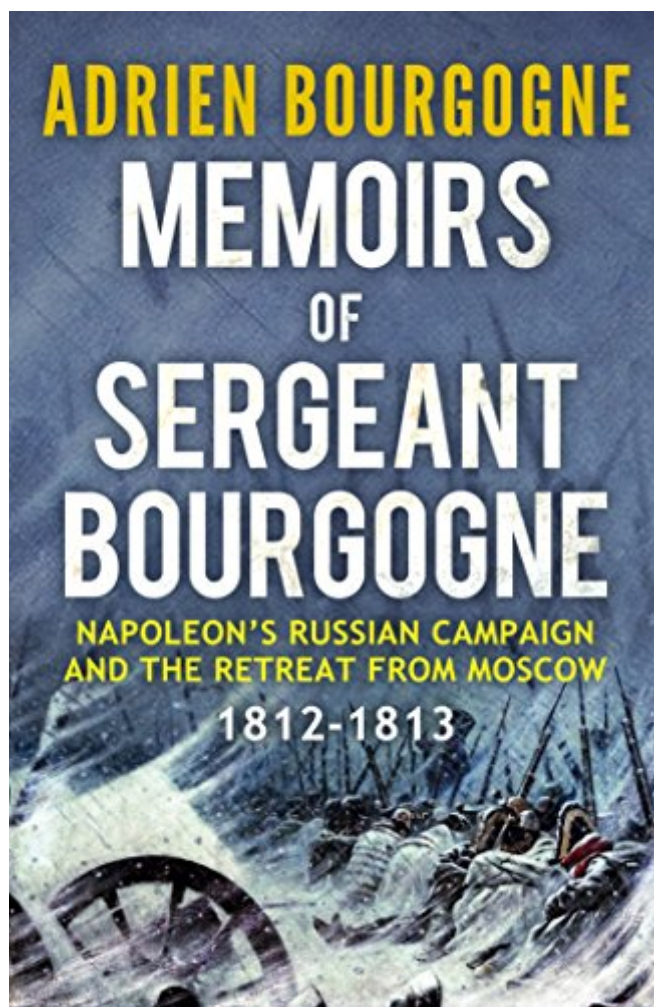


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Memoirs Of Sergeant Bourgogne: 1812-1813



Synopsis

In June 1812, Napoleon's 680,000 strong Grande Armée crossed the Neman River and invaded Russia. When the remnants of Napoleon's army returned over the Berezina River in November, only 27,000 effective soldiers remained. Adrien Bourgonne's Memoirs is one of the most vivid and moving accounts of this dramatic turning point in the Napoleonic Wars. Bourgonne had been in the Napoleonic Army since the campaign of 1806 in Poland. He had taken part in the Battle of Essling, and had fought in Germany, Austria, Spain and Portugal. But none of this could prepare him for the campaign of 1812. The memoir begins with the long travel from Portugal to Moscow where the French were able to defeat the Russian armies in small battles and take the city. But this victory soon became a nightmare as supplies ran short and winter descended onto the Grande Armée. Without being able to strike a decisive blow against the Russians, Napoleon was forced to retreat across the barren, snow-covered lands of western Russia. Bourgonne's account of this agonising journey back towards France truly captures the horrific experience of the troops. As their rearguard was constantly harassed by Cossacks, the French stumbled across the landscape. Some died from hunger, others from merely sleeping on the ground and freezing to death. Bourgonne's Memoir is an extremely personal account of this time, as he details how he and his comrades did absolutely anything to survive. These proud troops of France who had defeated every army they faced were reduced to killing their horses, stealing, pillaging and begging. But throughout they never lost faith in their leader, Napoleon. The Memoirs of Sergeant Bourgonne are essential reading for anyone interested in the Napoleonic Wars and Napoleon's failed invasion of Russia. These memoirs were written during his months of captivity. After his life in the army he worked as a draper before re-enlisting in the army in 1830 and receiving the Legion of Honor in 1831. In 1853, Adrien Bourgonne retired and completed his memoirs entitled Memoirs of Sergeant Bourgonne, appearing in the New Retrospective Review. He died in 1867. This edition was compiled and translated by Paul Cottin in 1899. Cottin died in 1932.

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Customer Reviews

I first read Bourgogne nearly twenty years ago - I have read it at least four times since. It is quite simply, the best book I have ever read in my life. It is the ultimate in historical terms - an account of an epic event written by someone who actually went through it all, a survivor of 40 degrees of frost, warfare, starvation and poisoning. This small man, 'petiot' to Grangier his friend, was an incredibly tough individual and he writes with a verve and preciseness that captures in exquisite detail all that he went through. Whether it be a fleeting glimpse of Le Tondou - Napoleon - or a vignette of the starving, frozen human wrecks fighting over the Army gold strewn by the wayside at Ponari hill, he brings a vividness to his tale that is seldom there in the accounts of his contemporaries. I particularly like his adventures with Picart, the regimental marksman, his best friend who he met up with by sheer accident in the vast frozen wastes of Russia. Their struggle to get back to the Sacred Squadron that guarded the Emperor is worth a film in its own right. For a brief moment, Picart loses faith in Napoleon, and Bourgogne is shattered by his friend's slide into apparent insanity. But then the two come across a wandering Jew who saves their lives by taking them to the Grande Armee. This makes up for an earlier encounter with another couple of Jews who poisoned Bourgogne and tossed him off a sledge in order to steal his belongings. All life is here, heroism and treachery at every turn. The weather grows so cold that frozen birds literally fall out of the sky, men cut open the frozen rumps of living horses and drink their blood as they stumble on in misery and despair, like wraiths or vampires.

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