formalization, international respect. So she addresses those in the field for support. Not surprisingly, it is not a successful attempt. Parachute launches involve the involvement of an aircraft, expensive devices, consuming resources that are difficult to procure and it can be particularly expensive. The money needed - and perhaps the lack of trust in her talent - are the barriers that will stand in her way.

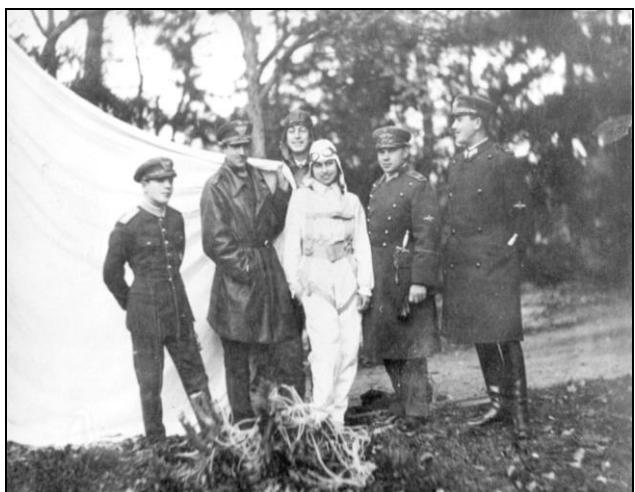
All she gets after long efforts and pressures is being included in the program of rallies and air shows that were periodically organized, and the jumps were being paid from the cashings.

She started a campaign of demonstration jumps in Bucharest, Brașov, Galați, Cluj, Oradea, Iași, Brăila between June of 1929 and June of 1930.



June 30<sup>th</sup> 1929

She seriously challenges her body and so she begins suffering certain injuries, also the emotions of having difficult landings increase, influenced by weather and terrain factors. It should be noted that Smaranda performed the vast majority of the jumps using only one parachute, as she had learned in training with Heinecke. Although it was wide, strong and reliable, the Schröder parachute - which she used almost exclusively in various models - could not be handled. Hanging in suspense, Smaranda was in the mood for drafts and the whimsical wind from the moment the flight unfolded. The distances traveled in the air until the moment of landing were often very large - in relation to the jump altitude - so that the approximation of the contact area was like a lottery.



Cluj, November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1929

On August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1930, in Satu Mare, she performed a jump in good conditions, initially, but the wind began to blow in strong gusts near the ground. The landing was brutal, causing a severe accident with a double leg fracture, a cracked pelvis and some broken ribs. She had to lay in a hospital bed for 6 months without being able to move. This was a time period of bitter thoughts, many worries and high hopes...

In the spring of 1931 she was recovered from the terrible accident, so Smaranda Brăescu resumes training in parallel with the work of convincing the authorities to provide support in making a record attempt. She finally finds an understanding with the commanders of the military aviation.

It is designed for an aircraft capable of reaching a potential record ceiling - the Potez-25 model - and a tailor-made pilot: the famous Alexandru Papană, very skilled with the stick and a top sportsman. There are testimonies from the time related to the fact that Smaranda would have requested the assistance of another elite pilot, Captain Romeo Popescu - with whom, apparently, she was weaving the first threads of a romantic story. But she was training hard at the time to set a new closed-circuit speed record with the IAR-CV 11 domestic production aircraft (unfortunately, the

*Smaranda Brăescu*

man would die at the end of the record attempt, executed in the winter of the same year).



Ready for the leap that brought her the national  
and European record.

On the left,  
the pilot Alexandru Papană

After performing some successful trainings, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1931, three Potez-25 planes take off from Pipera aerodrome, one with Smaranda Brăescu ready for the record and two others carrying the accompanying and the homologation teams.

After an hour of flying, Papană's plane - the only one left able to fly (the other two aircrafts had to land because of technical difficulties) barely exceeded the 4500 m ceiling and climbed, thanks to favorable ascending currents, to 6000 m high.

The pilot and his reckless companion faced quite complicated conditions (hypoxia due to low oxygen concentration, decreased engine power caused by the rarefied air).

At 6000 meters, Smaranda launched into the void and, after 21 minutes and 25 seconds of floating, landed well, recording a drift of over 10 kilometers. She needed 3 hours of rest to recover from that difficult leap. The absolute record was set for Romania and all of Europe, thus marking the first step towards international fame.

*Smaranda Brăescu*



**Sacramento, California, May 19<sup>th</sup> 1932, 24,500 feet,  
a record for both men and women,  
The Tudor Aerodrome, California**

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1931, she left for America, where she began the process of obtaining the necessary approvals and identifying an aircraft from which to execute the attempt to break the absolute world record.



**Smaranda in New York, Roosevelt Field, January 29<sup>th</sup> 1933, with a good friend, Henry Ottinger, after the world absolute record. Photo – Sireteanu family archives**

After several unsuccessful attempts, on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1931, she performed the miraculous leap of her life.

The plane climbs up to 24,000 feet (7,315 m) high and Smaranda Brăescu floats right into history.

After more than 25 minutes, she lands in a field near Sacramento, California. After recalibrating the altitude recorders, the US authorities calculate the official jump height: 6929 m. An absolute world record, 476 meters higher than the world record in force at that time. Romania, through this kind and tenacious daughter of hers, shone on the map of the world.

Also there, in the United States of America, in the months following the establishment of the absolute world record, Smaranda obtains the private pilot license (PPL), her great dream. She participates in aviation rallies in the USA and Canada and has beautiful moments with members of Romanian communities overseas.

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1933, she returned to Bucharest. She is decorated for special merits by King Carol II receiving the Order of the Aeronautical Virtue class Golden Cross with two straps.



**New York, 4 februarie 1933. Carol Tărcăuanu, Lena Madelin Phillips, Smaranda Brăescu și Ruth Nichols**

True to her belief in absolute and notable deeds, she focuses on obtaining financial support to enable her to purchase a raid plane.

An old friend and supporter, the newspaper *Universul* (*The Universal*) of Bucharest - which had already given her a particularly valuable support in her "American adventure" - opens a new public subscription list for fundraising. The Miles Hawke plane, produced in England, is the chosen one. In December of 1935, the money were collected, so she began the process of buying the plane and carrying out the specific training at the manufacturing plant in Reading, UK.

After almost a year, passing through many obstacles and difficulties (she chose to leave England at one point, at the helm of the aircraft, without notifying the authorities who were granting the flight permit), she crosses the English Channel and lands, to the delight of the scandalous press, on French territory. There, after overcoming other unpleasant adventures,



she obtains the necessary documents and funds and takes off in a bold and difficult raid, which will end on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1935 at Băneasa aerodrome.



March 5<sup>th</sup> 1935 on Reading aerodrome of England

With the English plane named "Aurel Vlaicu", wearing majestic tricolor stripes on the planes, the Romanian flag, Smaranda crosses the mountains of the Black Forest, the Central European plain and the Western Carpathians, posthumously paying her homage to the brilliant Vlaicu.

From the series of exceptional achievements we may also note the Bucharest-Tripoli solo raid and return, which she completed between May and June of 1936, with the difficult but courageous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea.



Smaranda Brăescu and her plane – photo published in The Universal newspaper on October 14<sup>th</sup> 1935

In September of 1939, World War II broke out. During this time, Smaranda Brăescu worked as a volunteer instructor at the Parachute Training School / 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion, a structure newly established in

*Smaranda Brăescu*

1941, then she volunteered for the front. She worked in the eastern campaign at 180 Light Transport Squadron, and on the western front, at 113 Liaison Squadron. For the entire activity carried out on the front, she receives the decoration of "Regina Maria" class III Cross.

After the war, her star dims down. In 1946, together with other personalities from the political and cultural life, she signed a letter of protest against the falsification of the elections, addressed to the American Legation.

The Soviet authorities came into the possession of the document and, as a result, all of them were sentenced to 2 years in prison in absentia. She will not submit to this unjust punishment and will hide from relatives and friends, choosing the bitter life of the haunted wanderer.

