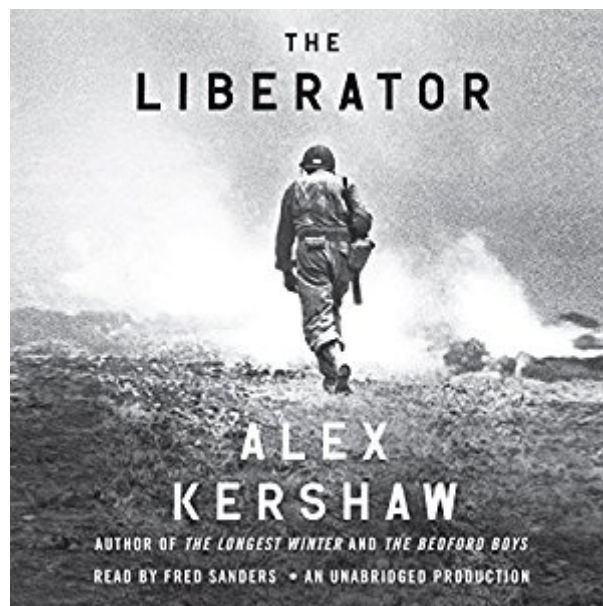


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The Liberator: One World War II Soldier's 500-Day Odyssey From The Beaches Of Sicily To The Gates Of Dachau



Synopsis

The true story of the bloodiest and most dramatic march to victory of the Second World War: the battlefield odyssey of a maverick U.S. Army officer and his infantry unit as they fought for over five hundred days to liberate Europe - from the invasion of Italy to the gates of Dachau. From July 10, 1943, the date of the Allied landing in Sicily, to May 8, 1945, when victory in Europe was declared - the entire time it took to liberate Europe - no regiment saw more action, and no single platoon, company, or battalion endured worse, than the ones commanded by Felix Sparks, who had entered the war as a greenhorn second lieutenant of the 157th "Eager for Duty" Infantry Regiment of the 45th "Thunderbird" Division. Sparks and his fellow Thunderbirds fought longest and hardest to defeat Hitler, often against his most fanatical troops, when the odds on the battlefield were even and the fortunes of the Allies hung in the balance - and when the difference between defeat and victory was a matter of character, not tactics or armor. Drawing on extensive interviews with Sparks and dozens of his men, as well as over five years of research in Europe and in archives across the US, historian Alex Kershaw masterfully recounts one of the most inspiring and heroic journeys in military history. Over the course of four amphibious invasions, Sparks rose from captain to colonel as he battled from the beaches of Sicily through the mountains of Italy and France, ultimately enduring bitter and desperate winter combat against the diehard SS on the Fatherland's borders. Though he lost all of his company to save the Allied beach-head at Anzio and an entire battalion in the dark forests of the Vosges, Sparks miraculously survived the long bloody march across Europe and was selected to lead a final charge to Bavaria to hunt down Adolf Hitler. In the dying days of the Third Reich, Sparks and his men crossed the last great barrier in the West, the Rhine, only to experience some of the most intense street fighting and close combat suffered by Americans in WWII. When they finally arrived at the gates of Dachau, Hitler's first and most notorious concentration camp, the Thunderbirds confronted scenes that robbed the mind of reason. With victory within grasp, Sparks confronted the ultimate test of his humanity: after all he had faced, could he resist the urge to wreak vengeance on the men who had caused untold suffering and misery? Written with the narrative drive and vivid immediacy of Kershaw's previous best-selling books about American infantrymen in WWII, *The Liberator* is a story for the ages, an intensely human and dramatic account of one of history's greatest warriors and his unheralded role in America's finest achievement - the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've always been fascinated by WWII, especially in the memoirs and bios of the men who fought, those responsible for executing the orders of their nation. One area seemingly not as highly regarded and thus not written about enough are the Sicily and Italian campaigns, and, even more so, the Vosges Mountains Campaign. The Liberator touches on all of these and I eagerly devoured this kind-of-bio of Felix Sparks. Felix Sparks was an excellent combat officer, one of the kind who didn't stay behind the lines. He led from the front, amidst the bullets and shrapnel flying through the air. Even as a colonel when he should have been well behind the lines, he led his men by example. There is something to be admired about a man who takes such an interest in his responsibilities to his men. What Kershaw does is more of a snapshot of his career in the army. You don't really get any extended information on Sparks, with the exception being of his life before the army, and shortly in the end about his duties and functions after the war. One important aside that did follow Sparks was his interaction with the general and journalist who showed up at Dachau. The showdown between the two is one made for movies, and I admired Sparks even more so because of it. The tragic situation his men were put in at Dachau, that of trying to respect the prisoners of war and balance that against the atrocities they were seeing all around them. If Patton weren't in charge Sparks and his men could very well have been thrown under the bus. As it was Patton, crass as he may have been, was always there for his men, and be there he was for Sparks.

This relatively short book is essentially a biography of U.S. Army Colonel Felix Sparks, who led an infantry unit in the Sicily, Italian, and southern French campaigns of World War II. Most accounts of the War in Europe focus upon the Normandy invasion and Battle of the Bulge, so this is a welcome

addition, detailing the war effort of those that fought in Sicily, at Anzio, and through the south of France. Sparks certainly saw his share of battle and was never far from the front line, somewhat rare for officers of his rank. His unit saw some of the highest casualty rates of the War. Without a doubt, Sparks was one of the finest soldiers to wear the uniform and his record cannot be denied or diminished in any way. However, as frequently happens in the case of such biographies, the author has tried a little too hard to sell the Colonel's story. In this instance, he does so by denigrating virtually every U. S. service man of higher rank than Sparks. Of course, the Generals are either bumbling fools (Mark Clark) or venal, publicity hounds (George Patton) whose negligence and incompetence put Sparks and his men repeatedly in harm's way, despite the well-argued and indisputable warnings of Sparks. To believe the author, the War would have been won far quicker, with little loss of life, if only the higher ups had listened to Sparks. His immediate superiors likewise come in for their share of criticism as well, particularly Brigadier General Fredericks, who he blames for the sniper death of a soldier returning from a victory parade (as if the sniper would have otherwise been unable to find a target). He also blames the vindictiveness of Fredericks for Sparks's failure to receive the recognition (as in medals) that he deserved.

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