



33 Days: A Memoir

Léon Werth, Austin D. Johnson (Translation)

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A rare eyewitness account by an important author of fleeing the Nazis' march on Paris in 1940, featuring a never-before-published introduction by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

In June of 1940, Leon Werth and his wife fled Paris before the advancing Nazis Army. *33 Days* is his eyewitness account of that experience, one of the largest civilian dispacements in history.

Encouraged to write *33 Days* by his dear friend, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of *The Little Prince*, Werth finished the manuscript while in hiding in the Jura mountains.

Saint-Exupéry smuggled the manuscript out of Nazi-occupied France, wrote an introduction to the work and arranged for its publication in the United States by Brentanos. But the publication never came to pass, and Werth's manuscript would disappear for more than fifty years until the first French edition, in 1992. It has since become required reading in French schools.

This, the first-ever English language translation of *33 Days*, includes Saint-Exupéry's original introduction for the book, long thought to be lost. It is presented it here for the first time in any language. After more than seventy years, *33 Days* appears—complete and as it was fully intended.

33 Days: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review 33 Days: A Memoir for online ebook

Cari says

An excellent firsthand account of the mass exodus from Paris ahead of the Nazi invasion--*if* you already know the very basics. 33 Days doesn't waste time offering a load of context so this is more likely a 3-star read for a casual reader, as they might be a bit lost at times. The confusion of the author is a key part of the book's depth but may be untenable for those who aren't history buffs.

Ashley P. says

The notes in the beginning from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry were actually better than this whole book. It made you believe you were going to be reading something ground-shaking and eye-opening and then you start the story and you're like

well

okay then....

this is underwhelming.

where's the meaning??

I have read a lot of WWII books because it's my favorite time period in history but it's actually really hard to find a good gut-crushing one. This read as a day-to-day account of the exodus from Paris and I was looking forward to it because that mass migration is something not many people know about it. I studied history in college and not once was it mentioned and I think that's disgraceful. The Nightingale and Sarah's Key hit me harder when it described what happened during the escape and this one just didn't hit the mark for me. The entire story was all about how he was feeling and what he went through but rarely was his wife mentioned nor did I feel the lackluster worry over his son was believable.

This is a short book so if you're looking for more information on the exodus then by all means pick this up. It was very straight up and was more concerned with daily facts than emotions though. If you want your heart to bleed and your chest to ache then go for Sarah's Key.

classic reverie says

When reading The Madonna of the Sleeping Cars, I had wondered what The Neversink Library meant so after looking it up & finding it was a publisher's version of many forgotten written gems of the past, 33 Days was my next choice in this library. I had never heard of Leon Werth nor his younger friend, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry who wrote a well known children's book which I had never heard of called The Little Prince. He even dedicates this to his friend Werth, who in Jura, France keeping himself in mountain areas alone many times keeping away from the Nazis who after the Fall of France had Jewish people register. In my excerpts I will quote Saint-Exupéry's dedication to Werth his friend. Werth wrote 33 Days & Saint-Exupéry who was living in the USA tried to get 33 Days published but for some reason that fell through. They wanted it published so that the USA would help fight the Nazi rise in Europe. Saint-Exupéry did write a introduction to his book. 33 Days manuscript was found in 1992. Saint-Exupéry was in the French Air Force until 1940 & rejoined the Free French Air Force after a 27 month since he was reenlisted. In 1944 while flying a reconnaissance mission he disappeared in the Mediterranean. After the war was won, Werth

