



Seven Men of Gascony

R.F. Delderfield

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Comrades and heroes, the seven warriors slog through the swirl and tumult of the Napoleonic Wars, fighting for their lives across Europe, until they confront their destiny at Waterloo. This stirring saga is drawn from true stories left behind by the soldiers of the First Empire, a dramatic tale of triumph and defeat.

Seven Men of Gascony Details

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Author : R.F. Delderfield

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From Reader Review Seven Men of Gascony for online ebook

Dwer says

Historical novel of soldiers in Napoleonic France

'Aussie Rick' says

This has been the first novel that I have read for many years and what a delight it was to read. Although this book was first published in 1949 it still offers anyone interested in the Napoleonic Wars an engrossing story of men at war.

The author provides the reader with a great story of seven French *Voltiguers* (elite skirmishers and/or marksmen) fighting during the campaigns of the Empire under Napoleon from the battle of Aspern to the final showdown at Waterloo.

We trudge through cannonades and cavalry charges, hot dusty treks into Spain and Portugal and into the Winter of Russia before the final campaigns and battles of 1813, 1814 and 1815. Although the battle scenes are not in-depth accounts the author provides enough for the reader to get a feel for the heat of battle

I found myself rushing through the book to find out what happened to my brave *Voltiguers* and actually felt a touch of sadness at the end of the story for the fate of these brave men.

Julian Blatchley says

Another re-read... this is a book I read as a teenager, and together with Hornblower it was instrumental in igniting my interest in the Napoleonic Wars.

Well written in a plain, clean English, this is a well-crafted story which flows freely, carrying the reader effortlessly across Europe and back, from Portugal to Moscow and Devon to Vienna, following the fortunes of a file of French soldiers. The opening is a flashback scene which is as compelling a beginning to a book as any I know, and from there the book is off like a steeplechase.

I really would find it hard to criticise this book. The tale is absorbing, the characters beautifully crafted, the historical detail convincing. And if your taste does not run to war stories, don't avoid this book... the story is far more human than action.

For me, this is Delderfield's best book. I have enjoyed some of his chronicles, but this is a smashing yarn in a higher league.

Art says

I read this book during Reforger 1984 while travelling in a Duece & 1/2 on some of the same roads as the story.

The book was in a collection donated by the library for us to read in the Contonment areas before we went out for the Exercise.

I was facinated by this book.

I found it an interesting look at the French Army Under Napoleon.

Recommend it to anyone.

Ian Rees says

A superb story that ranges across the breadth of the Napoleonic wars with seven principal characters, through victory and defeat. What makes it more interesting is that it is written about French soldiers, so gives a different perspective to the ones we are now used to (ie British riflemen, etc)

Steve Cox says

I read this book ages ago and reread it recently. I was entirely caught up in the life and death struggle of the close-knit unit of French soldiers fighting for Napoleon all over Europe. The characters were very believable and the dramatic events were equalled by the mundane choices and chances that affected the men.

I liked the ending where the narrator runs along the rough track to catch his comrades trundling along in the back of the wagon. I could read such books forever.

Betsy says

A good read about 7 men who fought for Napoleon during the years 1809-1815. The early part of the book introduces the men, and some of the individuals who affect their lives. Frankly, I was not as interested in the early part because of the romantic aspects of the story.

On various battlefields, we learn of the fate of these men, their ties to each other, and their endurance during the years when glory slipped away from France. Delderfield includes many of the great names of Napoleonic fame, showing them as men and not just titles, but the seven men of Gascony are the story, not Napoleon or his marshals.

Chrisl says

11/3/17 - Cold and wet outside. Goodreads weather

The way Delderfield begins his first novel evokes the start a Shute story ... a provincial priest asking a maimed man to write a war story. (" ... others had been discouraged by the veteran's incivility.")

Quotes from Prologue

"I don't know why I ever told you anything,' he said. 'It wasn't because you were a priest. Priests were never of much account in the old days. We didn't see one from one campaign to another. I'm not in the habit of talking about the past. My wife and I made a pact the night of Waterloo.'

"What sort of pact?"

"A pact to forget the past. It was our only chance.'

...

"The priest let his imagination wander to Paris for a moment. He saw the silent throng lining the snow-covered streets to watch the funeral procession move towards the fantastic tomb they had prepared at the Invalides. He heard the slow, mournful strains of the bands, the shuffle of the plumed horses that pulled the funeral carriage, the creak of the carriage wheels along the precise lines of the procession. He had never seen Napoleon and ... He looked at the veteran with a new interest. It gave him a pleasant shock to realize that the gaunt, nondescript man standing on the hearthrug had marched with the Emperor across the Danube plains and through the icy pine forests from Moscow to the Niemen. Great names, already part of a great legend, were as familiar to this man ...

"The priest stood up and shook out the folds of his cloak. He felt slightly piqued.

"I'll call in again tomorrow,' he said, and quietly left the room.

"The veteran sat motionless ... Then he crossed over to his bed and, stooping, dragged a hair trunk from beneath it; he groped in the interior for some large clothbound manuscript books that lay submerged among the jumble of creased clothes and papers. ..."

