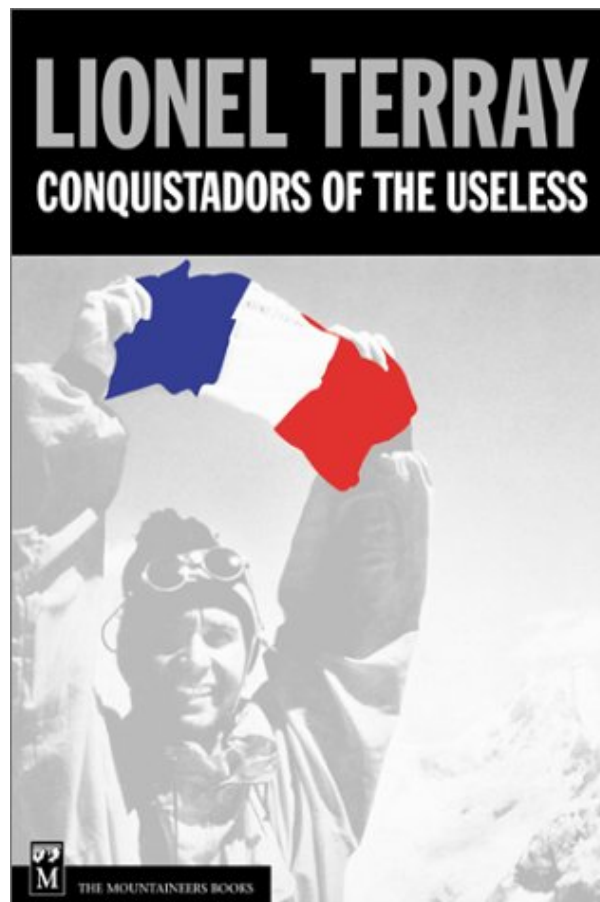


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14 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

Once Again Old is Better

By Rodney J. Szasz

If you have read my other reviews on many of the mountaineering genre you will find that I personally find it very hard to find a modern mountaineering adventure story. Mountaineering literature is so suffused with the quest for money, huge personal egos and quests for climbing garbage strewn summits that there is little time to note the adventure.

In old mountaineering books they almost never have enough money, they climb with holes in their socks and equipment that make modern mountaineers shiver. They also summit and do routes of incredible complexity and skill that even modern mountaineers find hard to match -- and they all seem quite happy to hang off the Eiger North Face on a single piton...!

Terray fits this genre par excellence. He was famous in his day, but his name is not often mentioned around campfires today... (he is perhaps the French equivalent of Moe Antoine of Britain). He climbed some very technical routes with many first ascents, but throughout the book, the amazing thing is that he also does a lot of very hard climbs that most people, even in mountaineering circles have never heard of, nor want to undertake... Hence I believe the Title of his book -- the conquering of brilliant but largely useless summits.

Terry offers great and nailbiting vignettes of his climbs all over the world. Starting with climbing the Walker

Spur, the Second Ascent of the Eiger North Wall, and the French Classic climb of the first 8000-metre summit, Annapurna. Each chapter is a real page turner. When you are in the middle it is hard to put down... you can feel the tension build in some parts such as the numerous traverses on the Eiger, the uncertainty of route finding... the terror of the long run outs of rope... where downclimbing is about the scariest option one can think of..

The early work on the Eiger is well recounted and the rescue of the Cassin Expedition. He also covers a lot of ground on the climbing of Annapurna with no overlap with Herzog's classic. I was particularly impressed with the amount of bushwacking Terray and crew had to do just to get access to the mountain glaciers. They were using maps and entering valleys no outsider had seen. This raw adventure, lower than summit peaks with its route finding conundrums, waterfall climbing, backtracking down blind valleys, is supremely exciting. It is in fact a joining of the exploration genre with mountaineering.

The other summits are just as stupendous but less known. Terray saw the South Ridge of Mt Hunter in Alaska and thought it the most beautiful he had seen. He had to climb it. While not high by Himalayan standards this Frenchman set a new North American standard with his long and arduous ascent.

Also there is one of the most exciting (and rare) accounts of Alpine Mountain Warfare that I know. At the end of the war he was attached to the French Alpine Regiment. Despite his knowledge that the war in the Alps would never hasten the end of the war even a single day, he fought as a good soldier should. But one does admire Terray in other ways. If this front would not be decisive in any way, why kill people he mused? He therefore devised daring raids upon German Mtn Troops. On one of them they scale a couloir, climbed a rock face and bivvied in a snow cave on the opposite side of a rock outcropping. The next day they set up their machine gun and duly strafed the German positions -- "not really aiming at anyone and hoping to hit noone." After scaring the Germans silly he and his partner decamped and slid back to their camp. Mission accomplished and no one dead. His other exploits were not so bloodless as when they attacked a heavily defended German position up sheer rock faces under their supporting artillery fire --- but the effect and accuracy required to pinpoint targets on ridges meant that most of the rounds missed and fell upon the cliffs with the resulting French Chaussers suffering their own friendly fire.

I must add that there are a lot of pictures in the book about his climbs in Patagonia, but these only get a brief mention in the book. The fact that he was soon dead after this was published is also a tragic note on which to end. But here is pure adventure that this Frenchman lived and but that the rest of the world could discover his raw love for nature, the challenge of the climb and love for only adventure... A ripping yarn... Thank you Lionel!

12 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

True mountaineering

By Maury Meyer

Let's face it, most recent mountaineering books are totally forgettable. Most have nothing exciting to report; they're just a way to pay for the next expedition. But Terray gets it all right here. Perhaps the greatest mountaineer of the 20th century (okay, maybe Buhl and Messner are equal), and certainly one of the greatest mountaineering books of all time. Forget the annoying Krakauers, and read the real McCoy.

8 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

An interesting view from a major French mountaineer

By Anton

This is really an autobiography of Terray. It's strengths are in its extensive description of French mountaineering in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Terray has been part of some of the major climbing endeavors in the Alps (the Walker spur on the Grand Jorasses or the north face of Eiger) as well as the first

climb an 8,000 meter peak -- Anapurna. He also presents honest and direct portraits of some of his climbing partners, such as Rebuffat or Lachenal.

While the book has no particular weakness, in my view it falls far short of the inspired writings of some of his French contemporaries -- Gaston Rebuffat ("Starlight and Storm" -- highly recommended) or Maurice Herzog ("Anapurna" -- a riveting account of the expedition).

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