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The Surgeon and the Shepherd: Two Resistance Heroes in Vichy France

Meg Ostrum

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Of the thousands of people who escaped through the Pyrenees during World War II, at least one hundred owe their lives to a daring scheme that Belgian Charles Schepens masterminded in Mendive, a remote Basque village near the French-Spanish border. The story of this near-miraculous resistance effort, an epic undertaking carried out in plain view of the Nazis, is recounted in full for the first time in *The Surgeon and the Shepherd*, an incredible, true tale of wartime heroism.

In 1942, in coordination with the Belgian resistance, Schepens stage-managed a highly secret information and evacuation service through the counterfeit operation of a back-country lumbering enterprise. This book traces Schepens's gradual transformation from an apolitical young ophthalmologist into double agent "Jacques Pérot," and his emergence in the postwar period as a modern folk hero to the residents of Mendive. Woven into the account are the stories of a remarkable international cast of characters, most notably the Basque shepherd Jean Sarochar, regarded as a local misfit, with whom Schepens formed his most unlikely partnership and an enduring friendship.

Part biography, part spy tale, part cultural study, *The Surgeon and the Shepherd* is based on more than ten years of oral history research. The saga of a Belgian "first resister" who, by posing as a collaborator, successfully duped both the Germans and the local French Basque population, it offers a powerful and illuminating picture of moral and physical courage.

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