Her health is now deteriorating rapidly. An unforgivable disease will kill her, despite the surgery performed in Cluj, by the famous specialist professor Iuliu Hațeganu. The last support and the final relief are given to her by the nuns from the Sisters of God's Mother Congregation from Cluj.

It was extinguished somewhere in the vicinity of the Transylvanian capital, in February of 1948. The loan name Maria Popescu will appear on the tombstone in the central cemetery of the city.

Thus, a star died painfully sad and unjust. It was her last leap, inversely executed this time, from the land of all passions, to the sky of all hopes.

In a few and somewhat poor words, this is the life story of a woman who fought exemplary for her dream, for her ideal. She wanted to talk about Romania anywhere in the world. She managed to make people speak admiringly and with well-deserved respect of her country.

She won battles many would have given up, fell and rose each time, stronger and more determined. She had high dreams and hopes and life carried her on tumultuous waves.

She faced many prejudices, always believing "in her star". She knew how to go beyond fear and ignored the word "impossible."

As she wished, she gave her life to the country, a beautiful and glorious life!



*Smaranda Brăescu*



# SMARANDA BRĂESCU

## UNDER THE WING OF A HOMAGEMENT THOUGHT

**Aviation commander r. Vasile ZARZĂRĂ**

I agreed to write these lines at the request of a close comrade, Laurențiu Buzenchi, a talented and passionate helicopter flight, with whom I started my apprenticeship at Alexeni airfield. I did not propose an exhaustive approach to the subject - I shall leave this to historians - but rather want to put into words a thrill of deep admiration and respect for this seemingly frail female character, but characterized by a Sisyphean tenacity, a totally unique woman, which constantly swept between her faith in God and her love for aeronautical performances.

Any individual who passionately embraces the profession of aviator or parachutist intuits a priori that they have chosen a difficult path, on which they will face serious challenges, extreme risks and efforts. Even placed in the context of those early years of aeronautics, Smaranda undoubtedly understood and accepted the specifics of such a completely different destiny.



Smaranda Brăescu, 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 1929, in Brașov, wearing a luminous smile, among 3 other colleagues, somehow foreshadowing her future accomplishments, but also their dramatic cost

From the fierce desire to decipher the magic of floating and the mystery of flight, she was divided between the struggle with the heights and the disputes with those who blocked her access to the sky.

The national poet, the academician Octavian Goga, said in 1932: "Indeed, I know of no devotion to a manifest idea with a purer, bolder, and nobler sacrifice than the heroic deeds of this frail being, who, by

endangering her life so many times, set records in aviation, carrying the fame of our name abroad".

Her longing for the stars was based on the belief that at least one of them will always shine to light her path to success: "I will return only victorious, because I trust my lucky star!" (S.B. before leaving for the USA, 1931).



I reminded the divinity because the two diaries of the heroine are earnestly impregnated with pleas to the Almighty assumed by great faith, by which they invoke divine support in the struggle with the authorities and their representatives, many of them too little sensitive and non-cooperative.

After the end of the World War II and the communist regime's coming to power, orchestrated in Moscow, most of the famous aviators of that phenomenal time in Romanian aeronautics, including Smaranda, were pursued and persecuted, removed from all aviation structures. The "Queen of Sacramento" was further pursued for signing a petition with other personalities to contest the November of 1946 election. She will pay a painful price for her courage.

Surely, if she had survived to the present day, we would see the tenacious woman claiming a place on the waiting lists for space flights, because she would



have kept the same spirited spirit, sprinting between earth and sky.



Smaranda Brăescu with a group of Romanian Theology students, in Rome, February 20<sup>th</sup> 1933, after her return from the United States of America at the beginning of February (photo – Sireteanu family archives)

But since none of what exists is eternal, our heroine no longer lives, and even, paradoxically, there are no essential biographical data, or they are ambiguously offered or even contradictorily rendered by various authors. It is equally true that Smaranda Brăescu's whole life took place under the sign of an overwhelming diversity, mirroring facets and sequences that are difficult to really understand. It would be desolate to accept that the memories of contemporaries were inconclusive, that her coffin was taken to a cemetery, and moreover, that cemetery was not precisely delimited in time and space by the administration, and that the descendants' right to pay an homage to the "bird of Hănești", whenever they feel this urge, was taken away.



A detail of the eagle above Smaranda's head, a symbol of her burning desire for flying (photo – Sireteanu family archives)

*Smaranda Brăescu*

A remarkable human, Smaranda remains the fruit of a very rich Moldavian area that was the birthplace of geniuses and values that went beyond the borders of the country, such as Cantemir, Eminescu, Enescu, Comănești and many, many others. Fighting tirelessly to fulfill her dreams, she proved that there is no fear that is impossible to overcome, she always managed to get closer to the phenomena and laws that govern aeronautics, to understand them and to overcome them. She implemented in the training of air navigation personnel the concept that those who train and prepare you for the future transmit to you only the basic knowledge, and survival depends only on yourself.



Smaranda in Băneasa, 1936, with a group of pilots next to her plane named Aurel Vlaicu (photo – Sireteanu family archives)

We must pay more attention to the lives of the forerunners, to perseveringly and meticulously inventory the drawers and chests of history, to find evidence of the efforts of those who laid the foundation of the nation in all fields, to develop detailed studies in order to bring to light all the values, the traditions, the whole spiritual and material dowry of the nation.



## *Smaranda Brăescu*

The past always tells us who we are, moreover, it also tells us what we could become, and what corrections we could make, depending on what we want to be.

I also think that, for fans of the history of aviation and skydiving that emerged as the aviation domain grew, there is insufficient ground explored regarding the life of this winged sylph, and contextual historical identification would be of great importance for Romanian aeronautics, but also for the international ones.

We lack essential elements from the biography and life of Smaranda Brăescu, in some places there are contradictions regarding the date of birth, death and even the identity of the remains, informations without which we are poorer. Sentenced to two years in prison in absentia and buried in Cluj, under a "loan name", the most widespread Romanian patronymic - Maria Popescu, this Great Lady of Romanian and of world aeronautics would have had another fate in more generous times. She certainly deserved it, and we like to believe that today she would get national funerals, along with the gratitude of the whole nation for everything she has accomplished.



**Smaranda in Constanța, August 15<sup>th</sup> 1936 with mister Vasilie's sister. She wrote about mister Vasilie in her diaries, thanks to the way he helped her along the way (photo – Sireteanu family archives)**

The confessions of contemporaries are not sufficiently found in the archives, and those who dedicated their interest to them, not having sufficient specialized training as historians and not being specialists in aeronautics, failed to completely shape their strong profile of a pioneer in world aviation. Moreover, even her human side, who was Maranda Brăescu with the intimate facts, feelings and decisions still remains insufficiently looked into.

In the absence of solid and unequivocal documentation, this beloved character will long struggle between myth and reality, between fabulous and rational, between heroic and tragic. She



characterized herself superbly, in fiery, meaningful words: "My life means nothing if I keep it only for myself. I give my life to the country, but I want to give it while it's beautiful and glorious". Her whole effort was to bring the country to the light of recognition and appreciation. Constantly oscillating between ecstasy and despair, between satisfaction and desolation, she made an essential contribution to consolidating a national reputation in international aeronautics.

I reverently lay these lines to one of the most prodigious pioneers of the air, a daredevil among other daredevils who, through their achievements and performances, opened a window to the sky that I had long believed to be intangible. Their self-sacrifice, generosity and abnegation traveled through time, and also inspired today's generation of flyers. And certainly those who follow us. We hopefully think that this will be the case for those who raise after us, but this means we have the honor and the duty to watch over the flame of memory.



I am also looking forward to the publication of the book the comrades from ARPIA "Smaranda Brăescu" Cluj promised and I congratulate them in advance for their noble concerns, especially since, with some of them, I floated in the infinite blue, shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, wing to wing.





*Smaranda Brăescu*

# CONQUERING THE UPPER STRATA: THE REMARKABLE STORY OF ROMANIAN SKYDIVER SMARANDA BRĂESCU'S RECORD JUMP NEAR SACRAMENTO, MAY 19, 1932.

