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Literary Depiction of the Second World War in *The Eagle has Landed* by Jack
Higgins
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Student si pro svou práci zvolil populární verzi historie, a proto bude nejprve charakterizovat populární kulturu a žánrovou literaturu s patřičným důrazem na konkrétní žánr zvoleného díla. Vzhledem k tomu, že pracuje s alternativní historií, je nutná i analýza období 2. světové války v Británii. Literární analýza zvoleného díla se pak zaměří na konfrontaci historických faktů s autorovou historickou alternativou a jejími aspekty.

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Prohlašuji:

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ANNOTATION

This thesis focuses on the World War Two setting of the book *The Eagle has Landed* by Jack Higgins. The theoretical part describes the genres of Alternative and Secret histories and provides a short description of the author. The following chapter is dedicated to the raid on Gran Sasso by Otto Skorzeny and provides a summary of the Second World War up until the plot of the book takes place. The final, practical, part of the thesis examines individual aspects of the story and compares them to historical sources to verify their historical plausibility.

KEY WORDS

Eagle has Landed, Jack Higgins, Winston Churchill, Second World War, history

ANNOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se soustředí na vyobrazení druhé světové války v díle *Orel Přistál* od Jacka Higginse. Teoretická část popisuje žánry alternativní a tajné historie a v rychlosti popisuje autorův život. Následující kapitola je věnována nájezdu na Gran Sasso, který provedl Otto Skorzeny a poskytuje detailní shrnutí průběhu války až do bodu, kdy začíná příběh. Poslední praktická část zkoumá jednotlivé elementy příběhu a porovnává je s příslušnými zdroji, aby určité jejich historickou pravděpodobnost.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Orel Přistál, Jack Higgins, Winston Churchill, Druhá světová válka, historie

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on the accuracy of the depiction of World War Two and plausibility of the story presented in the book *The Eagle has Landed* (1975) by Jack Higgins.

Jack Higgins, real name Harry Patterson, wrote 77 books as of 2016 and is now one of the most famous military fiction authors. It was, however, his 35th book, *Eagle Has Landed*, that jettisoned him among the best-selling authors. The book has since sold over 50 million copies¹ and garnered international praise.² But how authentic it really is? This is the question that this thesis will attempt to answer.

The book is significant for various reasons. Firstly, it is a best-selling book from World War II that features German protagonists. While the German soldiers were portrayed with sympathy in works of fiction before, there hasn't been a story that attained mainstream popularity told from their perspective. Secondly, the historical setting, which except for a few mistakes, which will be explained later, is written fairly convincingly. The author uses the 'false document technique' to add the feel of realism. While the historians or history enthusiasts will point out many inaccuracies, it is convincing enough for the general public to enjoy and get immersed. As the author states in the book: "At least fifty per cent of it is documented historical fact. The reader must decide for himself how much of the rest is a matter of speculation, or fiction..."³ And this is precisely what this thesis will attempt to distinguish.

In the first chapter, this thesis will provide a basic historical context, and establish and explain the terms 'alternate history' and 'secret history', finished with information about the author.

The next chapter will open with historical context of the war, as this is one of the cornerstones of the story and the date it takes place is important. And while the description of nature and landscape by the author is incredibly convincing and picturesque, this thesis cannot verify this is any way, therefore it will not be an examined subject.

The following chapter will select key moments in the story and examine their historical plausibility based on various sources. With a significant portion of the chapter dedicated to the team of German paratroopers that serve as the main characters, focusing

¹ John Crace, "A Life in Writing: Jack Higgins", *The Guardian*, July 31, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/jul/31/jack-higgins-life-harry-patterson>.

² "The Eagle Has Landed," GoodReads, accessed April 17, 2019, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/295961.The_Eagle_Has_Landed.

³ Jack Higgins, *The Eagle has Landed* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2014), 12.

mainly on Kurt Steiner, the leader and a German paratrooper, Preston, a disgraced British soldier and a member of the British Free Corps and the only real ‘antagonist’ of the book, and Joanna Grey, a Boer born German spy.

The thesis will finish with a summary and a conclusion based on previously stated facts on the plausibility of the novel.

1. Literary background

This first chapter of the thesis will focus on establishing general information about the author, the book and the genre in which it is written and also providing a definition and description of several genres.

1.1. Historical context

The Eagle has Landed was published in 1975 and it is considered by many as a remake of a British film from 1942. Both follow a similar story but the themes and characters are drastically different, while in the wartime movie, the Germans are portrayed very negatively, with passing time this depiction could be eventually altered.

