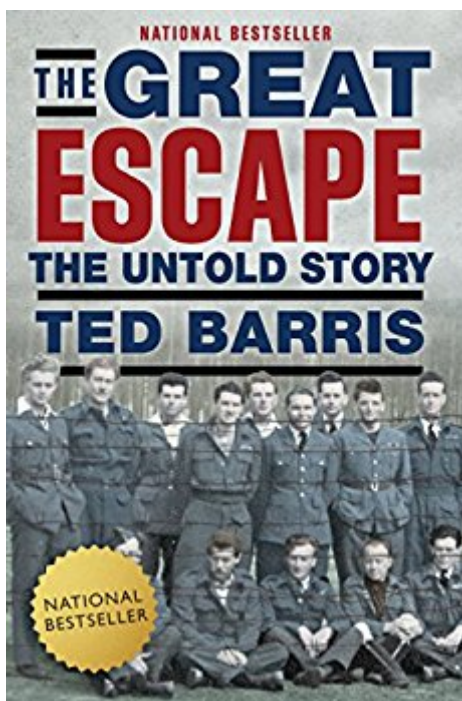


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The Great Escape: A Canadian Story



Synopsis

A unique retelling of WWII's most dramatic escape, told through first-hand recollections of the soldiers who experienced it. On the night of March 24, 1944, 80 Commonwealth airmen crawled through a 336-foot-long tunnel and slipped into the forest beyond the wire of Stalag Luft III, a German POW compound near Sagan, Poland. The event became known as 'The Great Escape'; an intricate breakout more than a year in the making, involving as many as 2,000 POWs working with extraordinary coordination, intelligence, and daring. Yet within a few days, all but three of the escapees were recaptured. Subsequently, 50 were murdered, cremated, and buried in a remote corner of the prison camp. But most don't know the real story behind The Great Escape. Now, on the eve of its 70th anniversary, Ted Barris writes of the key players in the escape attempt, those who got away, those who didn't, and their families at home. Barris marshals groundbreaking research into a compelling firsthand account. For the first time, The Great Escape retells one of the most astonishing episodes in WWII directly through the eyes of those who experienced it. Joint Winner of the Libris Award for Non-Fiction Book of the Year 2014 Globe and Mail Bestseller Toronto Star Bestseller

Book Information

File Size: 5341 KB

Print Length: 320 pages

Publisher: Thomas Allen Publishers (September 16, 2013)

Publication Date: September 16, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00EKPWPT0

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #171,804 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #11

in Books > History > Americas > Canada > 20th Century #14 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > Canada > Military History #44 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Europe > Eastern

Customer Reviews

There have been lots of books done on the Great Escape over the years, making it one of the most overly abused POW escape stories ever. Most of these books merely retell details from Paul Brickhill's landmark work, although recently there have been several that have brought new details to the table, particularly when it comes to personal information on the men involved. Other recent books have also revealed details that contradict Brickhill's work -- which should not really come as a surprise since he himself admitted that he had had to "work" with the facts some in his retelling. Nor was he privy to EVERY detail there was. Therefore it is only recently that we have come to view the story in a much clearer light than ever before. The Great Escape: A Canadian Story adds to the body of knowledge of the personal details of the Canadians involved, but it also drops the ball in the retelling. While I can and do fully appreciate the author's total focus on the Canadian aspect to the story (obviously the main subject of the book) which has been shoved into the periphery for far too long now, in my opinion it is difficult to overlook the many mistakes or questionable aspects in the retelling. Of course if you are an escape fiend as I am and can overlook the flotsam for the manna you're going to want this book in your collection. However, as a published author in the escape field I personally find the historical inconsistencies and errors almost inexcusable, considering the breadth and depth of material there is out there to draw from. That said, while I will not say this book is trash -- it certainly isn't -- the reader should go into it with open eyes. Consider: Except for the Canadian details, the book reads painfully close to Brickhill's book.

The "Great Escape" of World War II, in which 76 Allied PoWs broke out of Stalag Luft III in Sagan, Germany, with 73 being recaptured and 50 gunned down by the Gestapo, is one of the more legendary incidents of the conflict, punctuated by the 1963 John Sturges' movie, whose stunts, stars, scenery, and acting have become iconic. However, the truth of the Great Escape, fascinating as it is, has been obscured by that movie, which didn't just take liberties with the truth -- it tore them apart. Historians who have studied the subject know that there was no Steve McQueen motorcycle chase -- the actor demanded that as his price for appearing in the picture. But an even greater sin -- Hollywood commits many -- is that the movie ignores a very important fact about the escape and the team that organized it -- they came from a large nation north of the 49th parallel, which fought in World War II from September 11, 1939, to September 2, 1945, with incredible valor, horrific losses, and total obscurity -- the Dominion of Canada -- and most of the "Great Escape" leaders and escapers were Canadian. Ted Barris tells this forgotten story with ability and verve. There is a lot

new here -- Canadian mining engineers and surveyors figuring out how to dig a tunnel by hand, keep it on course, and maintain its cover. World War II escape fans will find much of this familiar, but how this was accomplished with virtually no tools is an incredible story of resilience and resolve in the face of immense odds.

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