



The Wooden Horse

Eric Williams

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Based on true events in which the author, calling himself Peter, was involved, this is the story of a successful escape from Stalag Luft III in German-occupied Poland, by British prisoners of war, during WWII.

The title is well chosen, for it was by means of a wooden vaulting-horse that Eric Williams and his two companions made their way out of the captivity of a German prison camp, into freedom.

This vaulting-horse was four feet six inches high and its base covered an area of five feet by three feet. When it was carried into the courtyard the German guards thought it was simply a vaulting-horse, similar to that used in any gymnasium.

It is true that the prisoners vaulted over it. But unknown to the German guards, two men were always concealed within the horse and while the prisoners vaulted, these two men were busy underground burrowing a tunnel.

When's the day's work was over the hole was boarded up, earth placed over the boards, and the horse with the two men inside taken back into the camp. This work of tunnelling went on for several months, until the tunnel was over 120 feet long and extended beyond the barbed wire which bounded the camp.

The Wooden Horse Details

Date : Published 1949 by Collins

ISBN :

Author : Eric Williams

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, War, World War II, Military, Military History, Historical, Classics, European History, Biography, Military Fiction

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From Reader Review The Wooden Horse for online ebook

Matthew says

A daring tale of escape from the eyes of a British soldier in a German POW camp... Told with a flowing style, underlying humor, and quick dialogue. Good Book!

Joseph Hofmann says

Read ages ago and need to re read. During the digging of the tunnels in Stalag Luft III (the Great Escape), some prisoners came up with an ingenious invention to fool the Germans and shorten a tunnel by hundreds of yards. Amazing story and written extremely well

Mary L. says

Amazing story of life in a stalag and escaping from it. Hogan's Heros isn't quite as far fetched as we might think. Men can be amazing in their kindness to each other under adversity. I am so glad that I decided to read this.

Studehawk says

Duty
Honor
Country
Courage
Friendship
Dedication
Perseverance
I could go on.

This book encompasses all of the above and more. A great tale , well told by the author. This story grips your attention while reading and it won't let go.

Excellent.

William Powell says

There are two significantly different versions of this book. Eric Williams' original 1949 edition was written while military censorship was still in force, and is a simpler story, built around simpler characters.

In the 1979 edition, Williams sets the records straight on (particularly) one event that was invented to make a

better ending for the 1949 book. The rest of the book is significantly revised and expanded, also, and the PoWs' language becomes less "comic-book" and more (one assumes) true to life.

Read the 1979 revision if you want the actual story - the 1949 is more like a Boys' Own adventure.

Pramod Nair says

'Wooden Horse' is a fictionalized narration of the true events behind one of the most ingenious and daring escape made by POWs from a German prison camp during World War II. Written by RAF Flight Lieutenant *'Eric Williams'*, who was one of the escapees this book is an absorbing narration of how perseverance, bravery and ingenuity helped the prisoners to break from a POW prison camp which was specially designed to be escape-resistant.

Eric Williams was shot down over Germany in 1942 and was initially imprisoned in the '*Oflag XXI-B*' prisoner-of-war camp in Occupied Poland. A failed attempt at escape from that prison resulted in him being transferred to one of the most escape-proof POW camps of the time, '*Stalag Luft III*', the Luftwaffe-run prison camp for captured airmen, in Zagan, Poland. Those readers who are familiar with the *Paul Brickhill* book from 1950 or the 1963 *Steve McQueen* smash hit movie, both titled *The Great Escape* will remember '*Stalag Luft III*' as the infamous prison camp specifically designed to prevent prisoners from tunneling out of the camp with both natural and man made defensive measures.

'Wooden Horse' is the detailed accounts of how a bunch of prisoners beat all the odds stacked against them by punching through each of the camp's defenses with tenacity and a genius of a plan. The book narrates these tense events separated in to three different sections. It is in the first phase of the narration that the reader gets introduced to the 'Wooden Horse' – *a wooden vaulting horse meant for exercise with a hidden hollow inside which was made by the prisoners to camouflage the entrance of an escape tunnel, which was under construction-* and this explains the title of the book.

The hollowed out wooden vaulting horse was a brilliant invention just like the real '*Trojan Horse*' and it allowed Williams and two other officers conceal themselves while engaged in the tunneling operation and to hide the large quantities of sand, which they dug out. The second phase of the book describe their escape from the prison through the tunnel dodging search dogs, sentries and searchlights and the third phase narrates their pulse racing journey across German occupied territories engulfed in the desperations of war on foot and on train with the ever present danger of getting captured again. After some real close shaves with danger they finally manage to stow away themselves in two different ships to reach the safety of a neutral Sweden.

