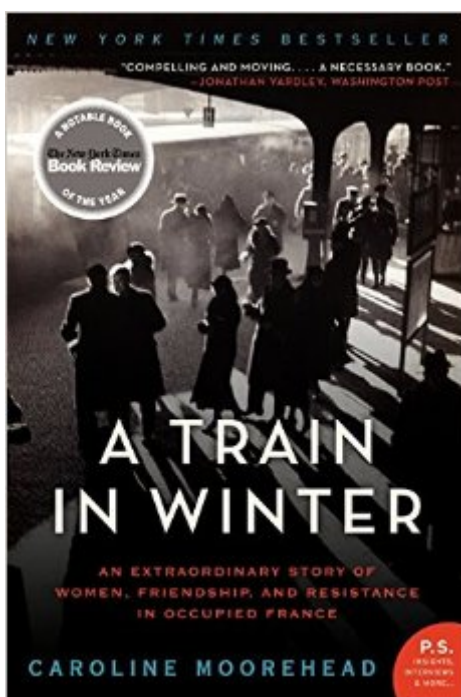


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A Train In Winter: An Extraordinary Story Of Women, Friendship, And Resistance In Occupied France (The Resistance Trilogy)



Synopsis

The New York Times bestseller, now available in paperback "the riveting and little-known story of a group of female members of the French resistance who were deported together to Auschwitz, a remarkable number of whom survived. In January 1943, 230 women of the French Resistance were sent to the death camps by the Nazis who had invaded and occupied their country. This is their story, told in full for the first time" a searing and unforgettable chronicle of terror, courage, defiance, survival, and the power of friendship. Caroline Moorehead, a distinguished biographer, human rights journalist, and the author of *Dancing to the Precipice* and *Human Cargo*, brings to life an extraordinary story that readers of Mitchell Zuckoff's *Lost in Shangri-La*, Erik Larson's *In the Garden of Beasts*, and Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken* will find an essential addition to our retelling of the history of World War II "a riveting, rediscovered story of courageous women who sacrificed everything to combat the march of evil across the world.

Book Information

Series: The Resistance Trilogy (Book 1)

Paperback: 374 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial (October 23, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0061650714

ISBN-13: 978-0061650710

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars See all reviews (392 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #49,751 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #69 in Books > History > Europe > France #134 in Books > History > World > Jewish > Holocaust #214 in Books > History > World > Women in History

Customer Reviews

This is the story of the "31,000 Convoi," a reference to the numerical series tattooed on the arms of 230 French women who arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau in January, 1942. These women were of all ages from 17 to 67 and from all walks of life and villages and cities all over France. All had been arrested for actions detrimental to the Nazi occupiers or the Vichy government. Many were members of organized resistance groups, but some made spontaneous gestures as minor as writing a pro-British slogan on a wall, and some never knew why they'd been arrested. The women

were held for months in a French prison, where they formed a tight bond, before they were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and put on a detail that promised extermination by work. After just two and a half months, 150 of their number were dead from cold, exhaustion, beatings, selection to the gas chambers and, most often, from dysentery and typhus. But then a form of luck kicked in. Spring arrived, some of the 80 surviving women were sent on an easier work detail and the rest were moved to Ravensbruck which, while brutal, was not designed to be an extermination camp. These breaks meant that the appalling death rate slackened, and 49 of the women survived until liberation two years later. Author Moorehead spends the first half of the book identifying the women and describing the events that led to their arrests. With so many people and events being described, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by detail and not get a strong sense of them as people. This changes once the story moves onto the women's imprisonment. With the women all together, the focus changes to their personalities and relationships with each other.

The horrors of the Holocaust have been documented with minute details. The Nazi domination of Europe required the killing of all lesser peoples, those who would pollute the Master Race. The Jews and the Roma of Europe were two of the first groups to be hounded and rounded up by the Gestapo and the SS. The Jews were to be destroyed because they were Jewish, the Roma and the people of the countries of eastern Europe were to be killed or were to become slaves in order to provide Lebensraum for the spread of the Master Race. With both groups, the Nazi machine was successful. Far less has been written about the people of western Europe, the people of the occupied countries who also had much to fear from the various branches of the Nazi propaganda machine. *A TRAIN IN WINTER* is the extraordinary story of a group of French women who were imprisoned and then transferred to Auschwitz because they published leaflets encouraging Parisians not to cooperate with the occupiers. Europe was not a peaceful place from 1918 until the invasion of Poland in 1939, the event that began World War II. A brutal civil war was fought in Spain from July 1936 and April, 1939. The Nationalists were led by General Francisco Franco and its adherents were referred to as Francoists or Fascists. They were vehemently anti-communist. Franco's Fascists won the support of the Italians and the Germans who adopted the term "fascism" to denote a form of government in which country was more important than any individual, group, or guaranteed liberty. Millions of Spaniards were killed on each side and as Franco and the Fascists emerged as the victors, Spanish communists went to France to get support for their group.

I know that Caroline Moorehead can write an incredibly compelling book -- I've read her bio of Lucie

de la Tour du Pin, *Dancing to the Precipice: Lucy de la Tour du Pin and the French Revolution*, one of those rare 5-star-plus books. But in that book, Moorehead's challenge was to tell the story of an era through the life of a single woman; in this book, she's tackling something altogether trickier, the saga of 230 women of very diverse background and experiences, brought together by their work for (different branches of) the French Resistance during the Nazi occupation, their subsequent deportation to Auschwitz and beyond. Her decision to try to do justice to each of those women may be laudable, but it makes the book a choppy and unfocused narrative. Don't misunderstand me. Moorehead does a superlative job of capturing the details of each woman's resistance activities, the prison environment in which they meet and their traumatic experiences in the death camps of Nazi Germany. It's a heartbreaking reminder of what happens when human beings lose their humanity and treat other humans as they might some kind of insect life. The book packs an emotional wallop. But it was too often a frustrating book to read. Packing the basic details of the lives of even several dozen of the 230 deportees (only 49 of whom would survive) is still a challenge to a writer trying to craft a compelling narrative. As Moorehead points out, some were workers, some ran bars, some were typographers, others were intellectuals. Some had been very active in the resistance; one woman had simply written a letter to her brother hoping for an end to Nazi rule.

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