



by Thomas Seiterich
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Non-Fiction

Last Paths to Freedom. French girl guides in resistance to Nazi Germany

Letzte Wege in die Freiheit: sechs Pfadfinderinnen im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus

review

A thrilling historical account of the 'Équipe Pur-Sang' resistance group, 'Last Paths to Freedom' tells the story of six girl guides in Nazi-occupied Alsace, who risked their lives to save hundreds of prisoners and refugees from German persecution in the Second World War.

Seiterich focuses on a hitherto unresearched footnote in the history of Nazi Germany and occupied France. Aged between seventeen and twenty-seven, the six members of the self-styled 'Équipe Pur-Sang' used a variety of different escape routes, westward across the Vosges mountains, or southwards into Switzerland, finding new routes whenever their current ones were compromised by increased Nazi surveillance. Between 1940 and 1942, they built a large network of secret helpers, including inn-keepers, church workers, shopkeepers and office staff. These people were in turn assisted by the local populace who turned a blind eye to the resistance fighters' activities, indirectly enabling them to escape the attention of the occupying forces. Before their capture by the Gestapo in the spring of 1942

(they initially received the death sentence, but ultimately survived), the women are thought to have helped around 500 people to escape the clutches of the Nazis.

The book is divided into short, easily digestible chapters, each building on the tense atmosphere of its predecessor. The author's concise, journalistic style carries the action along like a thrilling narrative rather than a purely academic history. It is worth noting, however, that the book is underpinned by thorough historical research, including interviews with participants in the events described, and the relatives of those who have died.

Alongside more scholarly historians, 'Last Paths to Freedom' will appeal to those with a general interest in the history of the Second World War, Nazi Germany and its occupied territories, and the resistance movement. Though many books, both non-fiction and fiction, have been devoted to the French resistance, this is the first to focus on this group of young Alsatian resistance fighters. It is a real-life story of death-defying courage and humanity in the face of barbarous persecution and its lucid, concise and uncomplicated style is reminiscent of Thomas Keneally's Schindler's Ark.

Find out more:

<https://www.hirzel.de/letzte-wege-in-die-freiheit/9783777631912>

press quotes

Anyone who reads 'Last Paths to Freedom' will find themselves asking why no film has yet been made about these courageous young girls and women; why the Franco-German Youth Office and the International Union of Guides and Scouts of Europe haven't found a joint 'path to remembrance' yet.

Michael Blume, Spektrum.de

The help provided by the six women, Christians and girl guides, was a simply incredible achievement. They walked in constant fear, with fugitives in tow, over mountains, through valleys and forests and meadows – until they reached safer ground. It is crucial that their story be remembered; in these present times, we should all take to heart their love for their fellow humans. To help us work towards a future where there is no room for hatred.

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about the author



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Thomas Seiterich studied History, Sociology and Theology in Freiburg, Jerusalem and Frankfurt. He wrote his doctorate, 'Left-Wing, Free and Catholic' on Walter Dirks, the great publicist and editor of the Frankfurter Hefte. Seiterich edited the critical left-wing Christian magazine Publik Forum from 1980 to 2020. He has authored and edited numerous books. Today he lives and writes in Ulm.

Previous works: Und vergib uns unsere Schulden, publik-forum (2006), Taizé – Den Geist Gottes atmen und leben, publik-forum (2004), Links, frei und katholisch – Walter

Dirks: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des
Katholizismus der Weimarer Republik, Peter
Lang (1989).