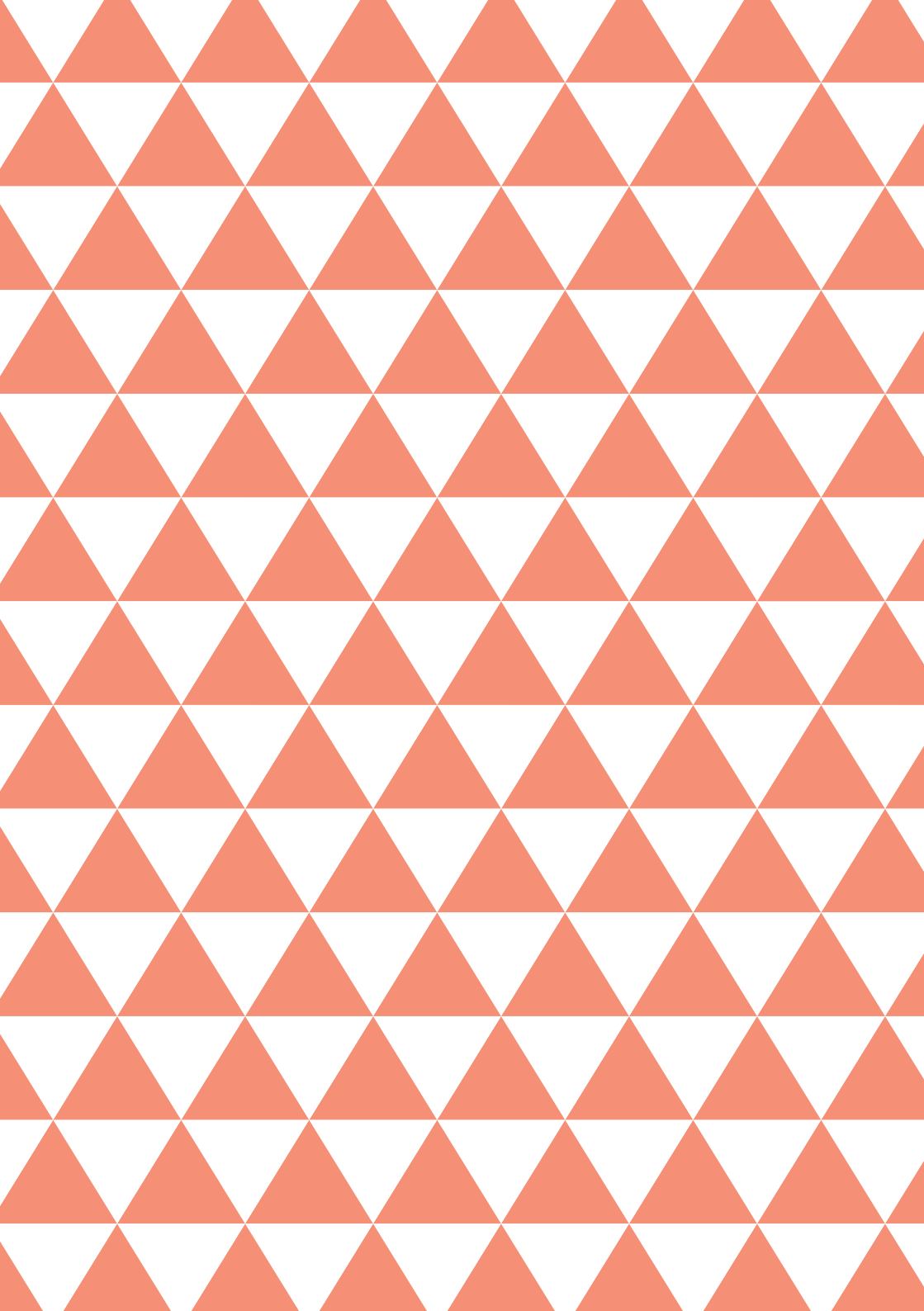


COLDITZ CASTLE

2000 PRISONERS

320 ESCAPE ATTEMPTS

56 HOME RUNS



OBJECTS OF ESCAPE

Glider, Doctors Uniform, Sheet, Key, False Brick, Passport, Soup, Can, Guards Uniform, Moustache, Mattress, French Lady, Tunnel, Football, Clock, Suitcase, Bricks, Doors, Van, Straw, Walking Stick, Helmet, Dog, Car, Button, Jelly, Cardboard box, Glasses, Pencil.