A Talk Presented by Gary F. Kurutz, California State Library  
by Horia Ioan Groza

**Gary KURUTZ**



Gary F. Kurutz has served as a Director of the Special Collections Branch of the California State Library in Sacramento since 1980. Kurutz also serves as an Executive Director of the California State Library Foundation. He is chair of the Collections Committee of the California Historical Society, honorary member of the Society of California Pioneers, and a past

president of the Book Club of California and Sacramento Book Collectors' Club. He is an active member of several bibliophilic organizations. Kurutz has received research grants from the Bibliographical Society of America and the Huntington Library.

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On May 19, 1932, L.O. Laughlin, a startled merchant from the rural town of Tudor in Sutter County, rushed out to a wheat field having spotted a parachutist hitting the ground after barely missing a power line. When he got to this aerial daredevil he pulled the person from the folds of the chute and helped the disoriented aeronaut stand up. Much to his astonishment, he quickly discovered that this skydiver was an attractive young woman and that she barely spoke any English. The man from Tudor then assisted her in removing her heavy, protective leather jump suit and discovered another leather suit underneath. Freezing cold and suffering from nausea, Laughlin gently loaded her into his car and escorted the breathless woman over to the Marysville airfield. Drinking some water and taking some deep breaths,

she regained her composure and was able to communicate to a Marysville Appeal Democrat reporter by means of hand writing that she had broken the world's record for parachute jumping having dropped nearly five miles or 24,000 feet. No man or woman had ever jumped that far in a parachute. Moreover, she had drifted over forty miles in her flight. Her pilot, now many miles away, would later prove it with his barometer and altimeter. According to the local press, she was all smiles. She had done it! She was the new champion of the air!



The first Romanian woman pilot and skydiver – Smaranda Brăescu wearing a Romanian traditional costume

Two other accounts written on the same day for the *Oakland Tribune* and *San Francisco Chronicle* give a

## *Smaranda Brăescu*

different version of events. Rather than being helped by Laughlin, this parachute jumper confidently strode into a general store in the town of Tudor, by herself, without having any idea where she was. Wearing an aviation suit and speaking with a heavy foreign accent, she told George Mortell, the store's proprietor, "I just broke the women's parachute record". Pointing to the sky, she further told the thunderstruck storeowner, "I left my pilot 24,000 feet up there". Mortell, in turn, called Mather field in Sacramento to alert authorities of this heavenly arrival.

Who was this modern-day Icarus who had flown over the Sacramento Valley after leaping out of an airplane nearly five miles high? On that historic day, the name of Smaranda Brăescu became famous in the Sacramento Valley and offered hope to all women who entered a field that was traditionally a men's field.

Born in Buciumeni, Romania on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1897, Smaranda was a woman who would not be denied. Seemingly, she was born with a burning desire to conquer the heavens. In 1912, the teenager saw her first airplane fly over her village, and in 1918, she climbed aboard a Farman monoplane, a French aircraft, piloted by Captain Dumitru Naidinescu. Exhilarated by that flight, this young woman had found her calling. Told by her government that women could not fly or enter the military and laughed at by Romanian pilots, she said, "I will prove you wrong!"

Undaunted, she took her ambition and her daring to Germany in 1928 and there she learned to skydive and fly. With some money she borrowed from a teacher, she purchased her first parachute. It was made by the highly respected engineer Otto Heinecke. Bravely, Smaranda made her first jump on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1928, dropping from a height of 600 meters or about 2,000 feet. No doubt, filled with self-confidence and a love for this death-defying aerial sport, she made several more jumps before becoming badly injured from a difficult landing on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1930. (She remained bedridden for six months). Not deterred and completely healed, she resumed jumping, and on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1931, she set a women's world record by free falling from a height of 6,000 meters or 20,700 feet. In doing so, this thirty-four year old stuntwoman became the first Romanian world's record holder in aviation. She beamed with pride and no doubt her chauvinistic male counterparts were now embarrassed! This intrepid queen of the sky became a national hero. King Carol, the reigning monarch of the time, decorated her for her astounding aerial accomplishment. Smaranda, however, had even greater goals.

Possessed with a singular desire to conquer the upper strata, Smaranda learned to fly, became an



accomplished pilot, and even owned two biplanes. She became the first Romanian woman to fly. In 1932, in her Miles Hawk monoplane, this bold Romanian aviatrix established a speed record by crossing the Mediterranean between Rome and Tripoli in six hours and ten minutes. There was no holding back.

Now, a national celebrity, a Romanian newspaper, *The Universal (Universul)* agreed to finance a trip to the United States where she could demonstrate her skill as a skydiver. Breaking the world's record for both sexes was her goal. As she later recalled, "It was succeed or die". And that was literally the truth. At the international air races in Miami she vowed spectators with a 20,000-foot jump. However, several other attempts to break the world's record ended in failure. At the time, the world's record for skydiving was held by an American with a jump of 21,733 feet. While in the eastern U.S., she attended aviation school and obtained an American pilot's license.

Smaranda then came to the San Francisco Bay Area with the hope of achieving her ultimate goal. To accomplish this historic feat, she made arrangements with noted East Bay Flyer Harry Bosshardt to take her aloft. Perhaps with the translation assistance from the Romanian Society of San Francisco, she communicated to the pilot her desire to break the world's skydiving record.



**Smaranda Brăescu near her Miles Hawk monoplane  
(1932)**

One can only imagine Bosshardt's reaction when he heard of this ambitious plan. Seemingly, her pilot was more than willing as this represented a chance to make history. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1932, at 11 o'clock in the morning, they climbed into his powerful Cessna monoplane and took off from the Curtis-Wright Field of Alameda. Knowing of the tremendous altitude they would have to reach, Smaranda wore a double leather flight suit with a leather helmet and goggles. Both had a sixty-pound oxygen tank strapped to their backs.

Because the story is so dramatic, I would like to



*Smaranda Brăescu*

share with the readers the interview that Smaranda gave to the *Oakland Tribune* of May 18<sup>th</sup>, with the assistance of John Peterson, the president of the Romanian Society of San Francisco. Peterson acted as her interpreter as Smaranda could read and write English, but understandably could not easily converse in this foreign language. I also like this interview because it occurred shortly after the event. Smaranda recounted her heroic feat as follows:

"We flew towards Sacramento for half an hour, climbing rapidly all the way. When we got up to 18,000 feet altitude, both the pilot and myself put on our oxygen masks because it was getting difficult to breathe. For three quarters of an hour we fought to gain higher altitude – another five or six thousand feet was our goal. All the way up I had my eyes glued to the altimeter. At last it showed 23,500 feet and I was ready to jump. I signaled to the pilot but he motioned to me to wait, that he thought we could get just a little higher. We did, another 500 feet, which brought [us] to the 24,000-foot mark". [In later interview, she recalled, the pilot yelled, "I can go no higher. My oxygen is gone. Jump!"] "Then I took the oxygen mask from my face, took one last big breath from it and jumped. I shot downward with the speed of a bullet, 3000 feet a minute, I learned later. Before I had time to realize what was happening I got deathly sick. I couldn't breathe, the air was so thin. And the last big breath of oxygen I had taken didn't last me very long. I didn't wear oxygen equipment because of its weight, but I would have given anything to have had it on then.

[I might add here that in an interview done six months later, for the *Brooklyn Eagle*, she recalled another incident during the first seconds of her jump. The journalist wrote: "The goggles she wore over her eyes were clouded with ice the moment she jumped and as quickly as she caught her breath she tore them off. Then the knife-like cold stabbed at her face."]

"Just when I thought I was going to faint, I reached an altitude of about 18,000 feet and began to feel a little better. I wasn't very cold in the air – because I had been so frozen before jumping from the plane that I couldn't get any colder. Then I lost my gloves coming down and my hands turned numb. I could hear the plane circling overhead but I couldn't see it because it was directly over the open parachute. The wind kept carrying me northeast. Then my parachute began to whirl in the wind currents and I got dizzy. I was spinning around like a top. As I drifted nearer the ground I sighted a river and seemed to be heading straight for it. I feared drowning if I landed in the river". [She may have glided over the Feather River.]