Though based on true events, since the book was written just after the war in 1949, the military censorship, which was still in existence over the matters, prevented the author from using the real names of the escapees and he portrays himself under the fictitious name of '*Peter Howard*'. The author's attempt in recreating the mental attitude of the prisoners and their conversations, which reflect their contempt towards the German guards show the true doctrine which is instilled in a soldier during any war, the doctrine of "*In total war one despises one's enemy, and as a prisoner of war one's only weapon is derision*".

'Wooden Horse' is a classic tale of escape and evasion, which can excite and inspire the reader and keep him glued to the book like a thriller.

Ed says

Very good 2 cassette audio book that I read in February 2007 even though this book was published in 1984. This is a true 2 hour story about how two English pilots were shot down, captured, imprisoned at Stalag-Luft III on December 17, 1942, and how they escaped to freedom using a very clever deception, and a lot of determination.

Diana says

A fascinating read on prisoner of war life and the strong need to escape; after all, that is the prisoners duty - to escape. And knowing that this is a true story made it all the more interesting to me. I love reading the survival stories of World War II. I read from a 1950 printing in which Eric Williams wrote he could now freely write of the Escape and had used a little of the material he had originally written in his 1943 book "Goon in the Block".

Sharyn Cardinali says

The rest is over

A never ending source of fear and danger from the German Army spurs two American Officers to circumvent the prison camp rules and regulations to work endlessly on escape. I really liked this book.

Kathryn Judson says

I read a 1959 mass market paperback edition from Berkley Books. In the introduction, it says that it's a special edition for teens.

This is a fictionalized account of an escape from a prisoner of war camp run by the Germans, written by one of the escapees. The camp is surrounded by barbed wire, and buildings inside the compound are placed on piles so that guards can see under the buildings. It's hardly a prime location for POWs to build a tunnel, but build a tunnel they do. The ingenuity of the prisoners, not just for the tunnel, but for other tasks, is inspiring. The way the men deal with each other and the indignities and dangers of their imprisonment is interesting, as are the difficulties faced by the escapees as they try to get out of German-controlled territory. The story is well written. The switch to the fictionalized format let the author insert more points of view.

I saw that a reviewer at Amazon said that later editions of the book left out a fabricated deadly encounter with a German soldier that the original publishers wanted put into the book to punch up the ending. My book is apparently an early one, because it has the incident. In my opinion, it wasn't the least bit needed. The story was interesting enough, and suspenseful enough, without it.

Trine says

An interesting and amazing story especially knowing that it is a true story. It is the story telling and not the story that is the reason for three and not four stars, but being written as a novel instead of a non-fiction story it somehow fails to really capture me.

Henry says

This book was like a rollercoaster ride. Sometimes the action zipped along quickly and others it slowly ascended towards the climax. Written about an escape from a World War Two German camp, detailing how three British officers hid the entrance to their tunnel under a wooden vaulting horse. I enjoyed this book even in the slow parts and would recommend it to anyone who enjoys war stories.

Steve Hall says

An old friend revisited!

Great read! I first read this in the mid 1960's, and enjoyed it hugely. When I saw it, I knew that a re-read was in order. The understated British manner is captivating. Mr. Williams was a true cousin to our own greatest generation.

Margaret says

Very gripping story. I enjoyed it.

Edward L says

This is a true story about escape from a German Prisoner of War Camp by three British soldiers during WWII. It involves the use of a Wooden Horse but quite different from the famous horse used by the Greeks at Troy. It is a good story highlighting the ingenuity of the English prisoners at the camp and the daring successful escape from the camp and return to Great Britain.

Nada says

I was engrossed from the first chapter. I could not imagine being in the position of being a POW. These men not only escaped but made it home. I felt for them at every moment of their journey and felt immense joy that all three escapees made it home.

Raymond Bial says

One of the great escape books of all time about RAF flyers imprisoned in an infamous German POW camp during World War II.

P.S. Winn says

This is an intriguing story of the hardship, challenges and horror of WW II as prisoners in a camp try to escape. The story is based on fact and is one to grab.

Iris (The Sheep and the Wolf) says

Not really my style of book (I picked it up because it's one of my dad's favourites), but an amazing story! I guess it really is acquired taste though: Williams obsesses over the smallest details and therefore the main part of the story feels very slow at times, whereas the ending to me was very sudden and abrupt.

Carrie says

My first escape story from a POW camp. I loved it! The ingenuity of it all. Speaking with second world war veterans, they tell of amazing things the prisoners got up to and how they all felt it was their duty to try and escape.
