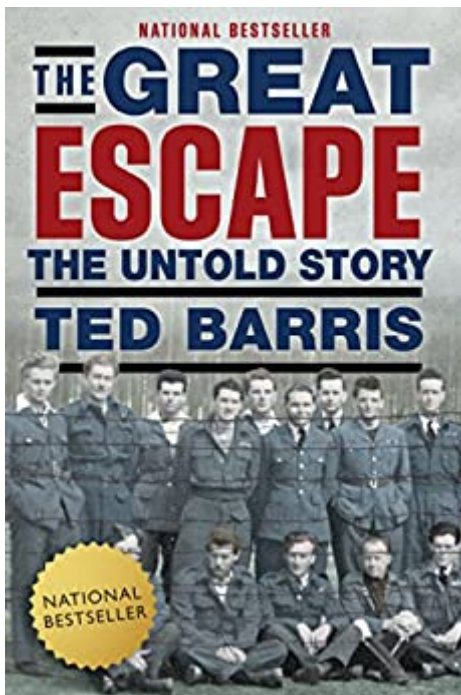


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The Great Escape: A Canadian Story



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

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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, but the reader should go into it with open eyes. Consider:

Except for the Canadian details, the book reads painfully close to Brickhill's book. More irritating is the constant rehashing again and again of personal details of the characters involved which had already been covered previously. It seems as if the author wrote the book in several sections with a fair distance of time between and could not remember what he had written in the previous sections when he sat down with it again.

Harry Day was not a Group Captain but a Wing Commander during his time behind the wire hence the nick-name *Wings* which was a common sobriquet for Wing Commander in the RAF and Dominion air forces.

Mike Casey, downed 10/16/39, and Jimmy Buckley, downed 5/29/40, were obviously not shot down six days apart as the text states.

The original compounds in Stalag Luft III were not known as Center and East until after North compound went up. Prior to

that they were simply the Officer's and NCO's compounds. Nor was Stalag Luft I known by that name until Stalag Luft II went up, which was set up in the east for captured Soviet flyers. Prior it was simply known as Stalag Luft. Prisoners arriving at Sagan did not debark the trains on the platforms of the station; they did so some way down the track line at a cargo siding near the granary. Stalag Luft III wasn't the "bad boys" camp as popularized in the 1963 movie. It was merely the Luftwaffe's attempt at congregating as many air force POW's into one centralized location as possible. The Geneva Convention had it laid down that prisoners were to be incarcerated service specific and the Luftwaffe tried to stick by that rule hence the gathering of the air force POW's scattered throughout the Oflag and Stalag systems as much as possible. The Luftwaffe hadn't figured on as many aircrew POW's as they got, hence the initial scattering to wherever there was room. The boxing match with Eddie Asselin was to cover the Toft/Nichols escape, not some other wire job. One section makes it sound as if Wally Floody was buried when the Germans discovered one of the tunnels and destroyed it. Obviously he wasn't in a discovered tunnel in the process of destruction. LTC Albert "Bub" Clark did not serve in the RAF; he was shot down in a Spitfire the USAAF had bought from the British and was fully marked in US colors. Goon in the Block meant a German had entered a barracks; not that one had entered the compound. Most of the details as to the where's and how's of Tom, Dick and Harry had already been figured out when the prisoners helped out building the North Compound. They had also stashed some supplies stolen from the workmen within the compound as well, which further eased the way toward getting going once they moved in. Williams and Codner never got out of Oflag XXI-B. Philpot hadn't been left behind in East Compound when the prisoners moved to North as he wasn't there but in Oflag XXI-B at the time. There is considerable debate over whether the escape really did any good at all. No front line troops were employed or diverted to searching for the escapers; the majority of those on the lookout were Home Guard and youth organizations, as well as local and district police. There were NOT hundreds of troops out combing the countryside looking for the escapers beyond the immediate area around Sagan (within about 25 kilometers or so). The biggest effect came in heightened security: more police checks, closer scrutiny of papers and persons, suspicious behavior of individuals or pairs,

etc. Further, Bushell and company were given ample warning by friendly camp personnel that mass escapes truly needed to be avoided and why; the suggestion being made that escapes by small parties might be tolerated but escapes of five or more would no longer be. It appears as well that certain Germans at least were fully aware that Bushell hadn't abandoned his escape tendencies. I would refer people to reading Guy Walters' book on the escape for more details in both these directions. Herman Glemnitz went to the South Compound with the Americans in September, 1943 and was rarely seen in the British compounds after that. He was NOT "still on duty in North Compound" when the Great Escape occurred. I might add that Tony Pengelly's veracity has been called into question in the past, but to what extent and truth I do not know. I do know that an audio interview with a British ex-prisoner (I don't recall which off-hand) exists in the archives of the IWM in which he gives his opinions of Pengelly, but I have not heard it so cannot comment on it. Pengelly was certainly there and certainly participated. And his participation has also been shoved into the shadows for many years, without ready explanation. I wish this author had explored that. I won't abandon this book by any means, but it won't be a "Eögo to" book either; at least not on the first tier. I do suggest you add it to the collection for the Canadian details alone. If one wants a full picture of the escape, one needs as many pieces as possible. I did not find any electronic flaws with the Kindle edition.

The book contained much detail, some which Paul Brickhill did n't have. However I was disappointed that the author tried to turn the escape into an all Canadian affair. It was a story about the allies working as a team, which Barris has misunderstood. The author seemed to have a chip on his shoulder about the film "The great escape." And probably because not enough was said about the Canadian participation in it. Yes Americans were the stars, we all know why. Its because the producers were interested in a successful sale of the film, not in producing a docudrama. He appears to blame the Brits for the "Fiction parts" (his words) of the "Great escape" film, not the Americans, by refusing to use the words "British Commonwealth" to describe the RAF airmen as such. Only the word Commonwealth was used. He only gave Roger Bushell's background as South African, when he would have known that, although he was born there, it was to English migratory parents and he returned to England to go to Cambridge and became a lawyer in the UK. No details on Bushell the mastermind, but pages and pages of each Canadian that participated in any way in the escape. To the point that any Canadian airmen anywhere in the book had the preface

"Canadian," whereas anyone British he ignored their background. I am Canadian, with Father (Winnipeg) and Grandfather (Nova Scotia), both wounded & frontline soldiers in WW1 & WW2, so I know what the Canadian participation was in securing freedom for us all. None of the other "Great escape" books, have such a bias as this. I have a collection of WW2 escape books, but I will not keep this one in it. Nor would I buy any other books from Mr. Barris

Book was good but was very slanted in the Canadian point of view. I glossed over a lot of the tunnel construction. Where the book did shine though was in what happened to the prisoners that did not escape post the escape and the evacuation of the camp. This is the 3rd book I have read on the subject. It had some really good information and is worth the read if you have already read the other books out there.

Great book - gives a wonderful insight into the "real" great escape and the surprisingly predominant role Canadians played in it. Especially interesting is the stories of the march before freedom that the POWs had to take in the last days of the war. Intriguing and highly interesting, especially for Canadians.

A interesting book to read about the great escape. It highlights different points of view and angles on things

Excellent read with special interest to me as my uncle was featured in the story as he was instrumental in engineering the great escape. My mother's maiden name was Pengelly.

I purchased this book after attending lecture by Ted Barris presenting the Canadian participation in the Great Escape. A very powerful story. There are other books giving the American and British point of view. I personally know one of the Canadian survivors who is written about in the book.

An wonderful read. Tells the true story of the Great Escape. A true group of brave men in war.....

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