In 1942, a Brazilian filmmaker by the name of Alberto Cavalcanti made a movie about a group of German paratroopers infiltrating a British village as a prelude to a full-scale German invasion. The film tried to reflect the fear and paranoia of a possible German attack of the time, but came out in late 1942, where it was the Allies planning amphibious operations like Operation Torch. The Germans depicted in this movie as ruthless murderers and the villagers as heroic and courageous people, who manage to form an ad-hoc militia and together with the Home Guard, defeat the Germans.⁴ Depiction of the Germans was not favourable, after they shed their disguises they became cold hearted monsters. Initially disguised as a Royal Engineering Regiment, they later introduce themselves as paratroopers. By the time the movie was made the fear of invasion has subsided and enemy troops dropping from planes was not a real threat anymore, but during the height of the Battle of Britain the German paratroopers landing in British countryside was a popular joke as Juliet Gardiner in her book *Wartime Britain 1939 – 1945* notes: “In the country Frances Partridge noted that ‘everyone makes jokes about the likelihood of German parachutists landing in our Wiltshire fields dressed as nuns or clergymen – a good farcical subject on which to let off steam’”⁵ This may have been an unintended consequence of British preparations for the invasion as parachutists were considered a first phase of the German assault and their importance overstressed and people started seeing them behind every corner, but as was later revealed, Germans did not plan on using them at all.⁶

⁴ S.P. Mackenzie, „Nazis into Germans; Went the Day Well? (1942) and *The Eagle has Landed* (1976)“, *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 32, no. 2, (Summer 2003): 84.

⁵ Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime Britain: 1939-1945* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004), 191.

⁶ Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*, 203.

However, due to thirty-three years gap between the publications Jack Higgins was able to alter the portrayal of the Germans significantly. According to Mackenzie's article, the British authorities maintained a certain distinction between Germans and Nazis at first; by 1942 the two words became synonymous. After the war the situation slowly began to change as many Britons began viewing Germans more with sympathy rather than hatred. In 1950's Germans were starting to be seen as allies again thanks to the creation of Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). However, the public opinion on the matter still had a way to go, as evidenced by the controversy surrounding the release of *Rommel – Desert Fox* in 1951, with some reviews describing it as “if made by the Propaganda Department of the Wehrmacht itself...” due to Erwin Rommel being depicted as a gentlemanly, honourable officer, who eventually commits suicide to save his family from persecution, achieving a martyr status.⁷ A decade later, 54 per cent of Britons rated their attitude towards Germans as positive and by the latter half of the decade it rose to 70 per cent. As a result, the portrayal of Luftwaffe pilots in the epic *Battle of Britain* (1969) is nearly identical to their British counterparts, both being very sympathetic. Despite this progress, Higgins' agent was very sceptical of the promise, but Higgins insisted, which was eventually the right choice as the book went on to gain massive popularity.⁸

To summarize, while the opinion of the British public was very hostile towards the Germans during and shortly after the war, by the time *The Eagle has Landed* was released, the public was more than ready for a story with German protagonists.

1.2. Alternative and Secret Histories

The Eagle has Landed is often misattributed to the Alternative history genre, while actually belonging to a sub-genre, or a 'grey area', called Secret History situated between the historical fiction and alternate history.

Collins Dictionary defines the alternate history genre as: “a genre of fiction in which the author speculates on how the course of history might have been altered if a particular historical event had had a different outcome”⁹. Writers, but mainly historians, referred to it as counterfactual history, because as the name suggests, it goes against, in other words counters, the known facts. Martin Bunzl in his web essay *Counterfactual History: A User's Guide*

⁷ Mackenzie, „Nazis into Germans”, 86.

⁸ Mackenzie, „Nazis into Germans”, 88.

⁹ “Definition of alternative history”, Collins Dictionary, accessed April 5th, 2019, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/alternative-history>.

states that historians approach the genre with great unease, because evidence is a central point of historical methodology and it is impossible to argue for something that, not only is supported by any facts, but explicitly goes against them.¹⁰ In other words, alternative history establishes a ‘point of divergence’ at which the history changed from what we know and uses that as a setting for a story which might deal with the changed events directly, for example *Peklo Beneš* from Czech author Josef Nesvadba, where a Munich Crisis is averted and Czechoslovakia remains a neutral nation in Europe¹¹, or use them as a background as can be seen in one of the most popular alternative history novels of all time, *The Man in the High Castle* by Phillip K. Dick, which depicts a world that has been split between Germany and Japan following their total victory in the Second World War¹².

Will Shetterly’s Rule states that: “There are no correct alternate histories; there are only plausible alternate histories.”¹³ While this quote might be true, some histories are more plausible than others, there is a difference between creating things out of thin air and making an educated guess based on previous facts. For example, the scenario presented in *The Man in the High Castle*, while interesting from a story perspective, is absolutely unrealistic from historical standpoint, as neither Germany nor Japan would ever be able to conquer the whole world. On the other hand, the novel *Fatherland* by Robert Harris presents a similar, yet much more realistic scenario. In *Fatherland* Germany reigns supreme in Europe, after winning the war against the Soviet Union and forcing Britain to surrender. While the USA manages to defeat the Japanese Empire and the two victorious countries are locked in a Cold War, similar to the one between the USA and the Soviet Union in our timeline.¹⁴ Aside from that, Phillip K. Dick uses science fiction plot devices like parallel universes; therefore, the plot of the *Fatherland* is without the doubt more realistic.

The setting of the novels then has a following structure. History proceeded as normal, same as our timeline, then an event happened, or happened differently than in OTL ‘our timeline’, this is known as PoD ‘point of divergence’ and following that event, history changed course and is referred to as ATL ