



The eagle and the iron cross

Glendon Fred Swarthout

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The Eagle and the Iron Cross opens in a World War II prisoner-of-war camp. It centers upon a fierce struggle -- a battle both physical and moral -- waged by two young escapees against a foe at once relentless and sadistic. It takes its place among the probing war novels of our time, but one that offers the reader a jolting shock. For this POW camp is located in Arizona. And the two escapees are German soldiers, Matthe Teege and Albert Pomtow. They are barely out of their teens. For them the politics was a jumble of words, and war is slaughter without meaning.

They want to escape the bonds of barbed wire, not to fight for the Third Reich, but to flee the Fourth Reich that has been set up within the camp. Their haven is to be "America" -- or at least their image of America culled from the Western novels they read as boys and the words they memorized by America's founding fathers.

But it is another America these POW's discover. They dream of joining the proud Indian tribes of the Wild West; instead the Indians with whom they take refuge have only a terrible captivity to share. One of them, Matthe, finds love -- but the girl is a teenage, gun-chewing Indian prostitute. The pair seek justice, and are tracked by a group of ranchers -- vigilantes for whom torture and murder of their quarry is the highest form of patriotism. Finally, in a climax of explosive action and cutting irony, the one surviving German, in alliance with a young Indian who has all but lost his manhood, must enter into a war with these same ranchers, a war that becomes a vivid counterpoint of the world's war, with all moral roles reversed. The Eagle and the Iron Cross charts the breaking an illusion; it is a gripping escape story, tragically based upon fact.

Glendon did research about the old German POW camps during WWII and afterwards, even interviewing one of the old prisoners still living in Arizona. He also utilized his own knowledge of the war, having served as an infantry Sergeant in the famed 3rd Army Division during its Italian campaign, and worked in some of his personal observations about armed conflicts and their effects on the young men drafted to fight our wars. Totally original once again, this was the very first novel written about his provocative subject, set in America's prisoner-of-war camps, and from young Germans' points-of-view. Consequently, Eagle became quite a controversial book in some reviewers' opinions.

Reviews --

"One of the great books about the war." Nashville Tennessean

"Glendon Swarthout's best novel in some time....A strong story with some wonderful characters." Publisher's Weekly

"Competently conceived, concisely executed, this scenario-like novel has already been bought by film producer Sam Spiegel, of Lawrence of Arabia and The Bridge On The River Kwai fame. The story is a natural for the flicks." Kirkus Reviews

"Cuts so close to the bone that you put it down finally -- and only when it's finished -- wishing that it couldn't happen, and knowing that it could." Cleveland Plain Dealer

"From an improbable plot, an incredible cast, and an impossible title, Glendon Swarthout has skillfully concocted a funny, tragic, and simply marvelous novel....His latest effort combines War and the Wild West with touches of black humor and plenty of action. But beware of the slick veneer. Swarthout has planted some time bombs for the unwary reader." Worcester, Mass. Telegram

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