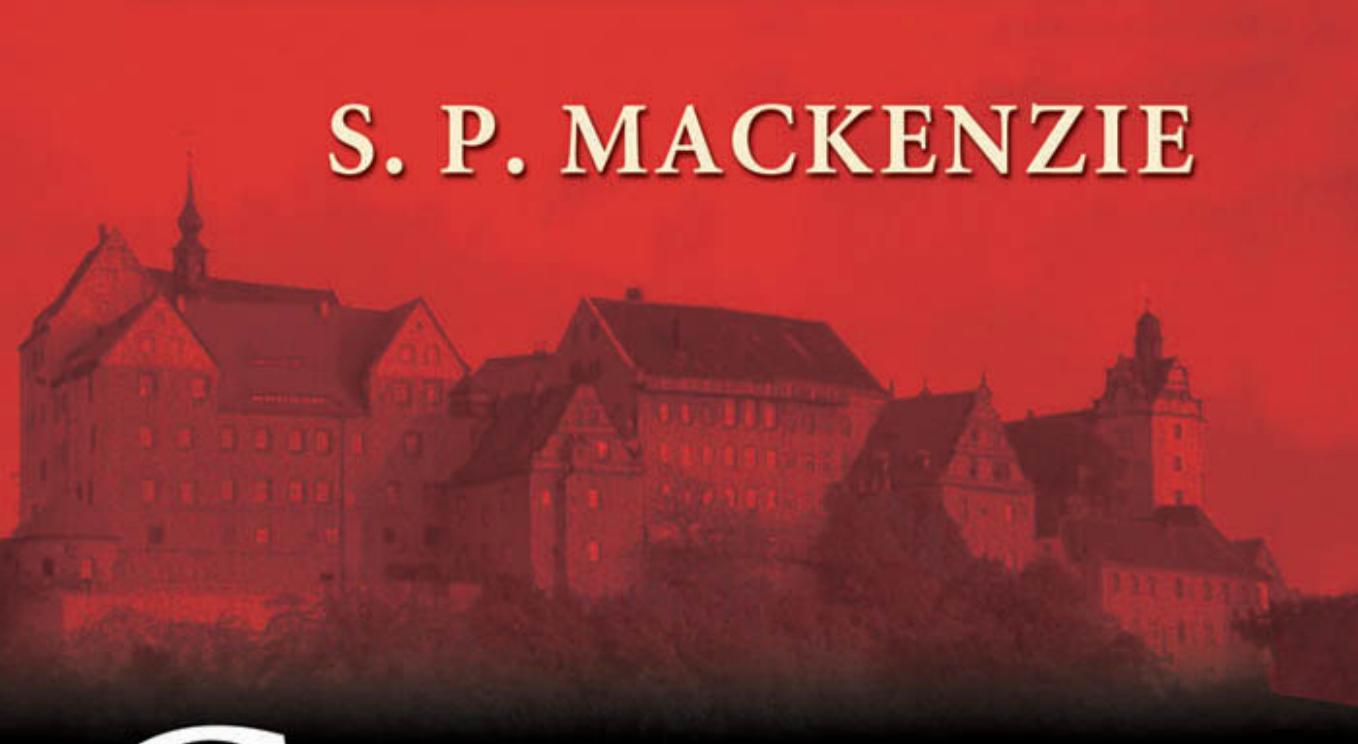
S. P. MACKENZIE



THE COLDITZ MYTH

THE REAL STORY OF POW LIFE IN NAZI GERMANY

The Colditz Myth

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The Colditz Myth

British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany

S. P. MACKENZIE

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Preface and Acknowledgements

As its title and subtitle suggest, the purpose of this book is essentially twofold. The first aim is to explore the nature and development of the popular perceptions associated with Colditz. How did this most famous of prisoner-of-war camps come to assume such mythical proportions in the British public imagination? The second goal is to explore the extent to which the reality differed from the image in connection with the British prisoner-of-war-experience in general and within the walls of Colditz itself. Was life behind the wire really akin to a Greyfriars version of a public school?

The introductory chapter examines the development of what has sometimes been dubbed the Colditz industry. There follow two chapters dealing with initial elements of the POW experience, beginning with surrender on the battlefield and ending with arrival in the permanent camps inside the Third Reich. The next chapters compare and contrast the camps themselves and those who ran them. (Here and subsequently the true situation at Colditz is examined after the state of affairs elsewhere has been explored in order to ensure a comparative perspective.) A number of the most significant factors impinging on both bodily and mental health and well-being inside German camps—from food and clothing to religion and politics—form the subject matter of Chapter 5. Chapter 6 chronicles the kinds of work other-rank prisoners were obliged to undertake at the behest of the enemy, along with the recreational pursuits of both officers and men held captive. The way in which prisoners could suffer or, more rarely, benefit from spontaneous actions in addition to the policy decisions of their captors forms the subject-matter of Chapter 7. Chapter 8 looks at British attitudes toward various other national contingents, as well as how ordinary Germans and neutral visitors were perceived. The nature and extent of efforts to continue the war behind the wire, along with their opposite, outright collaboration, are the focus of the next chapter. Escaping is of course central to the

mythology surrounding British prisoners of war in Nazi Germany, and, with the groundwork having been laid through discussion of less prominent but sometimes more vital aspects of POW life, discussion of this high-profile but oft-misunderstood activity is examined at length in Chapter 10. The final two chapters chronicle the period leading up to and following final liberation. The Conclusion seeks to sum up the ways in which the Colditz Myth needs to be placed in context.

A book of this kind would not have been possible without assistance from staff members at a variety of libraries and archives. I would therefore like to thank, collectively, the staff of the BBC Written Archive; the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre; the Guildhall Library; the House of Lords Record Office; the Imperial War Museum (the departments of documents, printed books, and the sound archive); the National Archives (a.k.a. the Public Record Office); the National Sound Archive; the Norfolk Record Office; the Second World War Experience Centre developed by Dr Peter Liddle; Research and Information Services at the RAF Museum; the Thomas Cooper Library (especially the inter-library loan staff) at the University of South Carolina; and the University of New Brunswick Archives and Special Collections. I would also like to thank Bart Brodowski for translation of Polish-language material.

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List of Abbreviations

ABC	American Broadcasting Corporation
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation (Written Archives Centre)
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BFI	British Film Institute Library, London
BL	British Library, London
BQSM	Battery Quartermaster Sergeant
BRC	British Red Cross
CMAC	Contemporary Medical Archives Centre
CRU	Civil Resettlement Unit
CSVA	Colditz Society Video Archive
GL	Guildhall Library
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HLRO	House of Lords Record Office
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IOR	India Office Records (British Library)
IWM	Imperial War Museum (Department of Documents)
IWM (Books)	Imperial War Museum (Department of Books)
IWM (Rolf)	Imperial War Museum (Department of Documents: David Rolf collection)
IWMSA	Imperial War Museum (Department of Sound)
LC	Peter Liddle Collection, University of Leeds
MO	Medical Officer
NARS	National Archives and Record Service
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
NSA	National Sound Archive
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht

POW	Prisoner of War
OCTU	Officer Candidate Training Unit
PBS	Public Broadcasting System
PP	Protecting Power
PRO	Public Record Office [The National Archives]
PWX	Ex-Prisoner of War Organization SHAEF
QMS	Quartermaster-Sergeant
QVR	Queen Victoria's Rifles
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFM	RAF Museum
RAFVR	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAMP	Recovered Allied Military Personnel
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RAOC	Royal Army Ordinance Corps
RC	Red Cross
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RN	Royal Navy
RNVR	Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
SAO	Senior American Officer
SAS	Special Air Service
SBO	Senior British Officer
SBNCO	Senior British Non-Commissioned Officer
SBS	Special Boat Section
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SPM	author interview
SWWEC	Second World War Experience Centre
UNB	University of New Brunswick
UNWCC	United Nations War Crimes Commission
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces.
WO	Warrant Officer
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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Source: Based on Foot and Langley, *MI9: The British Secret Service that Fostered Escape and Evasion 1939–1945* (Bodley Head: London, 1979) p. 99.


BALTIC SEA
Heydekrug, VI
REICHSKOMMISSARIAT
OSTLAND
EAST PRUSSIA
Danzig
Marienburg, XXB
Gross Tychow, IV
Bialystok
Thorn, XXA
Schubin, XXIB
Vistula
Posen, XXID
Warsaw
REICHSKOMMISSARIAT
UKRAINE
GENERAL
GOVERNMENT
OF POLAND
Bankau, VII
Lamsdorf, VIIIB/344
Lemberg
Mährisch Trübau, VIIIF
MORAVIA
SLOVAKIA
Tri Duby
Vienna
RUMANIA
Budapest
HUNGARY
Danube
CROATIA
Airmen's Camps Stalag Luft system
Officers' Camps Oflags
Other Ranks' Camps Stalags
Boundary of Germany, 1937
Other 1937 boundaries
Boundary of 'Greater Germany', 1942
Other 1942 boundaries
0 100 200 miles
0 100 200 300 km

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Introduction
The Colditz Phenomenon

Sir, Is there no escape from Colditz?

(letter to *The Times*, 1974)[1]

There is a picture of Colditz in people's minds. Whatever you or I think about it is irrelevant...