This Publication looks at the incredible stories of the escape attempts at Colditz Prison during WW2. The Objects they used and the skills of the soldiers with limited materials to create amazing escape tools.

D

uring the Second World War, Colditz Castle was the site of the notorious prisoner-of-war camp known as 'Oflag 4C', the 'Bad Boys Camp', the forbidding fortress prison in the heart of Nazi Germany, from which there was to be no escape.

Prisoners contrived a number of methods to escape. They duplicated keys to various doors, made copies of maps, forged Ausweise (identity papers), and manufactured their own tools. MI9, a department of the British War Office which specialized in escape equipment, communicated with the prisoners in code and smuggled them new escape aids disguised in care packages from family or from non-existent charities, although they never tampered with Red Cross care packages for fear it would force the Germans to stop their delivery to all camps. The Germans became skilled

at intercepting packages containing contraband material.

There was also a form of black market whereby the prisoners used items from their Red Cross parcels to buy information and tools from the cooperative guards and townsfolk.

In April 1945, US troops entered Colditz town and, after a two-day fight, captured the castle on April 16. In May 1945, the Soviet occupation of Colditz began. Following the Yalta Conference it became a part of East Germany. The Soviets turned Colditz castle into a prison camp for local burglars and non-Communist. Apparently the tradition of escaping continued even during the soviet era where the new prisoners even used tunnels that were dug during WW2 to escape or found the old tools hidden by allied officers.



A / 'the Bad Boys' outside Colditz, 1943
B / Guards patrolling checkpoints 1 and 2

T

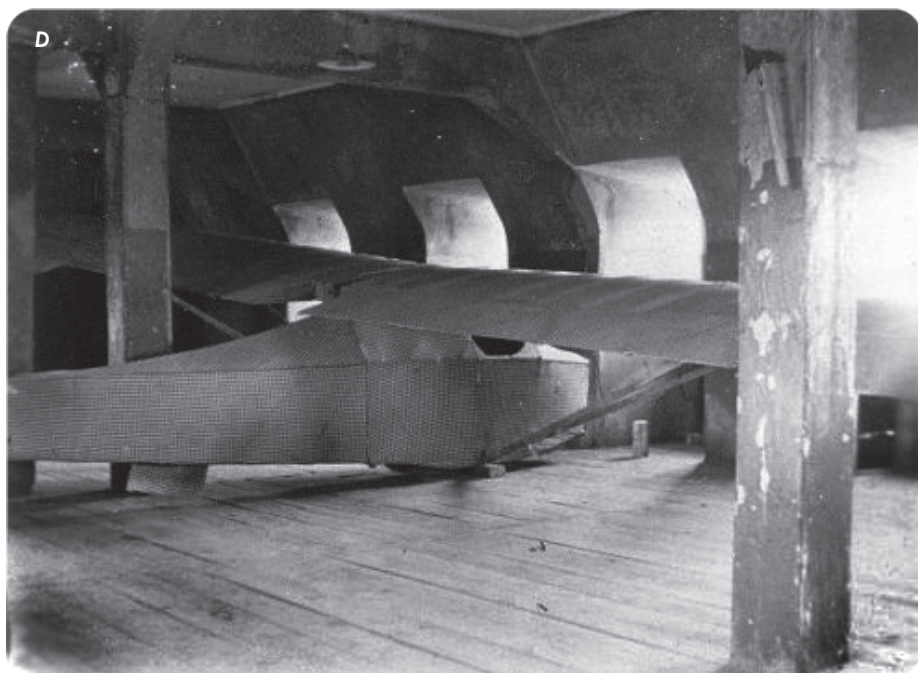
hough it was considered a high security prison, it boasted one of the highest records of successful escape attempts. This could be owing to the general nature of the prisoners that were sent there; most of them had attempted escape previously from other prisons and were transferred to Colditz because the Germans had thought the castle escape-proof. One lavish scheme even included a glider that was kept in a remote portion of the castle's attic, although it was never used because Germany surrendered to the Allies before the scheduled date of the planned escape. Today the castle and the church space require a significant amount of refurbishment and restoration. The last users moved out on August 1, 1996, and since then the castle has been almost empty except for the occasional visitor. The Colditz historical society began in 1996 with the intent of preservation.





