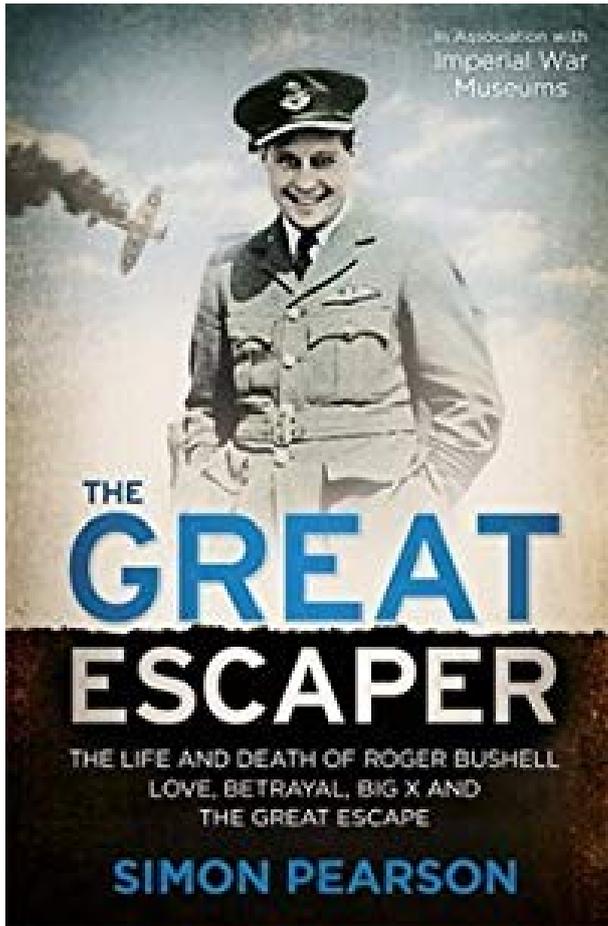


The Great Escaper



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Roger Bushell was 'Big X', mastermind of the mass breakout from Stalag Luft III in March 1944, immortalised in the Hollywood film *The Great Escape*.

Very little was known about Bushell until 2011, when his family donated his private papers - a treasure trove of letters, photographs and diaries - to the Imperial War Museum. Through exclusive access to this material - as well as fascinating new research from other sources - Simon Pearson, Chief Night Editor of *The Times*, has now written the first biography of this iconic figure. Born in South Africa in 1910, Roger Bushell was the son of a British mining engineer.

By the age of 29, this charismatic character who spoke nine languages had become a London barrister with a reputation for successfully defending those much fortunate than him. He was also renowned as an international ski champion and fighter pilot with a string of glamorous girlfriends. On 23 May, 1940, his Spitfire was shot down during a dogfight over Boulogne after destroying two German fighters. From then on his life was governed by an unquenchable desire to escape from Occupied Europe. Over the next four years he made three escapes, coming within 100 yards of the Swiss border during his first attempt.

His second escape took him to Prague where he was sheltered by the Czech resistance for eight months before he was captured. The three month's of savage interrogation in Berlin by the Gestapo that followed made him even more determined. Prisoner or not, he would do his utmost to fight the Nazis. His third (and last escape) destabilised the Nazi leadership and captured the imagination of the world. He died on 29 March 1944, murdered on the explicit instructions of Adolf Hitler. Simon Pearson's revealing biography is a vivid account of war and love, triumph and tragedy - one man's attempt to challenge remorse tyranny in the face of impossible odds.