"At an altitude of about 1000 feet I pulled the rip cord of my emergency parachute, hoping to slow down

my speed and avoid landing in the water. I shuddered. The next thing I knew I had floated over the river, my feet almost dangling in the water, and landed in an open field." [She also had to dodge some power lines.]

Commenting on the failure of her chute, Smaranda told the Marysville Appeal-Democrat reporter that "American parachutes are not good, German ones are."

By way of emphasis, Smaranda yanked a crumpled mass of silk from the seat of the automobile in which she rode to the Marysville airport, and hurled it from her. Then she held a similar appearing chute aloft, indicating the words, "Heinecke, Germany". She was referring to the German engineer Otto Heinecke. She explained that the American made 'chute had failed to open when she pulled the ripcord. Dropping like a lead weight, she tugged at the ring of the German 'chute and thankfully, it responded.



Sacramento, 1932

Between this, the lack of oxygen, freezing face and hands, and dizziness, it is amazing that she had any control at all and did not die upon impact.

On terra firma, Smaranda Brăescu no doubt wondered what happened to her pilot. Conversely, her pilot thought she had jumped to her death. According to an interview that appeared in the *Oakland Post Enquirer* for May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1932, Bosshart recalled: "I couldn't see her parachute open after signaling her to jump when my altimeter registered 24,000 feet. I

# *Smaranda Brăescu*



watched for her shoot down with terrific speed for the first 8,000 feet. Then I lost sight of her. I returned to Mather Field at Sacramento to replenish my fuel and sought aid to search for her body."

A frantic search was conducted both in the air and on the ground for her remains. Keep in mind that Smaranda had drifted for over forty miles. Happily, George Mortell, the owner of the aforementioned Tudor store, notified Mather Field that Smaranda had safely landed. No doubt, Bosshardt was simultaneously relieved and thrilled that she had survived. He then knew she had set the record.

"Two altimeters in the ship recorded more than 24,000 feet when she jumped", Bosshardt said. "The barograph would show at least that altitude." Most importantly, these instruments would make the record official. Gassed up, Bosshardt then took off for the Marysville airfield to pick up this record-setting Romanian champion skydiver. The two then flew back in triumph to the Alameda Aviation Field. Being a proper lady, the *Oakland Tribune* reporter wrote that "the first thing she did was powder her nose in modern feminine fashion".

Several of the papers also commented about her beauty and that she wore her hair in long braids. With her broad and attractive smile, she charmed the press. A reporter from *San Francisco Chronicle* asked her if she was afraid. Not surprisingly, she replied: "Afraid? Of course not!"

It is interesting though to find both the *Sacramento Bee* and *Sacramento Union* gave scant attention to this death-defying feat. The Oakland and San Francisco papers gave fuller coverage but her remarkable jump did not make headlines. One paper put her record leap on page 3. Why? Looking at the front pages of these newspapers reveals that other aerial events attracted more attention. On the same day, the USS Akron, the great Navy dirigible, flew over downtown Sacramento, and on the east Coast on the morning of May 20<sup>th</sup>, Amelia Earhart took off from Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, on her heroic non-stop solo trans-Atlantic flight.

What became of Smaranda Brăescu after this heart-stopping skydive of 24,000 feet? She spent several months in America, made herself available for newspaper interviews, and had the pleasure of meeting Amelia Earhart.

This Romanian airwoman was also invited to a Canadian air show and thirty airplanes escorted her. By the way, she piloted her own airplane to the event. The *Brooklyn Eagle* observed that this fearless aviatrix did not even have a press agent and was not boastful about her record.

Unlike today, no one thought of lining her up for

commercial endorsements or putting her face on a box of *Wheaties*. However, if we have learned anything about our "air-devil", she was competitive. Smaranda did tell a reporter that if anyone broke her record she would immediately take the skies and jump even higher. For her, it was a cause célèbre. One wonders, too, if she thought of her male counterparts in Romania who earlier laughed at her and called her silly for thinking that she could fly and skydive. She certainly had showed them.

Now an international hero, Smaranda returned to Romania and received another medal from King Carol. Within a few years, however, political darkness descended over Europe in the late 1930s and 1940s in the form of World War II, the Nazis, and the Communist subjugation of her homeland. During the war, she flew many missions. [During 1944-1945 period she was part of the 13<sup>th</sup> squadron, fighting against Germans in Transylvania, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia]. Although a decorated warrior, Smaranda ran afoul of the Soviet puppet regime installed in Romania by Stalin following the collapse of the Nazi terror.

She protested the legality of the 1946 elections to the United Nations that made her country a Russian satellite. Consequently, this war hero had to go underground and she joined a resistance movement against the communist dictatorship. Because of her brave opposition and escaping a prison sentence, she fled to Transylvania and took an assumed name, Maria Popescu.

Sadly, at the young age of fifty-one, our skydiving wonder died of cancer in 1948 and was buried under her assumed name. Amazingly, those who helped her in the resistance and the doctors who ministered to her in her battle against cancer were hounded and jailed by the Soviets. One account has it that the communists desecrated her grave some twenty years later.

However, her memory lives on. This hero of the air and World War II is not forgotten. A street in Bucharest honors her aerial legacy and service to her country. Now, she has been enshrined in the Aerospace Museum of California here in Sacramento.

The next time I see a parachute, I will forever think of our record setting Romanian skydiver. I especially want to thank Joanna Groza for introducing me to Smaranda Brăescu.

It has been a truly precious gift. And I have no doubt that if Smaranda were alive today she would have gone after Felix Baumgartner's 24-mile jump space in 2012.



### A Note on Sources

In preparing this presentation given at the Aerospace Museum of California on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013, I read newspaper accounts of Smaranda's jump in the May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1932 of the following newspapers: *Alameda Times-Star*, *Marysville Appeal-Democrat*, *Oakland Post-Inquirer*, *Oakland Transcript*, *Oakland Tribune*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Sacramento Union*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Washington Post*.

The January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1933 issue of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* gave a later account of her historic jump and her time in America.

It is interesting that the American newspapers gave Smaranda's age as twenty-six when she set the record. However, two biographies of her state that she was born on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1897, which would have made her thirty-five. Profiles of her appear on the Internet.

Also useful is the following: Extract from Biography from E-Book Anthology: *Blouse Roumaine – the Unsung Voices of Romanian Women. Collected and edited by Constatin Roman*, published by the Centre for Romanian Studies.

*Smaranda Brăescu*

Smaranda Brăescu poster displayed at the Aerospace Museum of California

**Smaranda Brăescu**  
May 21, 1897 – February 2, 1948

Smaranda Brăescu (May 21, 1897 – February 2, 1948), a Romanian flight pioneer, became the first woman to break the world record for sky diving from 21,733 feet previously held by an American. In 1930, she also set a record by crossing the Mediterranean Sea between Rome and Tripoli in a Miles M.2 Hawk twin-seat light monoplane (162.5 miles in 3 hours and 10 minutes).

Smaranda was born in 1897 in the town of Govora, County, Romania in a prominent family. She studied at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, graduated, and married and graduated in 1925. In 1926, after attending the Schneider parachuting school in Strasbourg, Germany, she bought a parachute and obtained her parachutist license. She became the first female Romanian parachutist. She also became the first female parachutist in the Balkans, jumping from a height of 19,681 feet. Smaranda was the fourth female parachutist from Bulgaria. The other three women were from France, Czech Republic, and Switzerland.

After World War I, she worked as a substitute teacher in her native village. On August 17, 1929, she was seriously injured and remained bedridden for six months. She decided to break the world record in skydiving because she had nothing else to do. She became the first European woman to break the record. She participated in the International Parachuting Competition in Miami (January 7–9, 1932). She faced the challenge of landing an aircraft both capable of flying higher than 22,000 feet and capable of landing on a small field. She chose the Miles M.2 Hawk, which had a flight capability higher than 22,965 feet. In April 1932, in a Cessna aircraft with a cabin, Smaranda and pilot Harry Stevenson landed at a height of more than 22,965 feet.