(letter from one former prisoner of Oflag IVC to another, 1981)[2]

Surely not *another* book on Colditz! After all, over the past fifty years the story has been told many times, in a variety of ways, and from a number of perspectives. Far more has been written about Colditz than about any other camp, relative to the size of the population, in which British prisoners were held during the Second World War. As long ago as the mid-1980s the 'full story' could be purchased, while at the dawn of the twenty-first century the 'definitive history' appeared on bookshelves. Surely there is nothing much left to write about?[3]

In fact in a rather paradoxical fashion there is. For the very success and scale of what one observer dubbed the 'Colditz industry'—a number of best-sellers, a popular feature film, a hugely successful television drama series, several TV documentaries, plus assorted games and toys—has helped create what is arguably a rather distorted view of what life was like both inside Colditz (officially Oflag IVC) and in Nazi Germany in general for British and Commonwealth prisoners of war.

Aided and abetted by books and films celebrating episodes such as the Great Escape and the Wooden Horse that occurred elsewhere, the Colditz Story was central in creating an enduring set of popular assumptions in which life behind the wire was interpreted, both figuratively and sometimes literally, in sporting terms. Escape was the name of the game, with the team from Oflag IVC topping the league tables in terms of home runs. The popular image of what went on at Colditz castle, and by extension what happened at more anonymous camps elsewhere in the Greater Reich in more diluted form, became and remained one in which

prisoners bore the burden of captivity with a light heart while helping one another with schemes to outwit and ultimately evade their captors. Like many enduring images this is based on a solid core of historical fact. But it is a core around which audiences, and those who have successfully catered for them, have unconsciously woven layers of generalized meaning based on selective evidence that serve their own needs rather better than the cause of a full and balanced understanding of the past. It remains, as a critic observed a quarter-of-a-century ago, 'another of those stories so peculiarly attractive to the British of moral victory wrested from defeat, laced throughout with understated heroism and that absurd sense of humour which is the pride and inverted swank of Englishmen'.[4]

The problem with the Colditz Myth is that it drastically oversimplifies and distorts the general experience in Germany and even that of prisoners held inside the *Schloss* itself. The emphasis on escapes, which in any case were less pervasive than is commonly assumed, has meant less exciting aspects of the POW experience have been underplayed or ignored. Though conditions were better than what men captured on the Eastern Front or Allied troops who fell into Japanese hands were forced to undergo, life for servicemen treated as *Engländer* by the Third Reich—Commonwealth and Empire men as well as those from the United Kingdom—was rarely the stuff of *Boy's Own*. Privation, boredom, uncertainty, occasional danger, and much else besides made POW life for most men resemble an endurance test rather than a light-hearted game. Much of what is assumed, furthermore, is based on tales of escapes by officers—not least from Oflag IVC—thereby obscuring the sometimes quite different experience of the majority of POWs without commissions who were put to work in the Third Reich. What is more, what was true for one set of prisoners in one location at one particular time—be it at Colditz or elsewhere—might not be true for another. The experience of being in enemy hands varied a good deal. Though the myth continues to appeal to many people, a more comprehensive examination of the prisoner-of-war experience can perhaps give us a truer idea of the multifaceted nature of life behind the wire. It might also yield a less escape-fixated appreciation of the hurdles that these men faced so long ago. Colditz, in short, needs to be placed in context.[5]

In order to do this, however, it is first necessary to chronicle how Colditz came to establish itself and remain firmly in the British popular consciousness. Why did this small camp, only one among several dozen (hundreds, if working camps are included) in which British prisoners

were held, become so uniquely famous? Other officer camps from which escapes took place, such as Warburg or Eichstätt, have been forgotten by all but a few. And while many people still remember the Great Escape and Wooden Horse tunnels, they are usually hard pressed to identify the location from which these breaks took place (respectively the North and East Compounds at Stalag Luft III, Sagan, as it happens). 'Colditz', meanwhile, enjoys almost universal name recognition within the United Kingdom, summoning up mental images of a floodlit, high-walled, and steep-gabled *Schloss* imposingly perched on a crag from which a variety of clever escapes were mounted. In both the popular and the quality press it is routinely used as a simile and a metaphor for high-security facilities and events, tough institutional regimens, and individual ingeniousness. What was the process through which Colditz became so dominant in popular consciousness?[6]

During the war Oflag IVC did not have much of a chance to seriously impinge on the public mind. Families of course found out through the Red Cross if their menfolk had been transferred to the *Schloss*, and subsequently received letters and postcards from Colditz. These were first read by the Germans, however, which meant that descriptions of the place were necessarily skimpy. Men who escaped back to England could theoretically tell all, but were warned to keep their mouths shut in public for security reasons. More broadly the authorities were keen to keep public exposure to news of the camps as limited and innocuous as possible, thereby avoiding anything appearing in the media that might provoke the enemy and make conditions worse (or might suggest that not enough was being done to safeguard prisoners' interests and so embarrass the government). The end-result was that only the blandest and most reassuring words and images were made available to the public. In the case of Colditz this meant allowing the publication of occasional portraits and other drawings sent to relatives in the *Illustrated London News*.[7]

Once the castle was freed and the war came to an end, however, things quickly began to change. Among the prisoners at Colditz was Michael Burn, a *Times* correspondent before the war, who wasted no time in filing dispatches to his former employer on the events surrounding the liberation of Oflag IVC. Far more detailed than the sketchy reports being sent home by press representatives accompanying the Allied advance and witnessing the liberation of other camps, these lengthy dispatches were published on 19 and 21 April 1945. Eight months later A. J. Evans,

already known to the public through the success of his memoir detailing his escape from Germany during the Great War, was able to publish some stories of Second World War breaks as well as reflections on the problems of escaping drawn from his personal experience in working with MI9, the organization set up to help servicemen behind enemy lines evade and escape captivity, and his liaison duties connected with the liberation of certain camps. In *Escape and Liberation, 1940–1945*, published by Hodder & Stoughton in December 1945, he revealed details of various wartime escapes, starting with one from Colditz. In a couple of pages he sketched out an image of the place as 'the "naughty boys' camp" ' for persistent troublemakers, where the guards outnumbered the prisoners, a 'strafe' regimen was employed, and life for the prisoners was 'hard but hectic'. The castle was also the place where 'every possible means of annoying the Germans was thought out with care, and practised with skill'. Escaping was a high priority in the castle, and officers 'spent a great deal of their time devising ingenious methods of getting out'. Locks were picked, tunnels dug, and escape attempts launched, including the one in which Flight Lieutenant H. N. 'Bill' Fowler and a Dutch companion made a home run in September of 1942. But as Evans admitted, this brief account was merely scratching the surface of the goings-on at Oflag IVC. 'The whole story of Colditz will, no doubt, one day be told, and it will make an enthralling story,' he wrote, 'but it must be written by one of the men who was there.'[8]

As it happened, plans were already afoot to publish something about the place prior to the point at which Evans put pen to paper. In the summer of 1943 the International YMCA had started sending to prisoners in Germany, free of charge, a bound, blank-page journal or diary, 'in which we could write something, sketch, paste photos, and so on', as one recipient put it. Two Canadian engineer lieutenants, W. A. 'Dusty' Millar and J. E. R. Wood, started asking their fellow prisoners at Oflag IVC to write down memorable incidents from their service lives before and during captivity. Eventually it was decided that it might be worthwhile to try and assemble some of these reminiscences in book form, accompanied by the pastel portraits and other drawings done over the years by a young mortar officer and gifted artist, John Watton, the aim being to produce a sort of Colditz yearbook—proceeds from the sale of which would go to the Red Cross. Millar was murdered in an escape attempt in early 1944. Wood carried on with the project, and, with help from the Red Cross and the British Army of the Rhine, saw *Detour: The Story of Oflag IVC* through to publication under the auspices of the

Falcon Press in early 1946. Though containing much of historical interest, and beautifully produced, *Detour* was a volume of reminiscence rather than a tale of escapes per se. While copies made their way into libraries in some unexpected places, it was not widely reviewed and never reissued.[9]

Meanwhile another, more fictionalized account of life in Colditz was attracting a certain amount of notice in literary circles. Micky Burn, the former *Times* man, had been captured fighting with the commandos at St-Nazaire. Eventually sent to Oflag IVC, he had, among other things, begun work on a novel about life in the castle. Though the characters were ostensibly fictional, the author suggested that only 'a few small liberties' were taken with other matters (for example, changing the name but not the location of the castle), and reviewers took the book to be largely autobiographical. Finished by the end of 1945, *Yes, Farewell* was published by Jonathan Cape in March 1946. An overtly political work—the farewell in the title is for liberalism in the face of the onward historical march of communism—it was also an unflinching look at human nature in captivity. Charles Marriott, writing for the *Manchester Guardian*, found it 'absorbing', while the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer labelled it an 'extremely intelligent' if 'disturbing and resolutely frank' story of men living 'in an atmosphere that is fatigued and febrile, pervaded by boredom and a morose negativeness of spirit'. This sort of approach, however, did not suggest a future of mass sales. 'Mr. Burn, as a novelist', the *TLS* critic concluded, 'substitutes a subjective mood for action, ideas for character, and a political philosophy for imaginative sympathy.' Marriott also thought that what episodes of drama and action there were in the book, when placed next to the 'overpoweringly real' atmospheric stuff, 'suffer by comparison.' Though it went through several impressions and was reprinted twice, the book's tone was too stark, and by the dawn of the Cold War its politics too hard left, to appeal to a mass audience in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[10]

