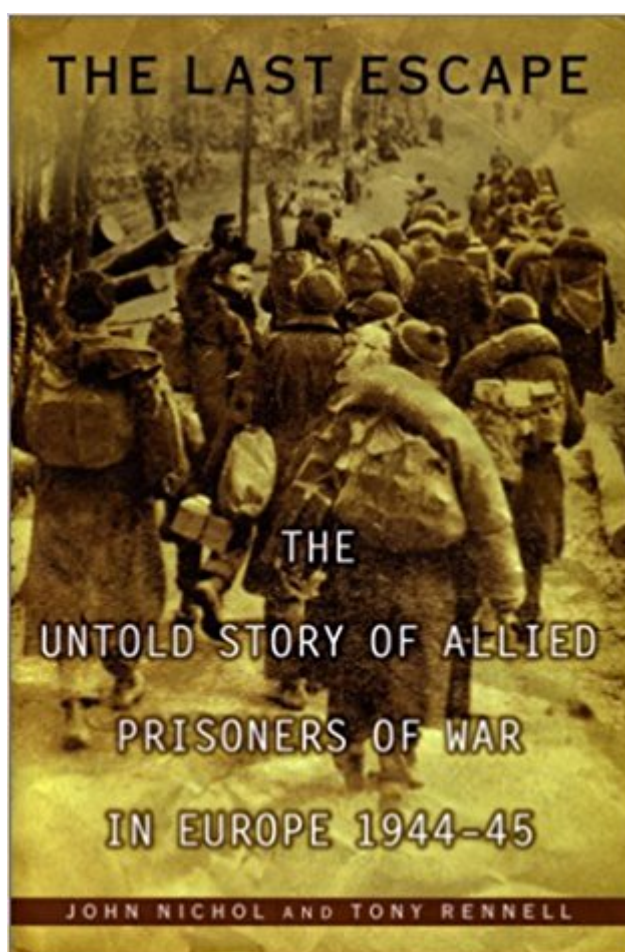


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# The Last Escape: The Untold Story Of Allied Prisoners Of War In Europe 1944-45



## Synopsis

By June 1944 there were hundreds of thousands of American and British prisoners of war in camps across Nazi-controlled Europe. News of the D-Day landings, heard on secret camp radios, filled the prisoners with both hope and dread. Amid this confusion and fear, the POWs were herded from their camps and forced at gunpoint to walk many hundreds of miles deeper into Germany on what the POWs themselves called the Death March. In *The Last Escape*, Gulf War POW and author John Nichol and popular historian Tony Rennell relate the astonishing story of these unrecognized heroes. Drawing upon interviews with many surviving veterans who speak here for the first time, this is an unparalleled account of endurance and courage in wartime.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author of *Tornado Down*, former RAF Flight Lt. Nichol was a Gulf War POW, while *Last Days of Glory* author Rennell is the former associate editor of the London Sunday Times. They cleverly weave WWII policy decisions dealing with POWs with firsthand accounts of POWs inside prison camps in Europe and during the forced evacuation marches many endured during the last months of the war. As the Russians advanced in summer 1944, POWs were crammed into boxcars (and, later, ships), attacked by guards in retaliation for Allied bombing of Germany and sent on extensive forced marches, described here in horrifying detail. As the war ended, some Red Cross relief convoys got through, but General Patton failed in an attempt to liberate a POW camp holding his son-in-law behind German lines. The reluctance of Russians to return liberated British and American POWs to the West was balanced by the issue of forced repatriation of former Soviet

POWs who didn't want to return to the Stalinist state. Nichol and Rennell offer anecdotal evidence that some POWs were killed by the SS, and retribution by prisoners against brutal guards also occurred. In the postwar lives of a few POWs featured, incarceration took a physical and psychological toll. While offering little in the way of new information, and failing to cover fully the complete spectrum of prison camps and prisoner nationalities, the authors provide a compelling account of the ways, means and effects of mass imprisonment during the last terrible century. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The authors note that there were an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 British and American prisoners in camps across Germany in 1944 and 1945 who survived World War II. Nichol and Rennell admit that gathering precise information was a problem in their research for this book, and they remind readers that it is not a definitive history of the POW camps. Yet from such sources as interviews, diaries, and more than 60 books on the subject, they describe in vivid detail the horrendous conditions in the camps and the forced marches after the Allied landing in France on June 6, 1944, and the Russian army's advance from the east. Survivors tell of the bitter cold, illness, filth, lack of food, despair, exhaustion, and indignities. They relate their fear of being shot by the guards, their faith in God, and their homesickness. They remember how hidden radios kept them informed of the war's progress and how Red Cross parcels sometimes brought them much-needed food. An exceptional chronicle of bravery and endurance. George Cohen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