On May 19, 1932, Harry and Smaranda took off once again, and this time she performed a solo jump in Orléans, France. According to her own account, she jumped from a height of 24,000 feet and landed in Toulon after 23 minutes of free fall. This record-shattering jump was recorded by Colonel Mullens, a California aeronautic inspector.

After her record-breaking sky dive, Smaranda continued pursuing adventure:

- She was the first European woman to obtain her pilot's license in the U.S.
- She was a friend of Amelia Earhart.
- She was in the medical wing during battles on the Eastern Front in World War II, remaining active until May 12, 1945.
- She was one of the White Guards who formed a plane formation that brought aid and relief of inmates and disabled soldiers from the Eastern Front west to Vienna, during the Battle of Stalingrad. This was all-female formation with ten biplanes across, the only one of its kind in the world.
- She died in 1948 in the Soviet Gulag. She survived a forced landing on Soviet soil when she ran out of fuel.

When the communists took over Romania, she signed a document condemning the November 1945 elections, and was convicted to a two-year prison term. She went missing and is believed to have died on February 2, 1948. Her body was never found. She is buried at the site that she is resting in the Cemetery in Chișinău, under the name Maria Popescu. Today, a street in Bucharest, the Romanian capital, is named after her.

Smaranda Brăescu poster displayed at the Aerospace Museum of California



## SMARANDA BRĂESCU IN THE NATIONAL AND WORLDWIDE PRESS

### Aviation commander r. Laurențiu BUZENCHI

#### Smaranda Brăescu was the first Romanian parachutist.

Smaranda Brăescu was mentioned for the first time in the autumn of 1928. On October 15<sup>th</sup>, *Aripa (Wing)* magazine wrote: "Every time rallies are organized - the program of which usually includes parachute divers - we have to address abroad. From now on we have our paratrooper. Smaranda Brăescu, a student at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, brought us this joy".

Responding to her inner call to rise up to the air, Smaranda Brăescu took her international parachuting patent in Berlin, making Romania the 5<sup>th</sup> country in

Europe to have a female parachutist at the time, after France, the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland.

*UNIVERSUL*, Friday, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935, an article by Ion Dragomir:

"Smaranda Brăescu spent six months at the hospital in Satu Mare to recover from a double fracture of her thigh, another of her pelvic bone, as well as two broken ribs. Every day when she woke up stuck in the plaster bandages, with the white ceiling as a sky and the walls as the horizon, she closed her eyes, swearing to never jump again. As soon as he got out of the hospital, he ran to the train station, stumbling, because he was still limping, and went straight to Berlin. She

*Smaranda Brăescu*

was going to check her parachute and make some changes to use it for new record attempts.

**Lăsați-mă să zbor!**

Este titlul unui nou și senzational reportaj a cărui publicare va începe, în curând, în coloanele ziarului

**UNIVERSUL**

**Lăsați-mă să zbor!**

Este povestea, rând pe rând tragică, eroică, plină de peripeții și de neprevăzut a înimioasei noastre aviațoare

Serisă după date și documente autentice de ION DRAGOMIR reportajul acesta va apărea în curând, ilustrat cu numeroase fotografii în text

**SMARANDA BRAESCU**

12-Fotografie din 1930 publicată în Universul 1935, care anunță serialul de 14 reportaje –interviu, publicate în oct.-nov. 1935 de reporterul Ion Dragomir. Interviurile surprind cu deosebit talent marile realizări ale campioanei în perioada 1928-1935 (colecția Bibliotecii Academiei Române)

When you die, it's forever! When you have to face the air, you can't do without the daze of the heights. You floated above all, eagle or swallow, you felt the coolness of the raging winds, you passed through the clouds that look like piles of immaculate cotton wool or stifling smoke from below, and above are only a formless mass of germinating fog of colds and bronchitis... Then you will continue to fly.



Smaranda Brăescu and Heinicke, a picture from The World Mirror magazine, November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1928



Smaranda Brăescu returned to the country with the idea of trying to break the women's record for parachuting.



Smaranda Brăescu recounting her memories to reporter Ion Dragomir from the newspaper *Universul* (*The Universal*)

The Royal Romanian Aeroclub organized, on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1931, a celebration of the record achieved by Smaranda Brăescu, the first world record brought to Romania.

On the occasion of the reception, His Royal Highness Prince Nicolae handed Smaranda Brăescu the Royal Order of Aeronautical Virtue Cross, awarded by the sovereign after the successful launch with a parachute from 6200 m (source: *Wings* no. 17/ November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1931).

**Aripi**

D-ra Brăescu, se lansează dela 6000 m. altitudine cu parașuta

D-ra Smaranda Brăescu, prima parașutistă română, și o figură foarte cunoscută în cercurile noastre aviatice, a obținut, în ziua de 2 Octombrie, recordul feminin de lansare cu parașuta, aruncându-se dela 6000 m.

Realizarea acestui record era unu din cele mai frumoase visuri ale d-rei Brăescu, care a făcut dovadă unui admirabil foarte rare, — în scop de a se reduce la minimum primejdile coborării în deviere.

Lansarea s-a făcut dintr'un avion Potez, care, pilotat de locot. Papana, a decolat dela Pipera, evoluând apoi deasupra Bărăganului, la 6000 m. altitudine.

Descinderea s-a făcut în bune condiții, parașuta deschizându-se imediat.

D-ra Brăescu, extenuată de lipsă de oxigen, a coborât la 28 km. est de Slobozia, lângă linia ferată. D-sa și-a revenit repede în simfuri.

D-ra Smaranda Brăescu, — cu îndrăneala sa acțiune care merită cele mai călduroase omagii, — a câștigat, pentru România, recordul feminin al lansării cu parașuta.

Revista „Aripi” și aeronautica noastră, în general, îi prezintă călduroase felicitări.

Recordul feminin anterior este de

4200 m., iar recordul pentru parașutistii bărbați este de circa 7000 m.

MAURICE

D-na Smaranda Brăescu



# *Smaranda Brăescu*



**Twice hurt in accidents.** In the summer of 1930 Miss Brăescu had her first mishap, while taking a 5,800 foot leap. Shortly before reaching the ground she was caught in a severe windstorm, and after being violently swung against a tree, breaking her hip bone, she was thrown to the ground on one side, fracturing her leg in two places. A short time after this accident, which needed hospitalization for three months, the daring young woman was injured while landing in a plane, sustaining a broken arm and a fractured collar bone.

She is not interested particularly in clothes, she declares, and has no time at all for parties or dances. „But what about good, young male friends?” The serious blue eyes sparkled for a second, and just she slightest blush tinged Miss Brăescu’s cheeks. “I have many great friends among the officers with whom I fly”, she said, “but no particular special friend. They all warned me, before I left Romania, not to lose my heart in America; but I’m sure there is no danger of that happening, because I will not have the time to think of anything else but my parachute jumping and, possibly, later taking the aviation course”. “Aviation” she added, “is the only thing that really interests me, I hope someday to qualify as a mail pilot and become associated with some commercial firm in Europe”.

Miss Brăescu, who is being entertained by members of the Romanian legation during her visit to Washington, will be staying in the city until the end of this week, then she will leave to Miami.

A sealed barograph used on the plane from which she leaped yesterday will be dispatched to the National Aeronautical Association at Washington D.C., to prove her claim.

Harry Bosshardt, pilot, confirmed Miss Brăescu's statement as to the height of the plane.

Miss Brăescu claimed a previous jump of 22,000 feet at Miami, Florida. Air authorities here said there was no official women's parachute record.

**NEW YORK TIMES, Saturday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1933**

## Romanian Aviatrix Honored Here

Officers of the National Council of Women gave a farewell luncheon yesterday at the Hotel Vanderbilt to Madame Smaranda Brăescu, only woman flier of Romania and holder of the world's parachute altitude record. She will sail on the Conte di Savoia today. Miss Ruth Nichols, aviatrix, and Mister Carol Tarcauanu, Acting Consul General of Romania, spoke briefly.

**NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1933.**

Rumanian Aviatrix Honored Here.  
Officers of the National Council of Women gave a farewell luncheon yesterday at the Hotel Vanderbilt to Mme. Smaranda Brăescu, only woman flier of Rumania and holder of the world's parachute altitude record. She will sail on the Conde di Savoia today. Miss Ruth Nichols, aviatrix, and M. Carol Tarcauanu, Acting Consul General of Rumania, spoke briefly.

**NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1933**

## Rumanian Woman Flier Has Message From Clubs of U. S.

New York City, Feb. 10.—Mile. Smaranda Braescu, Rumania's only woman aviator, sailing for Europe after several months in this country, travels as unofficial envoy for 5,000,000 women in the National Council of Women.

A letter addressed to Prime Minister Alexandru Vaida Voevod of Rumania, urging that the Rumanian government send an official delegation to the world congress of women under council sponsorship in Chicago July 16-22 was entrusted to her at a farewell luncheon in her honor Friday at the Vanderbilt hotel, New York city. A formal invitation of similar character will later be transmitted to the Rumanian and other governments through official channels.

Present at the luncheon was Miss Ruth Nichols, American aviatrix, who made a 3,000-mile goodwill flight for the council last spring. In behalf of American women fliers she wished Mile. Braescu goodspeeds.

Speakers were Miss Lena Madesin Phillips, president of the council, who presented the letter to Mile. Braescu, and M. Carol Tarcauanu, vice consul in charge of the Rumanian consulate.

Miles. Braescu returns to Rumania with an American pilot's license achieved through practice flying in California and New York. She financed her aviation education through parachute jumping and holds the woman's record and the world record for altitude with jumps of 20,000 and 24,000 feet respectively. For the former feat she was decorated by King Carol.

Miss Smaranda Brăescu, Romania's only woman aviator (who gained the pilot license in US – n.n.), sailing for Europe after several months in this country, travels as unofficial envoy for 5,000,000 women in the National Council of Women.

A letter addressed to Prime Minister Alexandru Vaida Voevod of Romania, urging that the Romanian government send an official delegation to the world congress of women under council sponsorship in Chicago, July 16<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, was entrusted to her at a farewell luncheon in her honor on Friday at the Vanderbilt Hotel, New York city.

**THE EVENING STAR, Washington D.C., Friday,  
May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1932**

## RECORD PARACHUTE LEAP FOR WOMEN IS CLAIMED Romanian says she jumped 24,000 feet from place and pilot affirmsfeat

By the Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO, May 20<sup>th</sup> — Miss Smaranda Brăescu, Romanian, claims to have made a parachute jump of 24,000 feet for a world's record for women.

EVENING STAR, WASHINGTON, D. C., FRIDAY, MAY 20, 1932

**RECORD PARACHUTE LEAP  
FOR WOMEN IS CLAIMED**

Romanian Says She Jumped 24,000  
Feet From Plane and Pilot  
Affirms Feat.

By the Associated Press  
SAN FRANCISCO, May 20.—Miss Smaranda Brăescu, Romanian, claims to have made a parachute jump of 24,000 feet for a world's record for women.

A sealed barograph used on the plane from which she leaped yesterday will be dispatched to the National Aeronautical Association at Washington, D.C., to prove her claim.

Harry Bosshardt, pilot, confirmed Miss Brăescu's statement as to the height of the plane.

Miss Brăescu claimed a previous jump of 22,000 feet at Miami, Fla. Air authorities here said there was no official women's parachute record.



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Present at the luncheon was Miss Ruth Nichols, American aviatrix who made a 3,000-mile goodwill flight for the council last spring. In behalf of American women fliers, she wished Miss Brăescu Godspeed.

Speakers were Miss Lena Madesin Phillips, president of the council, who presented the letter to Miss Brăescu, and Mrs. Carol Tarcauanu, vice consul in charge of the Romanian consulate.

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For the former she was decorated by King Carol (*photo*).



*Smaranda Brăescu*

## Plecarea unui nou detașament de voluntari ardeleni pe front

### Manifestații călduroase pentru d. Iuliu Maniu

Ei în orășel 12 s'a desfășurat în Capitală o imponentă manifestație privată de către români pe hînalul din Transilvania a „detasamentului 7 Companie”, fiind partea din regimentul de voluntari „Iuliu Maniu”, comandat de d. maior Dădușeu.

La manifestație — care a avut loc în fața statui lui Mihai Viteazu — a participat și d. Iuliu Maniu, ministru de stat, căruia populația Capitalei adunată în mare număr, i-a făcut o caldă manifestare de afecțiune.

Manifestanții au pornit din str. Dionisie Lupu nr. 65—sediul voluntarilor ardeleni și al redacției „Ardealul”, al cărui director, d. dr. Ionel Anton Murzeșanu, e animatorul și organizatorul acestor detașamente de voluntari—parcursând străzile principale ale orașului, în frunte drapelul detașamentului, urmat de mulțe militari a regimentului de gardă clăre, comandat de d. H. Stănescu.

A fost remarcat un numeros grup de femei voluntare, comandate de prima moștenică femeie parapilotă, Smaranda Brăescu.

#### Jurământul

Ajuns în fața statuii Mihai Viteazu, detașamentul s'a aliniat pe platou, iar muzica militară a intonat Imnul Nașal, după care voluntari au depus jurământul de credință Regelui și Tânărădești în fața Voievodului pentru durată de totală pe câmpul de bătaie, ca prim faptele lor de arme și prim sărbătoare lor să cumnească pe glăstrăbuna, să redescă libertatea fraților și părinților lor subjugăi patru ani în urma diktatului lui Viena.

Seria cuvântărilor a fost deschisă de d. George Togă, care a vorbit despre salvarea refugiaților sub regimul antonescian și opresiunile aceluia regim făcute de toți refugiați, cind apele Ardealului neaducău, prin undele lor turburi de triste, gemetele fraților noștri subterane bandajilor puștei.

„Vom pedepsi toti criminii nemicii ungar, caru au făcut în două trupul Transilvaniei” — a încheiat oratorul.

Voluntarii jură să răslove morimentele martirilor dela Ip, Trăsna, Huedin și Cornești.

Într-o temp soare d. Iuliu Maniu, ur-



Voluntarele pentru Ardeal desfilează sub comanda aviațorului Smaranda Brăescu

mat de d. Corneliu Coposu, muzica militară a intonat marșul lui Iancu.

Publicul a manifestat frenetic, strigând: „Trăsesc Iuliu Maniu!”

#### Cuvântările

A vorbit apoi d. Dumitru Naou, președintele „Asociației refugiaților ardeleni”, lăpuștorul dărăi al cauzelor acestor prigoci, zicând: „Frați voluntari! Ardealul urcă din nou pe creste de jertă pentru nouă întregire a unității noastre politice, pentru libertatea lu-

Lupta și dăruirea voastră pe altarul Transilvanie, vor rupe pentru todeană lanțurile groflorilor latifundari și va asigura o libertate deopotrivă fraților noștri.

Mergeți și vă dați tributul vostru de gâng precum au făcut părinții voștri în 1918”.

D. dr. Ionel Anton Murzeșanu, a arătat atitudinea politică a d-lui Maniu

făcă de fostul regim de rău moșă și venără. Poziția sa făcut de toate acțiunile multile ale războiului din Răsărit — când frații noștri din Transilvania geau în robie — a fost dărăzată.

Cere săncionarea drastică și imediată tuturor foștilor demnități cărăgiți legionari.

Indeemnă voluntari la împăratul neputit cupejătă pentru Ardeal — că Ardealul fost todeanu revolutionar și în fruntea timpuriilor — și lupta lor nu va zădărnică, încheie d. Mureșanu.

#### Manifestația

D. maior Dădușeu repetă din nou ju rământul, după care voluntarii său în coloană îndrepătană-se spre Palatul Regal. Deaco lo au trecut pe Președinte Consiliului de ministri, legătările ruse engleză și americană, de unde său în dreptat spre gară, în uralele de lăzăde publicului.