commented that "Peace, without Tonio isn't entirely peace." Wert's wife, Suzanne, helped actively in the Resistance movement in France by crossing the demarcation line & finding safe houses for soldiers & civilians a like. I had recently read fiction accounts of the "Exodus" of the French especially from Paris before the Germans invaded the city & towns. Irene Nemirovsky was not only Jewish but was living in Paris & part of the Exodus which she writes such a lively & terrifying account but Werth's 33 Days is his & his family's escape from the invaders & factual to his observations. So he gives an account of all he is feeling & sees. During their journey, they pass Pithiviers which after the occupation becomes a concentration camp which many will then be shipped to Auschwitz. Irene was one that went that route, whereas Leon Werth escaped that fate. In 33 Days, Leon Werth writes of the 33 days that it takes him to arrive at his home in the "free zone" at the time. It is an interesting account from anarchist but not a friend to the "ism" of Germany or Russia. He served in World War 1 and was an objector but still went back to the Front Line as a radio operator. He was a critic of colonization & was criticized for his book on the subject. I wish his book "Desolation" was available on Kindle which recounts his time in the mountainous regions of Jura. I always find it so interesting reading about a person narrative either Fiction or Non Fiction of this time of great uncertainty & how they perceive the occupiers & the citizens in general. This is not a tortuous story where the Germans invaded & life is unbearable that comes later during the occupation when the people are starting to think it is not so bad. The bombing, the killing & raiding are apparent but kept to a certain level at the initial stage. Leon sees how some citizens seem almost like the Fifth Column. We also see that depending on the German there can be kindness in some. Also little acts of how one behaves may not say a lot but actually little acts make up a total of all action. Excerpts-The Little Prince "I ask children to forgive me for dedicating this book to a grown-up. I have a serious excuse: this grown-up is the best friend I have in the world . . . He lives in France, where he is hungry and cold. He needs to be comforted." "France is not an abstract deity. France is not a history textbook. France is not some ideology. France is the flesh that sustains me, a network of connections of axes that are the foundation of my affections. That's why I need those to whom I'm attached to outlast me." "It was the time when they were "correct," which preceded the time when they gave us "lessons in politeness." "Fifty meters on, toward Ouzouer, some French artillerymen are gathered close together forming a human bundle, an opaque and shapeless mass. The women huddled against the farmhouse wall yell to them, "Surrender! Surrender! There are children." An unnecessary request. All at once, as much by clear decision as from fear, they raise their hands. I don't value military courage much, but I felt shame. This was the only time, in my whole life I believe, that I felt a personal military passion, a desire to fight." "Germany was deprived of all its colonies," she said, "it was forced to prepare its revenge. Germany needs to expand in proportion to its population. You must not listen to only one version, you must see both sides . . . You must understand that the Germans are organizers." "I'm saying to myself, 'I would sooner get myself killed than go find water for this soldier.' I'm sincere and I'm lying. Had the soldier pointed his gun at me, I'd have gone to the well and brought back the canteens. The truth is, at the moment and no other, this soldier and no other would have gone to the well to refill his own canteens without a word had I pointed the way. But everything would have been different had the soldier been a drunk thug or had headquarters decided to instill terror. A childish discussion . . . you might say. A trivial event, but the discussion is essential. Dignity isn't measured arithmetically. The smaller the event, the better one grasps the nuances of freedom and dignity." "What happens tomorrow isn't important for the moment. We're not calculating how much of France is under the boot and how much isn't. The armistice is nothing but a pause, an interlude that allows a person to recompose himself. We're no thinking in terms of history but rather in terms of our route, each of whose curves I know. Like one remembers his childhood in an old house, I recover everything that, in my life was hope and love."

Lorri says

I am not sure why, but I expected more. Irene Nemirovsky told of the exodus from Paris in her novel, Suite Francaise, and I felt more of an understanding of the panic and flight within her pages. Her characters were more defined, as were the circumstances.

I want to give 33 Days a two-star, but upped it to a three-star, for the historical aspect and the fact that it is a memoir.

Annina Luck says

This is a special little (116 pages) book. Léon Werth was a close friend of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and often addresses his friend in this tale of his flight from Nazi occupied Paris in 1940. There are some great descriptions of the characters he meets in the French countryside. His reunion with his beloved Siamese cat, Choum, on page 85 is touching.

Lisalou says

Moving true account of L'Exode. Reads more like a diary than a book that is meant to be a narrative. The quiet as well as the tension reminded me of Empire of the Sun for some reason. Good account of something you rarely read about.

Zachary Solomon says

an incredibly singular, observant, unusual, and somehow hilarious memoir about Leon Werth's 33 day exodus from Nazi-occupied Paris to the Jura mountains in June-July of 1940. Werth was a brilliant writer, wry, and every sentence is infused with pathos and intelligence. a weird read for sure - lacking are the emotional and graphic intensities of Nazi-era literature - but to good effect. a great read.

Allyson says

This was an unbelievable document written about the author's rootlessness after the German invasion into Paris during WWII. A firsthand account which was lost for years-incredible.