Moreover, attempts at breaking out were peripheral to the plot, and within a few years it became very obvious that what the public really wanted in the way of reminiscences by former POWs were tales of ingenious and ultimately successful escapes. *The Wooden Horse*, an account of the three-man tunnel dug from under a vaulting horse at Sagan written by one of the participants, Eric Williams, first appeared in February 1949 under the Collins imprint, and was an immediate success. Several million copies would eventually be sold, and within seventeen months of publication the story had been turned into a feature film

that, in turn, became a major box-office success in Britain. In 1950 Faber put out *The Great Escape*, the story of the Stalag Luft III tunnel break as written up by the Australian journalist Paul Brickhill (who had been at Sagan but had not taken part in the break), which also went through multiple editions. *The Great Escape* launched Brickhill on a career of writing best-selling accounts of British wartime exploits, and so successful was *The Wooden Horse* that Williams wrote a 'prequel' describing an earlier, albeit less spectacular, escape attempt, entitled *The Tunnel*. This book was put out by Collins in 1951 and was itself reissued more than half-a-dozen times in subsequent years.[11]

If adventure was what the public wanted, the many and varied breakout schemes that had been mounted at Colditz offered an obvious means of catering to demand. Pat Reid, who had served as escape officer in the castle before orchestrating his own successful home-run attempt, was undoubtedly conscious of this. Though an engineer by training and latterly a diplomat, Reid had both good raw material to work with and certain models to draw on in writing up his account. As a youth he had read avidly the popular first-person prisoner-of-war narratives—some of them with illustrations—that had appeared between the world wars, including *The Escaping Club* by A. J. Evans, *Within Four Walls* by M. C. C. Harrison and H. A. Cartwright, and *The Road to En-Dor* by E. H. Jones. These had all concentrated on the business of escaping, and at times presented captivity and attempts to evade it almost as a schoolboy adventure. Pat Reid consciously adopted a similarly light-hearted tone, later explaining that he wanted to avoid a narrative that could be read as 'one great damn moan about the sufferings we went through'. Instead he stressed the uniqueness of Colditz, the near-constant escape plotting, various humorous episodes, and in general the high spirits of all concerned, when describing the camp from his arrival up to the point nearly two years later when he successfully escaped to Switzerland.

While sifting through *Detour*, contacting over a dozen fellow ex-captives to buttress his own memory, and getting permission from the *Illustrated London News* to reproduce some of the John Watton drawings, Reid set to work outlining the escapes mounted from, and escapades undertaken within, 'the bad boys' camp'. After he finished Reid quoted Evans's words about the need for 'one of the men who was there' to tell 'the whole story of Colditz' as justification for the enterprise. 'This book is the story of Colditz', he explained in the prologue. 'I was one of the men who was imprisoned there.' In a manner typical of the book's boyishly enthusiastic style, the opening of the final paragraph of this

prologue read as follows: 'If you feel in a mood to launch into the feverish underground activity of a camp full of diehards, read on.'[12]

Published in the summer of 1952 by Hodder & Stoughton, *The Colditz Story* was received in generally favourable terms by the critics. The writing was praised for its 'pace and humour' (*Times Literary Supplement*), its 'attractive simplicity' (*Observer*), and the 'disarming modesty' of its author (*Sunday Times*), and the subject-matter was declared of great interest. What went on at Colditz in the way of breakout attempts 'challenges comparison with any of the escape stories of World War II' (*Daily Telegraph*). Yet there were also occasional notes of cynicism or asperity concerning secondary matters of substance or major aspects of style. Terence Prittie, himself a former officer POW who had already written up his escape experiences, suggested in the *Manchester Guardian* that the Germans were not as wrong-headed about security matters as Reid portrayed them to be at Colditz, and left it unclear as to whether he thought the author had consciously tried—or, if he had, had succeeded in—writing a best-seller. Guy Ramsey, writing for the *Daily Telegraph*, thought the book smacked too much of the atmosphere of 'the *Gem*, the *Magnet*, and the *Boy's Own Paper*', indeed almost to the point of parody.[13]

However, it was precisely that aspect of *The Colditz Story*, along with the exciting subject-matter—i.e. escapes—that made the book so attractive to the general public. It was an adventure tale of high-spirited and gallant young men risking their lives to outwit the enemy against all the odds, full of incident and humour as well as containing plenty of illustrations. 'I think you can take it for granted', Hodder & Stoughton explained in a letter to the author six months after publication, 'that we have sold at least 25,000 copies—a very remarkable scale for a 15/- book, and one that can have few competitors, if any, in this year of grace.' Within fourteen months over 32,000 copies had been sold, and sales continued to be brisk: for example, 1,830 copies were bought between October 1953 and March of the following year, and a paperback edition put out by Pan Books at 2 shillings appeared in January 1954. 'There are not many authors who can boast such sales as these', the publisher reminded Reid that June.[14]

As *The Colditz Story* was taking off, another former inhabitant of the castle was about to enter the publishing fray. Airey Neave, then a barrister, and a man Pat Reid did not mention in his acknowledgements as being among the ex-prisoners of the castle he had talked to, decided to write up a personal account of his POW experiences, culminating in an

escape that gave him the distinction of being the first British officer to make it home from Colditz. Having stood unsuccessfully as a Conservative candidate in the 1950 and 1951 general elections, he became the prospective candidate for North Berkshire in March 1952, a seat whose current incumbent was expected to be elevated to the peerage in the near future. Though the constituency was a relatively safe one for the Tories, *They Have Their Exits*, which appeared in March 1953 under the imprint of Hodder & Stoughton, can have done Neave no harm while he was campaigning in the by-election held in June 1954 that made him an MP. The author's supporters certainly thought it important to make sure the publisher got copies into all the Abingdon bookshops.[15]

Though rather more introspective and slightly more ambitious in style than *The Colditz Story*—'whole passages have a quality of real literature', Guy Ramsey commented, rather backhandedly—*They Have Their Exits* was nevertheless an adventure-filled account, and it did quite well. Advance orders meant that the first two printings were sold out before the official publication date, it was serialized in several papers, including the *London Daily News* and the *Scottish Daily Mail*, and excerpts were read out on the BBC radio programme *Suspense*.[16]

It was quickly overtaken, however, by the sequel to *The Colditz Story*, which Pat Reid entitled *The Latter Days*. Though he himself had escaped from the castle in the autumn of 1942, the success of the first book had prompted Reid, with help from his friends Dick Howe (his successor as British escape officer), W. T. 'Lulu' Lawton, and Harry Elliott, to contact other officers who had been there and put together a picture of what had occurred at Colditz down to the point at which it had been liberated in April 1945. Though not written in the first person, *The Latter Days* was very similar in style and general content to the first book—the variety and ingeniousness of ongoing escape attempts made up the central narrative thread—and John Watton once more contributed illustrations. Worried that the public might not recognize the book as a sequel in view of the absence of the word 'Colditz' in the title, Hodder & Stoughton made the dust-jacket look as much like that of *The Colditz Story* as possible. 'Though I say it myself', Reid wrote in a letter to his publishers just before the book was launched in November 1953, 'I think it should go down with the public like nobody's business.'[17]

Critics noted that the absence of a first-person narrator made *The Latter Days* somewhat less personal in tone than its predecessor, but conceded that the tale was an inherently exciting one that Reid had told in about as gripping a fashion as possible for someone writing as a de

facto historian. 'The book is alive from its first page to its last', enthused the reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Sales of the hardback edition of *The Latter Days*, priced at 15 shillings a copy, had by the end of March 1954 exceeded 12,700.[18]

The impact of the two Reid books, along with the success of earlier POW escape films, quickly prompted a production company headed by Ivan Foxwell to make a successful bid for the film rights. The fact that Colditz was now part of communist East Germany ruled out location shooting, and so a variety of exterior as well as interior sets were built at Shepperton Studios, while producer Ivan Foxwell, director Guy Hamilton, and playwright William Douglas-Home, a former officer POW himself, worked on a screenplay combining and condensing the contents of *The Colditz Story* and *The Latter Days*. Screen-time requirements meant that a lot had to be left out, and that the words and actions of various characters (all of whose names were changed, except for Pat Reid) had sometimes to be combined. John Mills was to play Reid himself, ably supported by Eric Portman as the SBO and various other actors—Christopher Rhodes, Bryan Forbes, Lionel Jeffries, and Ian Carmichael among them—playing brother officers keen on escape. Several cast members had acted in comedies or had natural comic talent, something that the director was keen to exploit. Hamilton not only wanted to highlight the adventure aspects of the story but also the schoolboy-humour elements. There would be excitement and drama aplenty, but also a strong thread of comedy. 'I was absolutely determined to show that Colditz was exceptional *and* could be very funny', he later explained. Shooting began in May 1954, and *The Colditz Story* was ready to be released by January 1955.[19]

Pat Reid (who had originally wanted Carol Reid to direct), acting as technical advisor on the set, was pleased with the results, stating in a letter to his publisher that 'my opinion is that this film will really hit the headlines'. Following the premiere at the Gaumont, Haymarket, it quickly became apparent that he was correct: *The Colditz Story* was going to be a hit. The critics almost unanimously praised the acting and admired the mixture of humour, excitement, pathos, and drama. 'There have been prisoner-of-war and escape stories [on screen] before,' Leonard Mosley opined in the *Daily Express*, '. . . but this one is superior in performance, in background, and in intention.' *The Colditz Story* was both 'exciting and amusing' and 'always enjoyable' (*Daily Telegraph*); throughout it represented 'not only the excitements, the failures, and the successes of the escape plans, but the dignity of the human spirit in

circumstances of extreme adversity' (*The Times*). Indeed, the film 'achieved a most convincing versimilitude' in comparison to what had actually gone on in the castle (*Manchester Guardian*). Even Paul Holt, who thought it rather manipulative and hoped that the escape genre was reaching its end on screen, suggested that this 'prisoner-of-war escape film to end them all' would be a success at the box office. He was right. *The Colditz Story* was one of the top moneymaking British films of the year.[20]