## WASHINGTON HERALD —

Sunday,  
December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1931

CHAMP — Smaranda Brăescu, Romanian woman champion parachute jumper, as she arrived in the United States to seek new laurels at a Miami air meet.

Her record is a three-and-a-half mile jump.



— International —  
CHAMP — Smaranda Brăescu, Rumanian woman champion parachute jumper, as she arrived in the United States to seek new laurels at a Miami air meet. Her record is a three-and-a-half mile jump.

*Smaranda Brăescu*



## FLASHES IN MĂNDIȚA'S WAKE

**Lt. col. r. Claudiu IORDĂCHESCU**

"Skydiving is so beautiful because it brings you into now and makes you live this moment moment,  
and as long as you are in the present, there is no fear.  
Fear and anxiety are emotions related to the future."  
(Alina Sime)

All love goes through the stages of fire: spark, flame, embers, ashes. Thinking about Smaranda Brăescu's special destiny and how she loved the idea of flying, we can't help but imagine how sad it would have been for the intense flame of her great achievements to have turned to ashes, in time. The miracle airplane once shone in her heart like a diamond in the sky. She was a child when this miracle happened, but her time was fueled by the flame of passion. And from the heart of this flame, for the combustion of which she dedicated all her energy and inner strength, appeared the admirable records that still illuminate his memory.

She went out, crushed by the gear of an unjust and cruel time, returning to the dust from which she had so many times risen to unsuspected heights. But the "embers" of her remarkable personality remained fruitful and from these embers, through all the decades since her passage to eternity, we could and still can happily see new flames igniting, flames that reflect their light into the sky, where Măndița still floats.



Arhiva personală Florica Ioniță

1930. On July 15<sup>th</sup>, at Cotmeana de Argeș, **Florica Ioniță** first saw the light of day. Hit by the idea of flying since adolescence, by pure chance, she was not cured of it for the rest of her life. She was the first woman in Romania, after the end of the Second World War, to obtain a parachute license. She did not have to go to Berlin on loan, like her famous predecessor. In 1950 she graduated from the sports parachuting school in

Chitila, as head of promotion. She was already nicknamed by her instructors "the new Smărăndița". Equally tenacious and dedicated to her passion, she did not stop here. In the same year she obtained the glider pilot's license, graduating from the non-motorized flight school in Iași. By 1952 Florica had already become a pilot in sports aviation (patent obtained in 1951) and a flight instructor (at the flight instructor school in Giulești).

She did not arrive to America, but she "drew" on the sky of the desired country and the bold trajectories. She took part in aviation rallies, raids, performed acrobatics, but also humanitarian flights, to parachute medication or to transport the sick. In 1956, she participated for the first time in a rally that took place in Constanța and flew in formation with two other aviators, Florica Bănciulescu-Slonetchi and Elisabeta Simu. She performed the whole range of aerial acrobatics in her pilot career and she remained faithful to aviation and professionally became employed as an air traffic dispatcher in sports aviation, in the traffic service of sports aviation on Chitila-Giulești Aerodrome „Romeo Popescu”.



ZLIN 22 sports plane. Florica Ioniță flew this type of device

Even if life did not pamper her, reserving many blows and troubles for her, she always knew how to keep the "gyro-horizon" in her flight through life. Serene and still grateful for every moment given by a new day, this first spark born from the flame of



Maranda from Hănești flies smoothly towards the centenary, remembered - which is true, a bit rarely - by contemporaries, but still full of bright memories.

The parachute patent obtained by Florica Ioniță in 1950 represented another petal from the wonderful corolla of the silk flowers opened by the Romanian girls on the dome of the sky. The years have passed and the present delights us with a magnificent bouquet of "celestial Amazons" that bring us fame on all meridians, gaining records of all praise and turning the incredible into the possible, along with other daredevils of infinite blue.

Here are some "sparks" arising from the heat of the longing for heights left behind by the flame of Smaranda Brăescu:



**Andreea Piștea** (b. 1979, Constanța) - dedicated "body and soul" to skydiving at the age of 16, when she started training in the profile section of the Romanian Aeroclub, Constanța branch (Tuzla aerodrome).

Since 2016, she has been practicing skydiving in large groups, which involves ordering jumpers in different arrangements

during the free fall to the ground, followed by a release in the safety limit, a parachute triggering and landing. At the end of 2019 she held 12 FAI world records (approved by the International Aeronautical Federation) and 5 European records in the team jump.



First world record: in 2014 - 2-point sequential team, made by 117 women parachutists ("sequential" means that all paratroopers launch, making the first team, after which at least 35% of participants must separate and "connect" in another area of the fall corridor to achieve a distinct formation). In October of 2019 she was part of the team that set a new world

*Smaranda Brăescu*

record in the US, when 130 people were caught in a free fall over California, then completely separated and regrouped in completely new positions, within the same flight sequence (at an approximate speed of 180 km per hour!). She is recalling the moments from her adolescence when she dedicated all her free time to parachute jumping, to different aeroclubs in the country: "In the summer, in order for my father to bring me home, he no longer sent me money. And you took it as long as you could, but in the end you still had to come back home. And he sent me, as a very wise man that he was and is, exactly the money for a train ticket and a juice, no more, because he knew it was a big risk for me not to come back or to postpone the moment".

**Cornelia Mihai** (b. 1985, Ploiești). She started parachuting training at the age of 19, on the aerodrome from Strejnic, within the Ploiești Aeroclub. The first jump leaves her heart hanging permanently up in the vault: "It may seem like a cliché, but the feeling is incredible, it's like riding on air waves. It's painfully beautiful up there. Those were my moments of absolution" (Cornelia Mihai interviewed by Adrian Cîțan - [www.avantaje.ro](http://www.avantaje.ro)). She clearly and undoubtedly knows what she wants and will follow her dream across countries and seas. She became a skydiving instructor at the Skydive Club in Empuriabrava, Spain, in 2011.



She became a legend in the world of extreme skydiving, with over 14,000 jumps achieved by 2020.



*Marina Tomașescu*

She is the first woman in the world to win medals at a World Championship in Canopy Piloting (parachute piloting, a new and extremely spectacular discipline in which skydivers evolve close to ground level, above water), and also the first woman to win the American National Championship, she holds multiple women's world records in distance and speed and is always in the top of those who attack world records generally. "I always preferred to regret trying something, rather than living with the regret that I never tried."

**Alina Sime** (b. 1988, Oradea) - is a safety and training advisor at TNT Brothers and skydiving instructor. She is also a skydiving examiner for the Romanian Aeroclub, an authority delegated in the field of skydiving by the Romanian Civil Aeronautical Authority.

She is the only female AFF (accelerated freefall) instructor in Romania. AFF courses are mandatory for paratroopers who want to participate in large free fall formations.



"As a child, I dreamed of being an astronaut and flying, of seeing the world from above and, why not, other worlds. Realizing that I would fly into space a few times, I began to look for other ways to fly more often. That's how I found out about skydiving, in a train talk between two military paratroopers.

That's when the flame ignited and I started searching for a way to do that as well. I was a child dreaming big, and when you really want something, the doors open for you."

2007 is the year of the first parachute jump, static line (automatic opening, after launch). Personal jump height record: 6500 meters. Over 2000 active jumps, involved in the 4-way techniques (coordinated jumps with falling dynamics, performed by a group of 4 parachutists).

Memorable leaps that she always enjoys remembering:



"... the largest formation of girls in southeastern Europe, on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Serbian army, Romania's record for the largest formation, to see an active volcano in free fall, the jump from a military aircraft over 6500 m high, the helicopter jump with the landing on the ski slope, our first kiss with my husband (who was also in free fall), the jump in the mountains of Austria, when we were still in free fall and the mountains were above us, the first high jump with my best friends, the last jump in the skydiving championship that I won with my team, my jump with the number 2000, in which I wrote with my colleagues the name ALINA in the sky "(interviewed by Adriana Moscu, [www.alistmagazine.ro](http://www.alistmagazine.ro)).



