



Wine and War: The French, the Nazis, and the Battle for France's Greatest Treasure

Donald Kladstrup, Petie Kladstrup

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In 1940, France fell to the Nazis and almost immediately the German army began a campaign of pillaging one of the assets the French hold most dear: their wine. Like others in the French Resistance, winemakers mobilized to oppose their occupiers, but the tale of their extraordinary efforts has remained largely unknown—until now. **Wine and War** tells the alternately thrilling and harrowing story of the French wine producers who undertook ingenious, daring measures to save their cherished crops and bottles as the Germans closed in on them.

By rooting the narrative in the stories of five prominent winemaking families from France's key wine-producing regions of Burgundy, Alsace, the Loire Valley, Bordeaux, and Champagne, journalists Don and Petie Kladstrup vividly illustrate how men and women risked their lives for a cause that meant saving the heart and soul of France as much as protecting its economy. It was an extraordinary partnership involving everyone from the owners of Paris's famed restaurant La Tour d'Argent who rushed to build a wall to conceal their most precious twenty thousand bottles, to French soldiers who triumphantly reclaimed Hitler's enormous cache of stolen wines at the conclusion of the war.

Wine and War portrays the central role wine has long played in France's military campaigns—how Napoleon ordered wagon loads of champagne to sustain the morale of his armies and how, during World War I, huge quantities of wine were shipped to soldiers in the trenches of Northern France. By the beginning of World War II, wine represented a living for nearly 20 percent of France's population and the authors chronicle the Nazis' determination to seize control of the French wine industry and its profits. At the same time, **Wine and War** brings to light the resourcefulness of wine producers who employed spiderwebs to "age" false walls hiding their best wines, who foisted off their worst bottles on the Germans or gleefully misdirected shipments, sending champagne to Homburg instead of Hamburg, and who sabotaged trains transporting wine to Germany. It also recounts the heroics of winemakers who hid Jewish refugees and smuggled members of the Resistance across the Demarcation Line in wine barrels, as well as the villainy of collaborators who worked with Nazi occupiers for their own benefit.

Finally, **Wine and War** reveals that the French were not alone in trying to save their wine. They received help from unexpected quarters: the German weinfuhrers, the very men the Nazis sent to requisition wine, whose close ties to the French wine industry mitigated their actions, and even the collaborationist Vichy regime, which recognized the importance of keeping France's vineyards French, and prevented the Nazis from seizing the Jewish-owned Chateaux Mouton-Rothschild and Lafite-Rothschild.

Based on three years of research and interviews with the survivors who engaged in this epic enterprise, **Wine and War** illuminates a compelling, little-known chapter of history, and stands as a tribute to extraordinary individuals who waged a battle that, in a very real way, saved the spirit of France.

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