Reid had every reason to be happy. But reaction among Old Colditzians outside his own circle of friends to what they saw on screen was a bit more mixed. Some understood the need to take a certain amount of dramatic licence, enjoyed particular performances, and thought that on the whole the spirit if not the letter of the place had been accurately captured. Nevertheless there were criticisms. Technical details were generally accurate but on occasion wrong. The sheer boredom of day-to-day prison life, even in a place as comparatively lively as Colditz, could not be conveyed, while the comedy elements might seem at times a bit over the top. 'I know we were silly,' Patrick Welch later commented in an interview, 'but I don't think we were quite as stupid and quite as silly as that.' Meanwhile at least one former prisoner was furious about what he had seen while visiting the cinema. Airey Neave had been the first British prisoner to make a successful home run from the castle, but in the screenwriting process his story had been axed to make way for the escape in which Pat Reid had got out, thus leaving the viewer with the impression that it was Reid rather than Neave who had first managed to escape from Colditz. Neave did not go public about what he regarded as a travesty of the facts, but through his solicitors he did insist that Ivan Foxwell insert an end credit to the film indicating that he had been the first to make it home. Relations between the authors of *The Colditz Story* and *They Have Their Exits* were apparently under some strain as a result of this contretemps.[21]

Even as the film was in production Weidenfeld & Nicolson were trying to capitalize on the growing fame of Colditz by publishing the accounts of two among the select band of special prisoners—the *Prominente*—who had been held at the castle because of their family connections. *The Privileged Nightmare*, in which Giles Romilly (a nephew of Winston Churchill) and Michael Alexander (related to the field-marshal of the same last name) stuck together their stories back to back, was first published in August 1954 and swiftly reprinted.[22]

But as Hodder & Stoughton had been anticipating, the critical and box-office success of *The Colditz Story* on screen redounded most suc-

cessfully in terms of book sales on the two Pat Reid titles. The 2 shilling paperback editions of *The Colditz Story* and *The Latter Days* put out by Pan in January 1954 and November 1955 had by the end of March 1956 sold 378,871 and 172,619 copies respectively.[23]

They Have Their Exits was also issued in paperback three months after the film opened. So great had the public interest in Colditz become that not only former prisoners but also a former guard were being approached about publishing their memoirs. Reinhold Eggers wrote up his experiences as one of the camp officers at Oflag IVC (he later claimed) after Pat Reid had suggested he do so, though it was in fact Howard Gee, another Old Colditzian, fluent in German, who translated the manuscript into English. Though it took three years to find a publisher willing to risk a memoir by a former jailer rather than a escaping prisoner from the castle, after Hale published *Colditz: The German Story* in 1961 sales were such that two additional print runs had to be made to keep up with demand, and a Pan paperback edition appeared in 1963.[24]

As the 1960s progressed there were signs that interest in Colditz had passed its peak. Though new editions of the Reid and Neave books were published in the middle of the decade, no further memoirs or secondary accounts appeared. There was, indeed, a sharp drop in the publication of new books by or about prisoners of war in general, and the cycle of Made-in-England prisoner escape films also came to an end. To a large extent this was due to overexposure of the war genre in general in the 1950s. This helped fuel an anti-establishment backlash in the 1960s in which a new generation reacted against what had come before; though in the case of films the decline of the British film industry as a whole (with television-watching rapidly supplanting cinema-going) must be taken into consideration. US production companies generated several motion pictures set in British POW compounds, but in a film such as *The Great Escape* (1963) American stars took the leading roles and both the plot and dialogue were geared to the American market. The 'classic' British escape tale was seemingly a thing of the past, perhaps the greatest screen indignity coming at the start of the following decade when a made-for-TV movie, *The Birdmen*, was made in California by Universal Television, in which the story of the Colditz glider was presented in entirely fictional terms, with Doug McClure leading an all-American cast.[25]

Shortly thereafter, though, the Colditz Phenomenon would revive and grow more powerful than ever as a result of another, larger-scale, and this time Made-in-England adaptation for the small screen: the hugely successful BBC Television series *Colditz* (1972–4). Back in 1956 episodes

from *The Colditz Story* and *The Latter Days*, along with other escape tales, had formed the subject-matter for Pat Reid while he was fronting half-hour episodes of *Escapers' Club*, an Associated-Rediffusion in-studio television series broadcast on ITV. But it was only at the beginning of the 1970s that Colditz finally came of age on the small screen. A documentary was mooted by the BBC TV Science and Features department, but dropped when it was discovered that the BBC Drama department was already working on a full-scale series.[26]

This was the work of writer Brian Degas and producer Gerry Glaister, who, having scored separate successes on television in the 1960s, began collaborating on a scenario that envisaged an episodic 'dramatized account' of the Colditz story in colour. The series would be 'based on' both the Pat Reid account and the big-screen version of *The Colditz Story*, but as in the film the facts would be altered for dramatic purposes. This time round all the characters were to be 'fictionalized': made-up names would be used, allowing for the personality and behaviour of the men on whom they were based to be exaggerated, downplayed, or combined for dramatic purposes. Episodes in the castle could be manipulated for the same reason, and where necessary particular characters and incidents might not be anchored to real persons and recorded events specific to Colditz at all.[27]

As the scenario for the series stressed, breaking out from the supposedly escape-proof castle would of course be the central motif. The series would be 'a record of the ingenuity . . . bravery and skill' of the prisoners who 'destroyed the reputation' of Colditz for being a place from which there was no escape. Three of the main British characters—one from each service—would differ 'in character, philosophy and background', but would share the 'common aim' of wanting to escape. Pat Reid himself was to serve as military and technical adviser to the programmes. But the creators of the series also hoped to present other aspects of life inside the *Schloss*, so as to create a more general human drama. Colditz on the small screen would serve as 'a symbol of many prisons—the prisons of class, of physical restraint and embarrassment, of despair and dejection'. The prisoners would be 'at once sharp studies of individuals and symbols of human hope, endeavour and frustration'. There would, moreover, be three main German characters to counterbalance the three main British ones: a definite contrast with the 1950s film, in which the jailers were little more than comic foils for the British. 'I went into this project with a very definite aim,' Gerry Glaister later admitted bluntly in a 1973 press interview: 'to put our boot through the

myths about jolly-chap prisoners and silly old Germans.' In an earlier letter to Airey Neave the producer was more diplomatic, explaining that the overall aim of the series was 'to treat the subject a little more seriously than perhaps some escape films have done'.[28]

A co-production deal was negotiated between the BBC and Universal Television in America, in which Glaister was commissioned to produce fifteen fifty-minute episodes of *Colditz*. Brian Degas would write the first episode, but thereafter writing, like directing, would be parcelled out between half-a-dozen or so experienced hands. British character actors, including Edward Hardwicke, Bernard Hepton, and Jack Hedley, were hired for a variety of recurring parts. Two faces familiar on both sides of the Atlantic—David McCallum and the film star Robert Wagner—were also given major roles in what was essentially an ensemble work.[29]

There were difficulties that had to be overcome. Shooting extensively on location remained impracticable; but from photographs, drawings, a little filming on site, and donated objects the production team eventually were able to re-create parts of the castle to their satisfaction at Shepperton and elsewhere. There were also problems of a more creative nature. Pat Reid, it soon became clear, did not approve of the class and personality conflicts and problems present in the initial scripts, not least with respect to the character most closely resembling him. 'I think he is still hankering after those happy days of the '50's when all those POW films were made', N. J. Crisp (one of the offending writers) acidly observed. At the same time Robert Wagner was complaining to Universal about 'a tendency for the writers to revert to the stereotypes of the 1940s/50s war pictures'. However, Reid was only the technical adviser, the contract gave the BBC full creative control, and 'R. J.' himself eventually came to understand that *Colditz*, while retaining elements from an earlier genre, was a gritty drama that demanded 'a level of acting that I've never had to deliver before'. The American actor also came to understand the underlying thrust of the series. 'If you think this is a prisoner-of-war story in terms of *The Great Escape*,' Wagner publicly explained, 'you couldn't be more wrong. It's not so much a story of war and prison as of people, of humanity.'[30]

The BBC mounted a formidable publicity campaign in the run-up to the broadcast of the first weekly episode of *Colditz* on 19 October 1972. The initial reactions of television critics were mixed and somewhat cautious in tone. But after viewing the first three instalments Clive James came out in favour of *Colditz* in the pages of the *Observer*, noting that, contrary to what he and other critics had expected, it was far from

being a re-run of the 1950s film, was in fact 'more realistic than any POW movie yet made', and stood a good chance of being 'an unexpected and highly interesting success'. The prediction proved to be highly prescient. On average over 7 million viewers (or over 30 per cent of the viewing public) tuned in each week to watch *Colditz*. BBC audience-research reports indicated that the majority of those who watched the programme found it thoroughly entertaining, well acted, easy to follow, but also out of the ordinary. Gerry Glaister was delighted to pass on the news that the series was 'maintaining viewing figures such as no series had reached before'. Over 8 million people tuned in to watch the last two episodes in January 1973, by which time *Colditz* had established itself as the most successful television drama series ever broadcast by the BBC. The producer, himself a veteran of the war, thought that in addition to nostalgia among older people, the younger generation, who had never known war, were curious to learn what had transpired. 'I am amazed, I simply can't account for it', a slightly stunned Pat Reid admitted.[31]