Quotes from chapter one, where Gabriel is the first character introduced

"Gabriel was an odd, dreamy young man, who had a local reputation for excessive amiability but seemed to lack ambition. ... At the time of his aunt's death he was thought to be twenty years of age, and all the lads of eighteen had been called." ...

"He was known to read a good deal and had been a promising pupil at the school of the ex-priest Crichot. He and Crichot still remained on terms of pleasant intimacy, and an excellent crayon sketch of the latter, done by Gabriel during school-hours, continued to hang over Crichot's chimney-piece long after Gabriel had been forgotten in the Agen district." ...

"... His shyness had been accentuated by the circumstances of his life, spent mostly alone with the eccentric old woman who passed him off as her nephew. Nobody in Agen believed in this relationship; some suspected Gabriel of being ...

"Gabriel felt that he needed advice, and the only place he could seek it was at the house of the ex-priest Crichot, his school-master. He put the letter in his pocket, locked the bakery door and went out. ...

"Crichot knew all about Aunt Marie's letter. He read the statement ...

"Crichot glanced at the sketch over the mantelshelf and then at Gabriel.

"Do you want to become a painter?' he asked. ...

"Has it occurred to you why you have never been conscripted into the army, Gabriel?' ...

"'Father,' he said at last, 'would you say that I was a good painter?'

"'I would say that you could become one,' replied Crichton, glancing once more at his own portrait above the chimney-piece.

"'What is required to improve myself? Practice?'

"'Practice, yes,' said the old man, 'but suffering too. Suffering is more important than practice.'

"The young man smiled.

"'Then I will go!' he announced, rising.

"'Go where? To sea, to the Americas, to the Orient to beg your bread?'

"'To fight for it,' said Gabriel.

"'As a young fool with an untrained paint-brush, you might do a good deal worse,' he said."

"

Among my long-time all-time favorites. Once again, the section devoted to the retreat from Moscow produces vivid images on the brutal insanity of war.

This is one of those books that Goodreads lists as first published in the 1970s. It was actually written in the late 1940s.

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Caveat -- what follows is a Spoiler review copied and pasted from KIRKUS REVIEW

"A 1949 novel set in the period of the Napoleonic Wars, which the late author published in the salad days of the mainly masculine-oriented historical novels (Kenneth Roberts, Nordhoff & Hall) before the thrust of the bosom superseded that of the bayonet. This is the familiar tale, utilized ad infinitum in WW II movies, of how a small close-knit group of infantrymen--in this case a section of seven French ""voltigers""--fight a long series of battles and die one by one, leaving a sole survivor. There's both a sneaking admiration for the noble endurance of men who fight on and on, and a passing recognition of the futility of wars staged by idols like Napoleon. The deaths match personalities: the best-liked member, a Jew, is crucified; the intellectual is shot by a firing squad for desertion; the gentle horse lover dies protecting his mount; and the grizzled sergeant dies in a last battle, while an enemy scavenger swipes the Medal of Honor from his corpse. And through it all--from the Danube to Moscow and back, a period of imprisonment in England, then gradual decimation--the caniniere Nicholette appears with her ""canteen,"" weds three times and is widowed twice. At the close, the old survivor has a dying dream of his comrades in Nicholette's wagon welcoming him aboard. You'll hate yourself in the morning, but Delderfield knew how to spring that sudsy tear. An old hat which wears well.

Matimate says

I was browsing through Amazon and searching for some interesting novel about Napoleonic wars. I stepped upon Seven Men of Gascony and it was the right choice. I was little bit fed up with all Sharpes and English victorious army. It was time to look at the other side. This novel follows seven French voltigeurs (skirmishers) through the later years of the Napoleonic wars and made it from glorious days to utter destruction of the Great Army. The characters are constantly developing through the book and grew. There is no flatness or schematic character. Even minor characters had their own short development. The death is gruesome and there is no victorious parade or speech. The novel touches the common soldiers and there is no flashy officer in it as main character. Just plain privates and one sergeant who were moving through the battlefield. Author made good research and he is very accurate. The very naturalistic was the description of the Russian campaign. I have still cold feeling running over my spine. I think this book belongs to those I will reread sometimes.

Nancy Ellis says

An amazing view of the final years of the Napoleonic Wars through the eyes of a group of seven French sharpshooters. We follow them from the miserable Portuguese campaign, through their captivity when transported to England, their escape to rejoin the army in time for the disastrous Russian campaign, and then to the very end. I had never read a story of this time written from the French viewpoint, so it was a very interesting change of perspective. Delderfield, of course, was a master!

Jim says

Even though this way, way outside my preferred genre of Sci-Fi. when I was in HS, I enjoyed reading it very much. It is very well written and makes one feel as if you are really in Napoleons army.

John says

This is one of my favorite books ever!!!! The story of Napoleon's retreat from Russia.

Retta says

I couldn't finish as it was such a harshly realistic view of what it was like to be a foot soldier in Napoleon's army during his last campaign that ended at Waterloo.