This is an important work. The detail of the atrocities and hardships inflicted on American and British POWs by the Germans makes up the bulk of this book, but is needed to put the lives of the POWs into context. Their's was a miserable existence (if they survived), and support from the nations that had sent them into harm's way was hardly forthcoming. The policy that paid them a pittance for each day in captivity but subtracted any money they received from the Germans during their POW time from their pay was cruel bureaucratic nonsense at its worst. Most of the other reviewers have concentrated on the hardships of the marches and camp life, so I will focus on the liberation of the eastern camps by the Red Army. As the author explains, Stalin was suspicious of the Allies and feared they would not honor the public and secret agreements made at Yalta. As a result, the American and British POWs were not freed -- the Soviet troops simply took over the camps as new wardens and guards from the Germans. The Allied POWs became hostages for the good behavior of the British and American governments. Acceding to Stalin's demands, the British and American

authorities forcibly returned all previous Soviet citizens to Soviet control, a policy that resulted in the extermination of probably some two million people. Soviet POWs, slave labor deported from Russia to work in German industry, and Russians working or fighting for the Germans were all condemned to the Gulag or executed. But how many British and American POWs were in German hands? How many were "liberated" by the Soviets? How many disappeared into the Gulag as hostages? The answers are not here. The author discussed the numbers in Appendix 4, but the answer is elusive. The final SHAEF tally was 199,592 British, but only 168,746 British were officially returned. On the American side, General Marshall estimated that the Russians still held 25,000 Americans POWs on May 19th, of which only 1,500 returned home. Later estimates concluded that the Germans held 107,000 American POWs in total, of which approximately 85,000 returned home. The reader is advised to read Sanders et al, "Soldiers Of Misfortune" that addressed this problem and what happened to the American and British POWs who were shipped into the Gulag. This book approaches the subject of the missing POWS, but drops it quickly as a hot potato. It does conclude that not all the POWs came home and that "...some undoubtedly fell into Soviet hands and, for various reasons, were detained behind the rapidly descending iron curtain and died there." If this sounds like what happened in Korea and Vietnam, I hope the reader will not be excessively shocked. The whole subject of POWs, their treatment and return in all US wars is a subject that should be definitively handled and discussed in open forums. To date, that has not happened, but this book is another force seeking to open the door to full disclosure. I hope it helps.

Nichol's project here is ambitious. Arthur Durand wrote about 400 pages on Luft 3 alone. Here Nichol covers all the Stalag and Stalag Luft camps in as much detail as he can in a limited 400 page space. There is good definition in the differences between each of the marches of Stalags that were put on the road, January, 1945, in Germany's worst winter in a century, in order to prevent POWs from falling into Soviet control. A fairly limited number of interviewees are relied on for each story, however, many vets are rapidly passing now. Nichol really does a good job of getting at the politics of the Soviets gaining control of Poland, and gaining the return of their POWS and citizens (so they could further punish and execute their own people) in exchange for releasing the Allied POWs. It was a closely run thing. Nichol shows that the Soviets were capable of sending all the POWs to the Gulag. Nichol also goes into some detail on how, if the Gestapo or SS, instead of the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe, had gained control of the Stalags right at the end of the war, the survival of the Allied POWS may have been a much darker story than it was. Nichol points out Germany had signed the Geneva Convention 1929 allowing third country (US then Swiss) oversight of the camps and the

delivery of Red Cross parcels to the POW camps. Without the parcels POW attrition would have been many times greater. Amidst Total War there was co-operation on repatriations of severely wounded and medical/clergy personnel. The differences in the way the British and US POWs were treated compared to Slavic "Untermenschen" POWs and Concentration Camp prisoners is extremely stark and horrible, about 30% of 750,000 fatality rates in these groups on the marches..Aryan racial theories work to the advantage of UK and US POWs is another theme touched on here, and this theme is also explored in Arie J. Kochavi's fine work, "Confronting Captivity".

Not the best book on WWII, but worth the time. You'll have a great appreciation for POW's

The book was as promised. Great condition, couldn't tell it was a used book. Quick shipping, very well wrapped. I purchased this book for my mother. One of our relatives is in one of the pictures (very disturbing).The Last Escape: The Untold Story of Allied Prisoners of War in Europe 1944-45  
Any history buff would enjoy this book.

I was engrossed in this book. My dad was on the march from Stalag Luft IV so it was a personal read for me and great detail about the political and social climate at the time

Great book, Great price, Great sellers!

it's an out of print book my brother recommended, since it is the story of our father who would/could not take about his horrific experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany. He did give me a list of cities they were marched through written on a Red Cross postcard. It matches perfectly the marches described in the book by those who would tell their stories and a historian who put the bits and pieces together. So I have a personal stake in reading this. it is well written, too, so I think anyone just wondering about that untold story of WWII would find it fascinating as well as horrific.

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