The success of the series had an immediate ripple effect. Its popular theme music, 'The Colditz March', composed by Robert Farnon, became a recording hit for the BBC. Coronet paperback editions of *The Colditz Story*, *The Latter Days*, and *They Have Their Exits* sold a combined total of half-a-million copies while *Colditz* was on the air. Out of print for a decade, *Colditz: The German Story* was reissued by Hale towards the end of 1972, followed in 1973 by a Sphere paperback version of *The Privileged Nightmare*, now bearing the title *Hostages at Colditz* for the sake of name recognition, as well as a compilation of stories by former prisoners and staff of the castle entitled *Colditz Recaptured* that Eggers had persuaded John Watton to edit and Robert Hale to publish. The series had appealed to younger as well as older viewers, and the toy industry was not slow to react. Vic-Toy produced a Ludo-like board game, *Escape from Colditz Castle*, in 1972, only to see it superseded by the more Monopoly-style *Escape from Colditz* from Parker Games, which bore the impressive legend: 'Devised by Major P. R. Reid, M.B.E., M.C., author of ''The Colditz Story'' and ''Latter Days at Colditz''.' Palitoy also got in on the act by producing a special *Escape from Colditz* Action Man set, containing figures dressed as a guard and a prisoner complete with Red Cross parcel. By popular demand six of the best episodes of the first series were rerun by the BBC in the spring of 1973—each episode followed by a brief interview with an Old Colditzian, beginning with Pat Reid—and plans were laid to make another thirteen episodes roughly covering the time span of *The Latter Days*.[32]

Former prisoners of war, meanwhile, including those who had been in Colditz, were sometimes rather less enthusiastic than the general public about the television series. It was they who would help spearhead what was perhaps an inevitable backlash against the BBC, on the grounds of distorting history for the sake of dramatic appeal.

Reid himself, conceding that 'this is history as well as entertainment', stated in public that he had pretty much succeeded in keeping episodes from straying too far from reality. 'I made a bit of a nuisance of myself,' he explained to the *Daily Mail*, 'ensuring that nothing crept in that would make anyone at home say: "That's sheer fiction, it's ludicrous".' Some were willing to accept a certain amount of dramatic licence, given the constraints of the medium and the recognition that this was not a documentary series. Dick Howe, successor to Reid as escape officer at the castle, made it known that while there were errors in detail, 'Gerry Glaister has captured the basic atmosphere of Colditz, the frightful, oppressive feeling'. Howe found the series made such an impression that he lost sleep as old memories resurfaced, while John Wilson, another former inmate, after watching Episode 8—in which a prisoner feigns insanity in order to be repatriated on medical grounds, but ends up going truly mad—decided that the series was a little too close to reality for comfort: 'one was enough.' Other former inhabitants, including Alan Campbell, Lord Harewood, and Jock Hamilton-Baillie, accepted that while not everything presented on screen was historically accurate, the BBC had still managed to capture the essence of Colditz. 'I found the TV dramatisation imaginatively conceived and brilliant acted,' Michael Burn wrote a year or so after the series first aired, 'and, with a few reservations, authentic as well as gripping.'[33]

There were some ex-prisoners who were simply bemused by the sight of amenities they themselves had never enjoyed and at the comparatively spick-and-span appearance of the actors. But there were also those who took lesser or greater exception to what they saw on television. 'Actually I saw only the first instalment and that was quite enough', Martin Gilliat wrote in a personal letter to an equally disgruntled David Walker. In later interviews Mike Moran called the series 'really ridiculous', while Lord Newborough dismissed it as 'completely unrealistic' and 'bloody awful', especially in relation to its positive portrayal of the Germans. Jimmy Yule, though he considered much of the first series to be relatively authentic, was annoyed enough by the presence of the entirely fictional American character played by Robert Wagner to write a letter of complaint to Glaister at the BBC. 'Look here, you know it's all very well,'

Yule later recalled himself arguing, 'but a Yank wasn't within a hundred miles of the place. I know you have to sell it to the States, and all that, but . . . it's a pity you had to give him such a prominent position . . .' Howard Gee wrote a piece for his local paper at the time complaining that 'the only thing missing from the series was Errol Flynn'.[34]

Meanwhile the BBC was preparing to air the second series of *Colditz*, starting on 7 January 1974. As part of the publicity campaign the *Radio Times* had funded the first return visit to the actual castle by four ex-prisoners—Pat Reid, Dick Howe, Rupert Barry, and Jack Best—in late 1973, and had then gone on to sponsor a special 'Escape from Colditz' exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, due to open on the same day that the first episode aired. In light of the storm that was about to break, the launch party for the exhibition, held on the previous Thursday, perhaps provided signals of troubles to come. Several hundred former prisoners had been invited, only half of whom showed up. One of the columnists from *The Times* was struck by the 'techiness' of men 'reluctant to talk about their Colditz experiences' who appeared deeply disillusioned with the world around them. Philip Howard, another *Times* man, opined that the exhibition would serve as a 'therapeutic antidote' to a TV series that he—and perhaps some of the middle-aged men he spoke to at the party—regarded as possessing too much adventurous fiction and not enough mundane fact.[35]

Howard Gee, who had attended the party, was certainly not in a positive frame of mind towards the BBC when journalist Jerry Caminada—whom Gee had known in a civilian interment camp in Germany before he was sent to Colditz—phoned him up to ask what he thought of the programmes (A: 'I don't think much of them'). The day after the first of the new episodes was aired, an opinion piece by Caminada entitled 'Killing the Charisma of Colditz' appeared in *The Times*. The central theme of the piece was that the series, the books, and indeed the whole Colditz industry was producing a false sense among viewers that the castle was a particularly difficult place in which to be incarcerated. 'The impression is abroad', he added, 'that Colditz had almost a monopoly of escapes, and that escaping from it was much more difficult than from other camps.' From what he had been told by Gee, and from the facts he had gleaned from various books, this was in fact false. Other camps were tougher to get away from, and the number of escape attempts made from Colditz was not particularly remarkable. 'So enough of Colditz', Caminada concluded. 'Let us file it away with all the camps of a generation ago, before the legend smothers us all.'[36]

If that were not enough, the same paper that day included a witty send-up review, written by Alan Coren, of the first of the new episodes that highlighted the way in which, despite efforts to make things grittier through the introduction of a nastier and entirely fictitious German character, *Colditz* drew its inspiration from books and a film in which escape was pursued with boyish enthusiasm. 'Hurrah! The Christmas hols over it was back to *The Fifth Form at St. Colditz* for a new term', the review began, after which the plot of the episode was summarized as a Greyfriars parody. 'All in all,' Coren concluded, 'I think it's going to be a whippingly good term.'[37]

This was a light-hearted jibe, of course—though funny and obvious enough to appear shortly thereafter in the form of a *Two Ronnies* comedy sketch—and a barrage of letters indicated to Caminada that his view of the Colditz phenomenon ('imprisonment by commercialism') was not widely shared, at least by readers of *The Times*. It was also fairly easy for the BBC to ignore the occasional complaint that, by inserting a truly Nazi character, the producer of the series was perpetuating wartime stereotypes about the Germans.[38]

Rather more unnerving was a full-scale assault on *Colditz* by none other than the first British prisoner to make a home run from Oflag IVC, Airey Neave. While the initial series was in production in the summer of 1972, the MP for Abingdon had been anxious to make sure that it did not perpetuate the false idea, conveyed in the film version of *The Colditz Story*, that Pat Reid had been the first British officer to escape, and had instructed his solicitors to contact the producer on the matter. In response, Glaister had given Neave what the latter took to be an assurance that the series would be 'largely fictitious' and that it would 'not portray individual escapes', either his or anyone else's.[39]

But while the producer continued to stress that 'we have fictionalised all the characters and no real names are being used',[40] the MP was not pleased when the series aired, either by what he took to be the overly bright tone—literally as well as figuratively, given the lighting needs associated with videotaping—or, doubtless, by the climactic final episodes in which the Pat Grant character (clearly based on Pat Reid rather than himself) makes it to Switzerland. Seventeen days after attending the *Radio Times* launch party at the Imperial War Museum, Neave spoke his mind at the *Sun* TV awards ceremony. 'The programme is seriously misleading,' he informed reporters, 'and does not really convey the harshness of the conditions.' Though 'a good adventure yarn', the series was too 'jolly and bright' to convey the reality of life in Colditz, and indeed

almost gave the impression that the place was 'a holiday camp', what with chatty guards and well-fed, well-dressed actors in khaki who looked 'as if their hair has just been styled by Vidal Sassoon'. Making a bad public-relations situation worse was the response of Pat Reid when approached for comment at home. While arguing that it was 'nonsense' to suggest the series made Colditz out to be a version of Butlin's, the technical adviser to the series conceded that there were problems. 'Airey Neave's arguments are sound', he was reported as saying. 'I think some of the actors look too well-fed—we were thin as rakes—and their uniforms look too new', going on to emphasize that, as technical adviser to the series, 'I have had my battles with producers about accuracy'. Given the high profile the series had attained, it was not surprising that these remarks were published widely the following day in both the national and local press.[41]