C / Guards preparing for inspection of post

GLIDER



D / The Cock in position to take off at Colditz.

Following the execution of 50 prisoners who had taken part in the "Great Escape" from Stalag Luft III, the Allied High Command had discouraged escape attempts. However the plan to build a glider was encouraged to divert the energies of the prisoners. The idea for the glider came from Lieutenant Tony Rolt. Rolt, who was not even an airman, had noticed the chapel roof line was completely obscured from German view. They realised that the roof would make a perfect launching point from which the glider could fly across the River Mulde, which was about 60 metres below. The team was headed by Bill Goldfinch and Jack Best. Goldfinch and Best were aided by their discovery in the prison library of "Aircraft Design", a two-volume work by C.H. Latimer-Needham which explained the necessary physics and engineering and included a detailed

diagram of a wing section. The glider was assembled by Goldfinch and Best and 12 assistants known as "apostles", in the lower attic above the chapel. Since the Germans were accustomed to looking down for tunnels. Not up for secret workshops, the officers felt rather safe from detection. Nevertheless, they placed many lookouts and created an electric alarm system to warn the builders of approaching guards. he glider constructed was a lightweight, two-seater, high wing, monoplane design of wood.

The take-off was scheduled for the spring of 1945 during an air raid blackout but by then the Allied guns could be heard and the war's outcome fairly certain. The prisoners began to realise that soon they could be set free.

E



E / The re-built Cock taking flight in 2007.



The British escape officer decided that the glider should be available for use in case the SS ordered the massacre of the prisoners as a way to get a message out to approaching American troops. The glider was approaching completion when the American Army liberated the camp on 16 April 1945.

Although the Colditz Cock never flew in real life, the concept was fictionalized, depicting a successful flight and escape, in the 1971 TV movie *The Birdmen* starring Doug McClure, Chuck Connors, Rene Auberjonois and Richard Basehart. It is also depicted in the final escape from Colditz Castle in the fictional story depicted in *Prisoner of War*, a game on the Sony PlayStation .

The fate of the glider is not known but the castle was in the zone controlled by the Russians who did not cooperate with its reclamation. The only evidence of its completion was a photograph, said to have been taken by an American soldier. However, Goldfinch had kept his drawings which enabled a one-third scale model to be constructed. This was eventually launched from the castle roof in 1993. full-sized replica of the Colditz glider was commissioned by Channel 4 and was built by Southdown Aviation Ltd at Lasham Airfield. The glider was flown successfully by John Lee on its first attempt at RAF Odiham, with Colditz survivors looking on at their creation. The programme was shown in 2000 by Channel 4 in the UK as part of a 3-part documentary series called "Escape from Colditz".

TUNNEL

The French officers came very close to pulling off what would have been the most massive escape of the entire war. All 200 French prisoners were going to make a run for it when the tunnel was ready.

A clock tower with a circular stairway went from the prisoners' courtyard to the attic three stories up. During a period of eight months, The French created a tunnel that went from the top of the clock tower all the way down to the wine cellar under the building and right through the medieval foundation of the castle -- 44 meters long.

It was an enormous project involving 31 men and tons of debris. The diggers were brazen; the castle echoed with banging and scraping noises all night, every night. Everyone, including the

Germans, knew a huge tunnel was being constructed, but where?

The Germans were desperate. They conducted searches day and night, but no luck. The sounds could now be heard from all over the castle, inside and out, and still they couldn't find it. Their microphones weren't able to zero in on the location.

Captain Eggers was getting more and more worried; based on the material they kept finding, he knew that they had reached the castle foundation. Then dirt from outside the castle walls started appearing! The break-out was scheduled for January 17; they had only 12 feet to go. On January 15, an observant security officer was searching the attic of the clock tower. He looked behind the workings of

the clock to the floor below and saw something that shouldn't have been there: a ladder. He found a small boy and lowered him down into the small space. "There are prisoners down there!", the frightened boy shouted. And the tunnel was found.

