

Source N - Great Escape article from Mail Online by Phil Craig

The story starts with a classic moment of British derring-do - what Hollywood rightly christened The Great Escape.

On March 24, 1944, 76 Allied airmen, mostly RAF officers, crawled along a tunnel deep beneath the forbidding fences and deadly machine-gun towers of the Stalag Luft III PoW camp and escaped to freedom.

Unfortunately, the tunnel was discovered half way through the break-out and many more got left behind. Among them was 21-year-old Flight Lieutenant Alan Bryett.

Today, sitting in his home in Bromley, Bryett smiles at the recollection of their extraordinary escapade - and the courage of its leader, Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, 'the bravest man I ever knew'.

He also insists that Bushell never took the terrible risks they faced for granted.



'I remember him telling us that we couldn't run an escape like this without one or two of us being killed.'

Hero: British prisoner-of-war Roger Bushell was shot by the Nazis in 1944 after attempting to escape

Unfortunately, however, it wasn't just one or two who lost their lives. In the end, 50 of the escapees, including Squadron Leader Bushell, were murdered by the Germans.

Imprisoned since 1940, Bushell was a driven man and a fanatical escaper. One previous attempt had ended in tragedy when the Czech family sheltering him were rounded up and executed, so Bushell knew exactly what the enemy was capable of. He had also been warned that his next escape would be his last.

And so it proved to be. All but three of the escapees were recaptured within days - and Bushell was among them.

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The Great Escape case study

As famously portrayed in the film, Bushell's companion made a fatal mistake. When a German policeman said 'Good luck,' to him in English, he replied, also in English: 'Thank you very much.' Their fate was sealed.

Bushell likely knew at that moment that he was going to be shot. His great escape had prompted a massive man-hunt and had infuriated the Nazi regime - just as he hoped that it would. Somebody was going to pay.

But nobody expected the scale of the revenge. On the direct orders of Adolf Hitler, most of the recaptured men were shot. Not collectively in a field, as portrayed in the film, but alone or in pairs, along quiet country lanes. Most were dispatched by a bullet in the back of the neck, a favoured Gestapo method.

When news of the atrocity reached London, there was outrage. As escaped prisoners of war, these men should have been protected by the Geneva Convention. They should have faced solitary confinement, not execution. The British government vowed to find the men responsible, promising 'exemplary justice'.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1222565/He-shot-hero-Great-Escape-cold-blood-But-Nazi-DIDNT-deserve-hang.html#ixzz1t8ftoVUj>