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She Landed By Moonlight



Synopsis

On the night of the 22 September 1943 Pearl Witherington, a twenty-nine-year-old British secretary and agent of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), was parachuted from a Halifax bomber into Occupied France. Like Sebastian Faulks' heroine, Charlotte Gray, Pearl had a dual mission: to fight for her beloved, broken France and to find her lost love. Pearl's lover was a Parisian parfumeur turned soldier, Henri Cornioley, who had been taken prisoner while serving in the French Logistics Corps and subsequently escaped from his German POW camp. Agent Pearl Witherington's wartime record is unique and heroic. As the only woman agent in the history of SOEs in France to have run a network, she became a fearless and legendary guerrilla leader organising, arming and training 3,800 Resistance fighters. Probably the greatest female organiser of armed maquisards in France, the woman whom her young troops called 'Ma Mère', Pearl lit the fires of Resistance in Central France so that Churchill's famous order to 'set Europe ablaze', which had brought SOE into being, finally came to pass. Pearl's story takes us from her harsh, impoverished childhood in Paris, to the lonely forests and farmhouses of the Loir-et-Cher where she would become a true 'warrior queen'. Shortly before Pearl's death in 2008, the Queen presented her with a CBE in Paris. While male agents and Special Force Jedburghs received the DSO or Military Cross, an ungrateful country had forgotten Pearl. She had been offered a civilian decoration in 1945 which she refused, saying 'There was nothing civil about what I did.' But what pleased her most was to receive her Parachute Wings, for which she had waited over 60 years. Two RAF officers travelled to her old people's home and she was finally able to pin the coveted wings on her lapel. Pearl died in February 2008 aged 93.

--This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

'A gripping tale. A story of narrow escapes, lost and betrayed comrades and incessant danger.'â •Literary ReviewThoroughly researched and perceptiveâ •The LadyThis biography successfully establishes her in the pantheon of the very bravest and best, up there with such legendary figures as Violette Szabo, Andree Borrel, Madeline Damerment and Nancy Wake.â •Mail on SundayThe truth is that Sebastian Faulk's novel...stands on its own, but so does She Landed by Moonlight, the long-awaited biography that Agent Pearl deserves.â •The TimesQuietly moving... Carol Seymour-Jones has done an excellent job in bringing Witherington's courage, commitment and ability to light, sensibly focusing on her war years when she lived to her full potential.â •SpectatorIt took until 2004 - four years before her death - for her own country to belatedly present her with a CBE. As this biography makes clear, the brave and wholly admirable Pearl Witherington deserved much, much better.â •Sunday TimesDialogue is recreated, scenes are set and we are given a character's thoughts, feelings and reactions. Pearl's story [is] so well-documented and her exploits so extraordinary.â •Independent Book of the WeekCarole Seymour-Jones does full justice to a truly remarkable and little-known woman.â •Country Life --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Carole Seymour-Jones was born in Wales. She was longlisted for the Samuel Johnson prize for her biography of Vivienne Eliot, first wife of TS Eliot. Her most recent biography of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, *A Dangerous Liaison*, received widespread acclaim. Carole is a Visiting Fellow at the University of Surrey, and former Deputy President and chair of the Writers in Prison Committee of English PEN, the writers' charity. She has three children and lives with her husband in London and Surrey. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

This is an excellent read. I am so glad I found this book. Ms. Seymour-Jones tells a wonderful story of one of SOE's most intriguing characters. The book is well researched, and the story is concise and easy to follow. Ms. Seymour-Jones does an admirable job of describing the inner workings of an organization for which there is relatively little historical material remaining. I would recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in the French Resistance, the SOE, or women whose efforts have, in some way, influenced the course of history. I hope Ms. Seymour-Jones will write about other characters who were prominent in the SOE.

I used to work with Pearl Cornioley until she retired from an international financial organization; she was a wonderful woman. Even though I was thirty years younger than her she was supposed to be

under my supervision, but that was a joke: I quickly realized she did not need any supervision. She never claimed any recognition for glorious achievements during the war. I knew she had worked for the French resistance but not at such a high level. The revelation was a huge surprise one day, in the 1980s when she participated in a two hour discussion at a French highly respected French TV show on World War 2, along with top recognized French "resistants" and former British top military actors. I highly respected Pearl who was always ready to help achieve an objective with patience, effectiveness and a great sense of humor.

Loved it. What a brave and inspirational person. It's sad that women who risked their lives and those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the war effort were not properly acknowledged at the time. Alas it was a different time. I am happy their stories of bravery are finally being told. My mother served in WW2 as a WAVE and I couldn't be more proud of her.

Historical accuracy in a tale that is almost too fantastic for a fiction novel! Highly recommended for all students of History or Womens' Studies--anyone really.

Loved it - a magnificent story beautifully written. This story need to be told - it's an important part of WW II history.

Very inspiring story!!

Easy reading. Great story!!

I enjoyed the book, but I found it got a bit slow at times.

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