This put the BBC on the defensive. 'We are as factually accurate as it is possible to be in television', a spokesman stated. 'We also try and be realistic as well and the guards are shown as human beings.' Glaister himself was more forthright. 'Colditz is an entertainment series, not a documentary', he argued. Yes, food and fuel were short, but you couldn't have actors go on a starvation diet or have them 'going round shivering all the time'. Moreover, he himself had evidence showing that conditions were not always that bad. 'I have pictures—taken by the Germans—of prisoners playing games in their courtyard and even sunning themselves in deckchairs.'[42]

The following week the BBC released copies of these photographs to the press. 'Some of the men in the photographs look extremely well fed—and one or two even have paunches', a spokesman pointed out. The series producer, meanwhile, stressed that he had taken great pains to get the general atmosphere and conditions as close to reality as possible. The release of the photographs backfired, insofar as it prompted Pat Reid to point out that the pictures were mostly German propaganda snaps. Meanwhile the press had been approaching other Old Colditzians for their impressions, the *News of the World* reporting the day before the BBC release that Reinhold Eggers, the former security officer, thought *Colditz* seriously strayed from the truth in key areas. 'Life in Colditz was never the good, clean, sentimental fun that British viewers are now being entertained with', he told reporter George Edwards. He pointed out what he thought were factual errors, and took great exception to the portrayal of the camp staff. Their characters, he insisted, owed much more to fiction than to fact. That, Glaister retorted, had been intentional.[43]

The BBC, as Neave perceived, was 'getting extremely touchy'. But the MP admitted that he was quickly 'getting quite bored with being interviewed on the subject', and the controversy slowly died down.[44] The makers of *Colditz* could in any case take comfort from the excellent viewing figures that the second series was generating. 'The strict authenticity of the series may be in question,' as the *Daily Express* put it, 'but there's no doubting the firm hold that it has on viewers.' On average over 7 million people were watching *Colditz* each week, and for the final episode, broadcast on 1 April 1974, in which the castle was liberated, the BBC estimated that a third of the UK population had tuned in. 'The perfect finish to a fine series', was the consensus verdict reached in a BBC audience poll.[45]

The success of the second series also had a knock-on effect. White Lion published a new edition of Micky Burn's *Yes, Farewell* under the title *Farewell to Colditz* in the summer, followed in November by a four-page spread in the *Observer Colour Supplement* in which the author explained why he had not tried to escape from the castle. The second Eggers volume, meanwhile, had gone into a second printing, and other authors were attempting to ride the wave of popular interest in POW escapes in general and Colditz in particular through escape-story compilations. The press continued to take an interest in everything related to Colditz—it was already being used as a metaphor for any tough institution from which the inhabitants wished to escape—including the castle itself in East Germany, and commercial spin-offs continued to generate money. Airfix, for instance, produced a model kit of the famous glider built inside its walls, while a 'Colditz Escape Map' was put out by Mars Limited with the assistance of Pat Reid as part of a promotion for Galaxy-Ripple chocolate bars.[46]

Though *Colditz* was now finished, interest in the wartime story of the castle and in escape more generally by no means disappeared in the second half of the 1970s. Pat Reid compiled a small children's book entitled *My Favourite Escape Stories*, and Robert Hale published *The Man Who Came in from Colditz*, a memoir by one of the Dutch prisoners. Adventure-mystery writer Harry Patterson (better known under the nom de plume Jack Higgins) was assumed to have used the holding of the *Prominente* at Oflag IVC as the basis for an otherwise fictional story, *The Valhalla Exchange*, put out by Hutchinson in 1976. Hodder & Stoughton published the Colditz diary of Ellison Platt, edited by Margaret Duggan, under the title *Padre in Colditz* in 1978. Pat Reid, on the jacket flap, was quoted as saying that this was a '"must" for all enthusiasts'. Meanwhile

new printings of the Colditz classics were continuing to sell briskly. The Coronet paperback version of *The Colditz Story* had by 1978 sold to the tune of 640,000 copies, while a 1977 paperback reissue of *They Have Their Exits* had within six months sold more than 170,000 copies. Neave was still receiving healthy royalties when he was assassinated in a car-bomb explosion engineered by an IRA splinter group in 1979.[47]

At the start of the following decade the Platt diary was reissued, followed in subsequent years by publication of the memoirs of several more ex-inmates—three of whom put 'Colditz' in their titles. A collection of wartime photographs of Colditz was put together by Ron Baybutt and published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1982, the same year that a paperback book of extracts from various escape stories, entitled *Catapulting from Colditz*, appeared under the Ward Lock imprint. The first computer game devoted to escape from Oflag IVC, written by Tony Barber and sold by Phipps Associates, also came on the market in the early 1980s. More consequentially, and in time to mark the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of the castle, Macmillan published a new history of Colditz by Pat Reid in November 1984.[48]

Originally titled *Challenge*, this was the end-product of a long-running collaboration between the author and a group of about half-a-dozen friends—most of whom had been at Oflag IVC themselves—who agreed that too much had been left out of the earlier books. Attempting to be as comprehensive as possible, Reid submitted a manuscript that the publisher calculated would run to nearly 500 pages of text. Macmillan refused on commercial grounds to publish a book of this length, and more than a hundred manuscript pages were eventually cut. Reid also accepted that, in order for the book to sell, name recognition would be important. *Challenge* became *Colditz: The Full Story*.[49]

Perhaps stung by criticism of the schoolboyish tone of his original account—'Possibly I overdid the humour and the fun', he admitted somewhat uneasily when questioned in the mid-1970s—Reid adopted a more impersonal style this time around. 'Pat's approach is a complete and refreshing departure from what one has been used to', as collaborator Mike Moran put it. But this did not save *The Full Story* from being criticized by the up-and-coming military historian Hew Strachan for being essentially the mixture as before. Certain omissions, he indicated in the *Times Literary Supplement*, were significant. 'Despair and depression barely feature; the tedium of a prisoner's daily round is never discussed; sexual deprivation and repression warrant [only] a misleading and inconclusive couple of pages.' But this did not stop the book from

selling well enough to appear as an Arrow paperback in November 1985, marketed as 'The final classic of the Colditz trilogy', or Coronet from reissuing the first two books as a single paperback entitled *Colditz: The Colditz Story and the Latter Days at Colditz* in 1986—the same year that Virgin published a game book by Clive Gifford entitled *Escape From Colditz*, in which the reader works out how to get away. Three years later the quarterly magazine *After the Battle*, which intersperses contemporary photographs of visits to wartime sites with photographs taken during the war, devoted an entire issue to Colditz.[50]

In 1990 came the news that Colditz castle, about to become part of a reunified Germany, was planning to open its doors to tourists, shortly followed by a reunion of eighty-three of the 125 surviving former Colditz inmates held at the Imperial War Museum, with the Queen Mother in attendance, to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the camp. Gibson Games, meanwhile, in association with Digital Magic, was in the process of releasing an arcade version of the popular 'Escape from Colditz' board game. So great had public interest become in everything connected with the camp that the Colditz Association (the membership of which consisted of former inmates of Oflag IVC interested in keeping up acquaintance with each other) suggested in early 1991 that a new organization made up of knowledgeable enthusiasts—the Colditz Society—be created. Comic virtuoso Stephen Fry, who had grown up reading the escape tales of the 1950s, freely admitted that when writing and filming his parody of the escape films of the period, *Stalag Luft*, in 1993, he had the film version of *The Colditz Story* as well as *The Wooden Horse* firmly in mind. That same year Classic Pictures and Castle Vision released through W. H. Smith a video documentary written, directed, and co-produced by Robert Garofolo in which various Old Colditzians described their experiences on location at the castle. Anglia TV also broadcast a documentary, *Flight from Colditz*, featuring a scale model glider being launched from the castle attic in which the real glider—built but never used—had been constructed. In 1994 the BBC announced that it was reviving the *Colditz* series. The following year another Colditz memoir was published, and the British press continued to follow the trials and tribulations of local and regional governments in Germany as they tried to work out how to pay for the restoration of the castle itself. Obituaries unfailingly highlighted the fact that the recently deceased had been a prisoner at Oflag IVC, while throughout the 1990s the wartime stories and current doings of those still living were considered newsworthy.[51]

After a period of uncertainty Channel 4 gave Windfall Films the green light in the late 1990s to proceed with a three-part television documentary that, through interviews, on-site simulations, and visits by former inhabitants to the castle, would retell the story of Oflag IVC. Henry Chancellor and others involved in the production were anxious to distance themselves from what some former prisoners saw as the overly jolly picture of events painted by Pat Reid—who died in 1990—that had been further exaggerated in the 1955 film *The Colditz Story*. The sheer boredom of being a POW was stressed, along with the risk of mental instability, the presence of men not all that keen on trying to escape themselves, and an episode in which one British inmate was almost lynched as a traitor. But the central theme—albeit from a more international perspective—was still breaking out, as the overall title, *Escape from Colditz*, clearly indicated. Channel 4 underlined the point by commissioning the building of a full-scale replica of the famous glider, the test flight of which, heavily covered in the press, occurred as the new series was being broadcast. First aired in January–February 2000, *Escape from Colditz* was a success with critics and public alike. Although some reviewers acknowledged the revisionist elements in the documentary programme, others lauded its makers for underlining the ingenuity, courage, and sheer tenacity of the youthful heroes whose exploits they had read about and seen on screen for up to half a century. John Preston, writing for the *Sunday Telegraph*, found it a 'wistful, funny, and moving' evocation of the Colditz Myth. 'It's a *Boy's Own* story, of course,' he went on, '—plucky Brits, wily Frenchmen, ''good'' Germans—and having lapped it up in childhood I find I'm just as susceptible to it in (early) middle age.'[52]

By the autumn of 2000 the BBC was ready to broadcast its own commissioned documentary. 'I grew up with films like *The Great Escape* and vividly remember the BBC television series *Colditz*', explained Michael Davies, who wrote and directed for Hartswood Films, adding that the true story of what went on in Stalag Luft III and Oflag IVC was even more riveting than the fictional versions. Entitled *The War Behind the Wire*, this interview-centred documentary came in two parts, the first dealing with the Great Escape and the second with Colditz. Both the series and the accompanying book by Patrick Wilson were well received.[53]

Colditz continued to be a name to conjure with in the first years of the twenty-first century. Cassell published a mass-market paperback version of *The Colditz Story* in its military classics series in February 2001. 'I read this book years ago and was enthralled then', noted a satisfied customer.

