Moondrop to Gascony

Anne-Marie Walters
Foreword: Professor M R D Foot, CBE
Introduction, postscript & notes: David Hewson

The account of an SOE agent working in southwest France in 1944, republished in a new, enhanced edition.

Anne-Marie Walters was just 20 years old when she parachuted into southwest France on a cold, moonlit night in January 1944 to work with the Resistance in preparation for the long-awaited Allied invasion. The daughter of a British father and a French mother, she was being sent to act as a courier for George Starr, head of the WHEELWRIGHT circuit of SOE. Over the next seven months Anne-Marie criss-crossed the region, carrying messages, delivering explosives, arranging the escape of downed airmen and receiving parachute drops of arms and personnel at dead of night – living in constant fear of capture and torture by the Gestapo. Then, on the very eve of liberation, she was sent off on foot over the Pyrenees to Spain, carrying urgent despatches for London.

Anne-Marie Walters wrote Moondrop to Gascony immediately after the war, while the events were still vivid in her mind. It is a tale of high adventure, comradeship and kindness, of betrayals and appalling atrocities, and of the often unremarked courage of many ordinary French men and women who risked their lives to help drive German armies from French soil. And through it all shines Anne-Marie’s quiet courage, a keen sense humour and, above all, her pure zest for life.

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the war, Anne-Marie largely used pseudonyms to protect those still alive. For this new edition, David Hewson has tracked down the real people behind the story through interviews, backed up by documentary evidence from the French and British archives. Alongside biographical details, maps and photographs, he also fills in the rest of Anne-Marie’s own story, from her school days in Geneva to why she was sent back to London across the Pyrenees, and what happened to her in the post-war years.

David Hewson grew up in the south of Ireland and subsequently joined the British Army as a Regular Officer. It was during this period that he developed his interest in military history, after visiting the battlefields where his Regiment, The Blues and Royals, had fought during the campaigns of the last three centuries. He has lived in southwest France for 15 years, which has given him the opportunity to retrace many of the journeys made by Anne-Marie Walters and to meet a number of people who still remember her from 1944.