Lucy Meeker says

This is a great little novella that I bought online. If you like to read about WW2 history than you will enjoy reading this. It is a very quick read.

Miriam says

Ein gutes Buch. Anders, als ich es erwartet hatte. Aber trotzdem (oder gerade deshalb?) gut. Léon Werth schildert die Odyssee, die er und seine Frau erlebten, als sie am 11. Juni 1940 aus Paris flohen, um zu ihrem (eigentlich) 8 Autostunden entfernten Ferienhaus zu fahren. Die Fahrt dauerte insgesamt 33 Tage. Diese Informationen gibt u.a. auch der Klappentext.

Der Bericht ist eher ein Bericht von Kleinigkeiten, von Erlebnissen, von Begegnungen, von Gedanken, die Léon Werth hatte, von allgemeinen Fragen, die er anhand der individuellen Erlebnisse versucht, zu beantworten. Die beiden sind natürlich nicht die ganze Zeit unterwegs, sondern zwischendurch für längere Zeiträume bei ihnen vorher unbekannten Menschen untergebracht. Sie erleben diese Zeit als unkalre und undefinierte Phase, in der ihnen wichtige Informationen fehlen, um die Situation einschätzen zu können, in der sie erleben, was es heißt, im besetzten Frankreich zu leben. Kein vergleich zu den besetzten Gebieten in Polen und anderen osteuropäischen Ländern. Soviel kann man sagen, ohne zu viel zu verraten. Das Buch ist keines, was den Leser oder die Leserin direkt zu Tränen röhrt oder die Luft anhalten lässt. Dazu konzentriert er sich zu sehr auf konkrete Szenen, Begegnungen, er legt es auch nicht auf Dramatik an. Gerade das macht diesen Bericht so lesenswert.

Phillip Ramm says

(I read the physical book, not the Kindle edition, but it is the only one on GR.)

I found two books about the refugee experience the other week. (The other is about Japan girl, but I haven't got to that yet.)

It took 33 days for Leon Worth to escape Paris, with hundreds of thousands of others, as the Germans approached and to get past the Loire into what was fast becoming Free France. He drives his wife as far as he can in a large convoy that is directed this way and that. Often the traffic jam is so bad, horses and carts move much more quickly. The roads increasingly become blocked with stalled cars and with military traffic being giving preference. Worth eventually has to stop, and his car is pulled by some horses out of the way.

I was surprised to find that some of the country farms were still relatively functional. For some reason I expected the entire countryside to be razed. Worth describes French soldiers and, increasingly, German soldiers wandering around the areas, seemingly lost. But eventually the Germans appear get more organised - or Worth's description of them does.

It looks for a while that Worth will be stuck in a certain semi-abandoned farm with a strange group of misfits, and never find his 17 year old son who had gone on ahead of him, with others, as he has no petrol to get his car moving again, but help comes from an unexpected source.

Worth appears fairly stunned by all the goings on, he stays philosophical and tries to be non-judgemental in the face of his adversity. But the reality of the world shimmers all the while - this can't be happening - people can't act like this.

There is surprisingly little anger or recriminations.

-- Extra credit: Compare and contrast the writings of L-F Celine on his experiences as a German war-

criminal (anti-Semitic propagandist) on the run.

Rose Anderson says

A gritty story of Parisians fleeing Paris when the Germans were invading during World War II.

Sean Carman says

French novelist Leon Werth recounts his family's escape from Paris after its fall to the Nazis — their slow journey into the countryside, the farmhouse they share with visiting German soldiers, and the daily quandaries about how to resist an occupying army without losing one's dignity and self-respect. The introduction by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is a beautiful meditation on exile. Good reading for our own troubled times.

Evelyn says

In this memoir the author discusses what it is like to be a refugee in your own country fleeing an invading army and dependent on the kindness of strangers. Although relating experiences when the author and his family fled from Paris in advance of the invading German army in 1940, this book may help the reader understand the experiences of people who are currently fleeing to Western Europe seeking safe haven from the wars in Syria, Iraq and other countries.

Jeanne Ferris says

German troops are entering France--people are fleeing Paris. The roads are clogged, cars break down, and French and German troops and refugees are entangled. Werth doesn't spare himself as he describes a desperate period at the beginning of the Nazi occupation of France. This very short book has a big impact, as an eyewitness account of "one of the biggest mass migrations in human history."