'My son finds this book as gripping as I did twenty years ago.' For young teens experiencing difficulties in reading—and who therefore would find the original text too hard—Christopher Martin produced a simplified, condensed, and heavily illustrated version of the tale under the title *Escape From Colditz* that was published in April as part of the Collins Soundbites series. Henry Chancellor, the researcher behind the series for Channel 4, used his findings as the basis for a book previewed in the *Daily Mail* at the end of July and published by Hodder & Stoughton—the firm that had originally handled the first two Reid books—under the title *Colditz: The Definitive History* in August. This too proved to be a great success. 'If you are keen on history and man's ability to tough it out in the face of adversity,' as one enthusiastic reader put it, then this new iteration of the Colditz story 'has to be on your list of books that you must read.' In October 2001 Big Finish Productions released an episode of their post-BBC audio *Doctor Who* series in which the Tardis ends up inside Oflag IVC, and in December Caxton Editions published a lavishly illustrated volume entitled *Colditz: A Pictorial History*. Four months later a Coronet paperback edition of *Colditz: The Definitive History* was released, followed in May 2002 by a softcover reissue of *Colditz: The Full Story*. In August of the same year Severn House released the latest popular war-is-hell novel by Leo Kessler (a.k.a. Charles Whiting), *Murder in Colditz*. Following the success of their reissue of *The Colditz Story*, Cassell put out their version of the sequel under the title *The Latter Days at Colditz* in April 2003. ITV, meanwhile, announced that production would begin in the autumn on a two-part drama that would focus on the Airey Neave escape. Almost sixty years after the existence of Oflag IVC was terminated, and even as the few remaining ex-prisoners are starting to pass away, the Colditz industry continues to thrive, complete with a range of books, home-viewing versions of films and documentaries, several types of games, and organized tours to explore the castle itself.

The reasons for, and the extent of, the popular fascination with Colditz have varied somewhat over time. In addition to nostalgia for fading glory in the 1950s, there was the 'now it can be told' factor, the public lapping up positive portrayals of heroic episodes, especially when presented in entertaining fashion, of a war about which little was yet known beyond the general outlines. During the 1960s the solid virtues the story embodied became less fashionable in an increasingly youth-oriented culture. By the 1970s there was perhaps a greater yearning after an idealized 'lost world'; nostalgia for a time when Britain was still a

world power, the country was not plagued by inflation and industrial unrest, and those now in middle age were still youthful. This was matched by a new wave of interest among those too young to feel the need to rebel against the values of a bygone age. In the 1990s, just as the castle itself began to assume a more tangible form as the Iron Curtain gave way, there was a growing trans-generational realization that the time available for those who had fought in the war to renew acquaintance with old comrades and to tell their stories, whether in print, on tape, or on film, was becoming decidedly short.[55]

The core of popular interest over the decades, though, has to do with the nature of the tale itself. 'Escape stories are bound to succeed,' as one reviewer of the *Latter Days* put it, '—for the good reason that they tell of ordinary men . . . who have risen to heights of daring or ingenuity or mere bare-faced bluff in their endeavours to regain their freedom.' They were individuals who had human qualities that those who read about or watched films on their exploits could both admire and hope that they too possessed. Their stories were also straightforward morality tales, in which apparently helpless captives outmanoeuvred their supposedly omnipotent captors. This David-versus-Goliath aspect, of courage in the face of adversity and the beating of odds, appealed to the British self-image in relation to the Second World War, while the goal—personal freedom—was one with which anyone could identify.[56]

Yet this was true of all escape stories, not just those set in Oflag IVC. What was it that made Colditz *primus inter pares*? The striking exterior appearance of the castle itself, as compared to the drab if not positively identikit look of hut-and-wire compounds, may have had some influence. It may also have helped that Oflag IVC contained a relatively small number of prisoners attempting a relatively wide range of breakout methods. 'It's on a small enough scale that people can grasp it', one of the wartime inhabitants of the castle, Peter Storie-Pugh, later observed. Those who were at Colditz, however, tended to think that it was the boyish and hugely appealing way in which Pat Reid framed the story that was at the root of the Colditz phenomenon. This was a collective opinion fully supported by the objective evidence of the ongoing popularity of books first published in the early 1950s. It was the success of *The Colditz Story* and its sequel, moreover, that allowed for the making of the even more popular film version, while the success of both books and film served as the initial selling-point for the wildly popular fictionalized TV drama series of the early 1970s. In turn, the BBC's *Colditz* programmes, as well as the film seen on television and the paperbacks still being

regularly reissued, spurred on those who would examine the story anew in documentary form at the end of the 1990s. Successive iterations of the story have introduced certain revisionist elements. Yet, as both critics and enthusiasts usually acknowledge, the popular image of the place remains rooted in the manner in which Pat Reid originally portrayed the castle. Indeed, there were indications that as late as 2003 his books were still outselling all others on Colditz.[57]

Hence the dominance of a particular set of images of British prisoner life in Germany within the collective imagination, in which high spirits and escape attempts are constant factors. But is this mental picture album entirely accurate? Or it is it closer to being a myth that 'abolishes the complexity of human acts' and instead 'gives them the simplicity of essences'? As the following chapters will show, the POW experience both in the Reich as a whole and inside Oflag IVC itself was quite varied, and differed significantly in key respects from what has become received popular wisdom.[58]

Notes

1. Michael Hall, *The Times*, 6 Jan. 1974.
2. UNB, MS L35, David H. Walker Papers, box 1, series 2, file 3, Moran to Walker, 17 Oct. 1981.
3. Henry Chancellor, *Colditz: The Definitive History* (London, 2001) (Chancellor distanced himself from the rather provocative subtitle—which may have been thought up by the publisher—in the preface, p. xiv); P. R. Reid, *Colditz: The Full Story* (London, 1984). Approximately 10% of all ex-POW memoirs and diaries published in the UK have been by former inhabitants of Colditz; around 30% of all published memoirs and diaries by former officer prisoners come from the men of Colditz.
4. Margaret Duggan, Introduction to *Padre in Colditz* (London, 1978), 5; see Harald Husemann, 'The Colditz Industry', in Cedric Cullingford and Harald Husemann (eds.), *Anglo-German Attitudes* (Aldershot, 1995), 141–63.
5. The Wooden Horse and (in particular) the Great Escape have drawn almost as much attention as Colditz. Early best-selling written accounts—Eric Williams, *The Wooden Horse* (London, 1949); Paul Brickhill, *The Great Escape* (London, 1950)—that remain in print were supplemented by further popular accounts over the years (see Bibliography), and reached wide audiences through the success of feature films. Stalag Luft III (Sagan) is only mentioned by name in the opening credits of the film version of *The Wooden Horse* (Wessex, 1950) and not at all in *The Great Escape* (Mirisch-Alpha, 1963). My use of the word 'myth' in this book has been influenced more by Roland Barthes than by either the classical usage or the popular definition in which the word becomes almost a synonym for falsehood.