The tunnel is still there and can be seen on the castle tour. The French had even put in electric lights for the entire underground portion and had a cart running on a track. One officer made a working camera from materials scrounged from the prison and used it to take first-rate ID photos for the escapers. Another man created a functional typewriter that was used for fake documents.

A young German officer who stood as a sentry at the camp from 1941

to 1945 wrote in his memoirs, "You might think at first sight that the place was impregnable. It probably was, but apart from putting bars on the windows it had never really been built for the purpose of keeping people in. Breaking out was shown to be much easier than breaking in!" This is why the French dug out. Even today as the Castle is being restored new tunnels are still being discovered. Some of the tunnels even contain the tools that were used. One such item is a Red Cross soup can that was used as a makeshift spade to dig a 50 metre tunnel out of the castle.

One French officer wrote, "While digging in the tunnel I was in my own little world, totally devoted to breaking out of this castle by any means. I learned to love the darkness."

THE LADY

A French officer almost got away dressed as a rather intimidating-looking woman. "She" made it past the sentries but then his luck ran out. As he walked past a group of prisoners out for their exercise, his watch slipped off his wrist. An unsuspecting prisoner picked it up and gallantly called out to alert her.

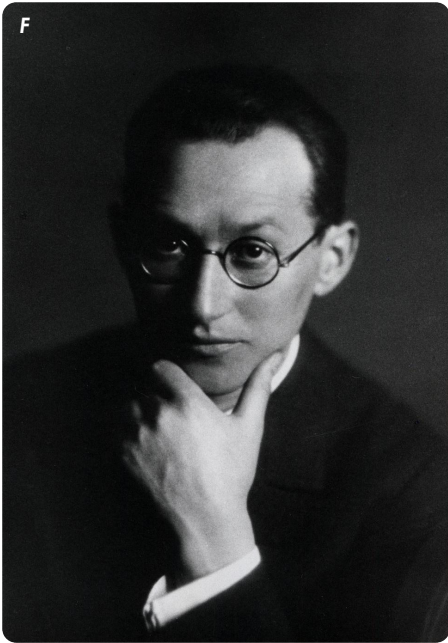
The French officer kept walking. The prisoner told the guard about the lost watch and the guard alerted the other sentry. When the second guard got a closer look at the "lady", the deception was discovered.

The French officer tried to run but found it difficult as he was wearing women's clothing and ended up falling in a ditch outside the castle grounds before the German guards caught

him. It is not known how Jean Le Sack managed to acquire the women's clothing but the soldiers did use to dress up as women when performing plays inside the prison.

There was also a bustling underground trade in producing outfits for escape. German guard uniforms were produced on numerous occasions to aid in escapes as well as doctors and civilian clothing. Perhaps the lady's outfit was produced at such an enterprise. Prisoners used to donate items of clothing such as socks and ties to be used in the production of these items and they used anything from soil to jelly to dye the clothing too.

For trying to escape dressed as women the French officer was given 2 weeks solitary confinement.



F / 'The Lady', French Officer Jean Le Sack before the war, 1939.

D / Soldiers dressed as women in, 1941.

GERMAN GUARD



*H / British officer in German uniform disguise
I / The commanding officer of Colditz in 1941*



There was big competition between allied nations in the Colitz of which nation could carry out the most successful escapes. By the American liberation the french were in the lead with 50 successful escapes. Britain was second with 30. Because of the competition it became a matter of national pride which meant that industries sprung up inside the prison to cater for this lust of escape. One of these industries was costume design for escape. The British had experts at German uniform copying that were used in many escape. One such escape involved a young British officer on the night of April the 4th 1942.

Material were scarce and soldiers had to save up their bedding and other materials received through Red Cross parcels just to scrape together enough

The Allied officer had his German uniform hidden under his usual clothing and after dinner he hid for 4 hours under floor boards just outside the main mess hall. When it was sufficiently dark he left his hiding place and then pretended to be a German Guards on patrol.

All was going well as the officer was fairly fluent in German he could say simple "Hallo" to other German guards without raising much suspicion. He made it out and past the first gate at the second gate he walked past the prison commander without the correct salute. This annoyed the commander and he raised the alarm. the commander himself chased the officer and the two were involved in a fight before other guards pulled them apart and arrested the prisoner.