We conclude a long and honorable list of Romanians in love with aeronautics and the special feelings generated by parachuting, in particular. From the bird-eye view of the past, to the girls of today's Romania, the sky remains an irresistible window that the brave can open countless times only to return to earth more serene, free and strong.

Our country, according to an official statistic published in 2016, had an average of 18% women out of the total number of patented paratroopers, given that the international average was about 13%. And the process is clearly evolving!

Every year, more and more "Smärändita"-like women embrace the sky, proving that the flame lit by the good yet stubborn girl, with deep eyes and long tails cannot be put out.

And so it must remain!





*Smaranda Brăescu*

## "THIS WAS POSSIBLE!"

### Aviation commander r. Laurențiu BUZENCHI



On the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the two world parachute jumping records set by Smaranda Brăescu - the famous Queen of the Air, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1931 in the Bărăgan Plain (6000 m), respectively on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1932 in Sacramento, California - USA (7233 m), the Romanian Association for Propaganda and History of Aeronautics „Smaranda Brăescu” Cluj wanted to publish this book.

The book launch was made possible by the extraordinary kindness of Prof. Dr. Tudor Sireteanu, corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, who gave us full access to the documentary materials of the book written together with his sister, the late Ana Maria Sireteanu, grandchildren of the heroine - *The diary of the famous Smaranda Brăescu* and my wonderful friend Prof. Dr. Mircea Goga, former professor at the Sorbonne and a nephew of the great patriot, poet and politician Octavian Goga, who, with a generosity little encountered today, made available for

us a relevant episode of his book about his mother, Elena Ilie Goga, a friend and confidant of Smaranda Brăescu, supported us in everything we did and helped us in the competent evaluation and finishing of this book. An angel on earth!

The central depository of the Military Archives from Pitești and the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs deserve our thanks for providing us with unique documents from the life and activity of the "Queen of the Air".

Mr. aviation commander rtr. Gelu Vartic, a renowned military writer, researcher, historian and journalist, made available for us with great generosity the journalistic series in XIV episodes, published in the newspaper *Universul (The Universal)*, written by Ion Dragomir under the title "*Smaranda Brăescu: Let me fly!*", a title that inspired us.

I used photos from the personal collections of Mr. aviation commander rtr. George-Paul Sandachi, my long-time military school colleague with spectacular results, director of the National Museum of Romanian Aviation, to whom I am deeply grateful!

The late aviation historian Prof. Tudor Vasile provided me with the entire collection of the *ARIPA (The Wing)* magazine, edited by the Romanian Association for Aviation Propaganda (A.R.P.A.), borrowed by him from the Central Depot of the Military Archives in Pitești.

All this information was "filtered" and written by my friend Claudiu-Nicolae Iordăchescu and read by Col. rtr. Iulian Patca - famous journalist, publicist and writer, and their combined work generated the final form of the book, which we are now able to offer to the readers. We sincerely hope that the literary expression, the approach and the selection of documents and images included in this book will provide a pleasant, interesting and relevant experience. Special thanks for your effort!

In the same note, I would like to thank "my brother" Col. eng. r. Mircea Grava, the one who designed and made the cover design (which delighted me from the project stage), but also the banners, diplomas, medals and everything that involves the web design used by our association in the last five years! I have no words to express the height of his involvement, a very discreet one, by the way, please receive my whole affection and gratitude!

I want to make a special mention about the Romanian Community from California - USA, the

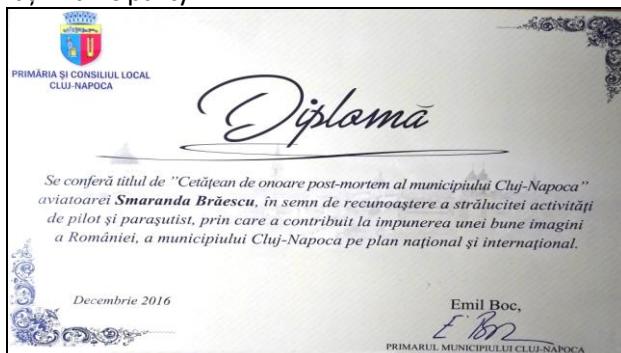
# *Smaranda Brăescu*

Romanian-American Academy of Arts and Sciences, through the distinguished Mrs. Prof. Dr. Ileana Costea, interim president and Mr. Eng. r. Nicholas Suciu together with whom we joined our efforts to celebrate Smaranda Brăescu on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021, through an international online event organized right at the place where our heroine achieved her most important record. The news of this event, through the care of Mrs. Ileana Costea, reached online magazines in the USA, Romania, Canada and Australia. In May of 2022 we will celebrate together the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this spectacular achievement.

I am deeply grateful to those who offered us the financial support without which this book would have remained only a manuscript: Mr. Ion Sterian, general manager of SNTGN "Transgaz" SA Mediaș - our main sponsor and eng. Claudiu Bâlc, through his company "Trezoreria documentelor" (*Treasury of Documents*), which, with admirable generosity, offered us a consistent amount of money, giving us hope.

I can't conclude these words without thanking my wife, Col. r. Daniela-Nicoleta Buzenchi, who was with me in the art of "deciphering" the articles, countless documents; when my eyes were dry, she warned me to continue documenting and writing this book. It was hard, but it would have been an impossible task without her!

After an extensive discussion in the Board of Directors of ARPIA Cluj, we took the decision to launch a national campaign to recognize the "Queen of the Air" Smaranda Brăescu, taking steps towards obtaining the title of "Post Mortem Honorary Citizen" of Cluj-Napoca and Galați, as well as the Emblem of Honor of Iași municipality.



We supported our colleagues from Tecuci and Bârlad with the necessary documentation to obtain the title of "Honorary Citizen".

I also received a refusal from Satu Mare City Hall, where Smaranda Brăescu suffered a terrible accident at an air rally, being forced to stay in hospital for six months and another three months recovering; they explained to us that the heroine's activity is not relevant for them...



Smaranda Brăescu' bust in the town of Bârlad



Monuments from the village she was born in, Buciumeni



Anniversary medal made by  
ARPIA „SMARANDA BRĂESCU” CLUJ  
Design by col. ing. Mircea Grava



## 53<sup>rd</sup> BATTALION COMMANDO „SMARANDA BRĂESCU” BACĂU

The battalion was founded in 1990, and on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1996 it gained the award of the battle flag and the honorary name of "Smaranda Brăescu". Since December of 2009 it has been included in the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Regiment.



ROMFILATELIA 2021

## IN MEMORIAM



In 2017, ARPIA Cluj, with the direct support of Cluj-Napoca City Hall, obtained a City Planning Certificate for the construction of a monument dedicated to Smaranda Brăescu, finding a place that could be used, near the place where she was buried, near the alley that crosses the second parcel of the cemetery.

*Smaranda Brăescu*

Prof. Dr. Arch. Romulus Zamfir, at that time still the dean of the Architecture University of the Technical University of Cluj, added to the collection of works he built an architectural masterpiece.



He designed a small sanctuary on a platform, with two flexible but firm curbs that lead to the monument consisting of two sections of black basalt: the lower one contains a photo of her and the main information of the achievement of Smaranda Brăescu, absolute record holder in parachute jumping in 1932 in Sacramento - California and the upper one, more slender, separated by a circular slit, represents the sacred, with a cross built in bas-relief.





## EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

Cdr. av. r. Laurențiu BUZENCHI – coordinator  
Lt. col. r. Claudiu IORDĂCHESCU – editor

First cover: Col. ing. r. Mircea Ștefan GRAVA  
Second cover: Andreia E. BREAZ

## PHOTO SOURCES

„Ferdinand I” National Military Museum  
National Museum of Romanian Aviation  
Personal collection of professor Tudor Vasile  
Personal collection of cdr. av. r. Paul Sandachi  
Personal collection of cdr. av. r. Gelu Vartic

The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Archive - Washington DC, S.U.A.



## The BOOK AND the ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE were published with support from