6. See e.g. *Daily Mirror*, 22 May 1993, 30 May 1994, 5 Aug. 1994, 3 Feb. 1995, 6 Apr. 1995, 4 May 1994, 4 June 1996; 11 June 1997, 23 Mar. 1999; *Sunday Mirror*, 19 Sept. 1999; *Independent*, 8 Sept. 1992, 24 Jan. 2000; *Independent on Sunday*, 13 Feb. 2000; *Daily Telegraph*, 1 May 1991, 14 Aug. 1991, 16 Aug. 1991, 9 June 1992, 1 Jan. 1995, 10 Jan. 1995, 7 Mar. 1995; *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 Feb. 2000; *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1991, 9 Feb. 2000; *Daily Mail*, 27 Apr. 1999, 11 June 1999; 16 Feb. 2000; *Guardian*, 16 Feb. 2000, 18 May 2002; *Scotland on Sunday*, 13 Feb. 2000; see also Anon., *From Colditz to Bangladesh* (Manchester, 1996), 47.
7. *Illustrated London News*, 19 July 1941, p. 84; 26 Sept. 1942, pp. 360–1; 19 June 1943, p. 691; 30 Oct. 1943, pp. 500–1. The drawings were all passed by the German censor before being allowed to be sent to the UK. For words and images designed to reassure relatives and the general public that all was more-or-less well see, e.g. *Illustrated London News*, 13 May 1944, p. 546; War Organisation of the British Red Cross . . . , *Prisoner of War* (London, 1942); id., *The Prisoner of War*, vols. 1–4; War Office, *A Handbook for the Information of Relatives and Friends of Prisoners of War* (HMSO, 1943); Noel Barber, *Prisoner of War* (London, 1944); and D. G. Adams (ed.), *Backwater* (London, 1944). With a few exceptions the replies given to parliamentary questions about POWs were opaque. Colditz, unlike other camps, was never the subject of specific questions. See HC Parl. Deb. 5s. vols. 365–410. On efforts to avoid publicizing camps or escapes, even in fictitious guise, see e.g. Robert Murphy, *British Cinema in the Second World War* (London, 2000), 212. On telling escapers to keep silent about conditions see e.g. P. Paddon, letter, 23 Oct. 1942, in *Colditz Society Newsletter*, 3:20 (June 1999); see also M. R. D. Foot and J. M. Langley, *MI9* (London, 1979), 61. The blackout on hard news concerning POWs, generated in part by earlier public criticism of the handling of matters such as the mail, the exchange of sick and wounded, and reprisals, was such that when the first successful exchange took place in the autumn of 1943 even close relatives of the men concerned were unaware that anything was up. David Rolf, ' "Blind Bureaucracy": The British Government and POWs in German Captivity, 1939–45', in Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich (eds.), *Prisoners of War and Their Captors in World War II*, (Oxford, 1996), 61. It is interesting to note, in an exception that proves the rule, that once in 1941 the Schloss was described—in quotation marks within a caption but without explanation—as 'the notorious IVC'. See *Illustrated London News*, 4 Oct. 1941, p. 418.
8. A. J. Evans, *Escape and Liberation, 1940–1945* (London, 1945), 45–6. Fowler was killed in action in 1944, which suggests that Evans either drew on the memories of his companions or, more likely in view of the speed with which the book was completed, condensed what he had read in MI9 escaper debriefing reports (e.g. Fowler's own—PRO, WO 208/3311, MI9/S/PG(G)994). For Michael Burn's dispatches see *The Times*, 19 Apr., 21 Apr. 1945. An account on the flight of the *Prominente* from Colditz by Captain the Master of Elphinstone was also published in *The Times*, 19 May 1945.
9. J. E. R. Wood (ed.), *Detour* (London, 1946), acknowledgements, 2; see IWMSA 4432/9, H. Gee.

10. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Apr. 1946, p. 3; *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 Mar. 1946, p. 149; also 15 Aug. 1952, p. 531. See Michael Burn, *Yes, Farewell* (London, 1946), imprint page, contents page; BL catalogue *re* reprints.
11. *Whittaker's Books in Print* (London, 1949–90 editions); Hal May (ed.), *Contemporary Authors, 111* (Detroit, 1984), 512; Susan M. Trosky (ed.), *Contemporary Authors, 134* (Detroit, 1992), 80; http://www.bl.uk, catalogue entries; Husemann, op. cit., 145. The film version of *The Wooden Horse* was also a great success. See *Kinematograph Weekly*, 14 Dec. 1950, pp. 9–10.
12. P. R. Reid, *The Colditz Story* (London, 1952), 11, 19, 17; BBC, T60/9/1, K. Smith precis of talk with P. Reid, 4. That Reid sought to emulate the style of the Great War escape-story authors is suggested not only by his mentioning his favourite books in the prologue but also by the much more restrained tone employed in later books such as *Colditz: The Full Story*, published by Macmillan in 1984, and *Prisoner of War*, co-authored with Maurice Michael and published by Hamlyn the same year.
13. *Daily Telegraph*, 1 Aug. 1952, p. 6; *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Sept. 1952, p. 4; review excerpts, P. R. Reid, *The Colditz Story and The Latter Days at Colditz*, Coronet edn. (London, 1985), 1.
14. GL, MS. 16,352/8, Hodder & Stoughton, P. R. Reid file, John to Reid, 18 June 1954; ibid., *Colditz Story* sales, July 1952—Sept. 1953; ibid., H&S to Reid, 19 Dec. 1952; see *The Times*, 24 May 1990, p. 14. The *TLS* reviewer had recognized that 'these ingenious [escape] schemes are interesting enough in themselves and from them we gain a picture of the Briton at his best': *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 Aug. 1952, p. 531.
15. GL, MS. 16,352/7, letter to R. Douglas Boyd, 17 June 1953. On the election campaign see Paul Routledge, *Public Servant, Secret Agent* (London, 2002), ch. 11. On the radio adaptation see BBC, R19/1252.
16. GL, MS. 16,352/7, Sutton to Bokforlag, 17 Mar. 1953; ibid., FTFF note, E. M. Legatt, 16 Feb. 1954; *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 27 Mar. 1953, p. 8.
17. GL, MS. 16,352/8, Reid to Williams, 10 Nov. 1953; see ibid. H&S to Reid, 5 July 1954; P. R. Reid, *The Latter Days* (London, 1953), 9–10.
18. GL, MS 16,352/8, John to Reid, 18 June 1954; *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 Jan. 1954, p. 60; see *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Dec. 1953, p. 4.
19. G. Hamilton in Brian McFarlane, *An Autobiography of British Cinema* (London, 1997), 274; see GL, MS. 16,352/8, Foxwell to H&S, 18 May 1954. The extent to which Hamilton succeeded in conveying the schoolboyish elements of the Reid stories is evident in an article on 1950s war films by a Film Studies academic in which the film version of *The Colditz Story* is described as 'a Billy Bunter story where Mr. Quelch is a Nazi'. Andy Medhurst, '1950s War Films', in Geoff Hurd (ed.), *National Fictions* (London, 1984), 35.
20. *Kinematograph Weekly*, 15 Dec. 1955, pp. 4–5; *Daily Herald*, 28 Jan. 1955; *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Jan. 1955; *The Times*, 26 Jan. 1955; *Daily Telegraph*, 29 Jan. 1955; *Daily Express*, 28 Jan. 1955; GL, MS. 16,352/8, Reid to Attenborough, 4 Oct. 1954; see also *Spectator*, 28 Jan. 1955; *New Statesman*, 5 Feb. 1955; *Sight and Sound*, 24 (1955), 200. In contrast to the *Guardian*

reviewer, John Minchinton thought that the film plot strayed too far from the book, but admitted that 'Dialogue and acting are in keeping with Reid's stiff upper-lip, public school account'. *Film and Filming*, Mar. 1955, p. 20. On Pat Reid wanting Carol Reid—no relation but then Britain's leading director—see GL, MS. 16,352/8, Reid–Leggatt correspondence, Dec. 1953. On Reid helping Foxwell promote the film, see e.g. LC, Michael Riviere papers, Reid to Riviere, n/d [1954/5]. On Hodder & Stoughton seeking tie-ins see GL, MS. 16,352/8, H&S to Reid, 26 Aug. 1955, H&S memo, n/d [Oct. 1954].

21. On the Neave affair see HLRO, AN/671, draft letter to G. Glaister attachment, Allen to Neave, 29 June 1972; BBC, T60/9/1, K. Smith precis of conversation with A. Neave, 6; CSVA 2, J. Yule. Reid evidently tried to make amends by having Neave relate his own escape in an episode of the 'talking head' series he began fronting for ITV, *Escapers' Club*, early the next year. See *TV Times*, 10 Feb. 1956, p. 23. On the 'silly ass' question see IWMSA 10643/3, P. Welch. On the failure to convey tedium—as well as the too-well-scrubbed-and-dressed appearance of the actors—see CSVA 11, H. Ironside. On getting technical details right see IWMSA 10643/3, P. Welch. On getting details wrong see IWMSA 4432/8, H. Gee. On enjoying the film see IWMSA 16797/4, H. Bruce; CSVA 7, P. Allan. Regarding the knock-on effects of having been a prisoner at Oflag IVC once the place became famous, another Old Colditzian happily remembered how: 'For years after the war you could dine out any day if you happened to have been a prisoner at Colditz.' Walter Morrison, *Flak and Ferrets* (London, 1995), p. viii.
22. Giles Romilly and Michael Alexander, *The Privileged Nightmare* (London, 1954), p. iv.
23. GL, MS. 16,352/8, H&S to Reid, 2 July 1956. On publicity tie-ins and the publisher's efforts to prevent the film's distributor, British Lion, from changing the title of the film during the production phase, see ibid., Leggatt to John, 7 July 1954; JA to Leggatt, 5 July 1954; Leggatt to Jones, 24 Aug. 1954; Osborne to Leggatt, 18 Mar. 1955; Lamb to H&S, 22 Mar. 1955; H&S–Murray correspondence, Feb.–Mar. 1955; H&S to Reid, 27 May 1955.
24. Reinhold Eggers, *Colditz: The German Story* (London, 1961), impressions page; ibid., Pan edn. 1963; IWMSA 4432/6, H. Gee; id. 12658/4, R. Eggers; Airey Neave, *They Have Their Exits*, Pan edn. (London, 1955). Extracts from *They Have Their Exits* also appeared as a chapter entitled 'Escape from Colditz 1942' in Fred Urquart (ed.), *Great True War Adventures* (London, 1957), 163–75. On being approached to write a memoir see IWMSA 4432/3, H. Gee. In the wake of the film even passing mention of having been at Colditz tended to be highlighted in memoir reviews. See e.g. review of Ion Ferguson, *Doctor at War* (London, 1955), in *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 July 1955, p. 403. When the enormously successful screen version of *Reach for the Sky* appeared the following year, director Lewis Gilbert and screenwriter Vernon Harris, despite cutting and condensing much of the best-selling 1954 book of the same name by Paul Brickhill—in which an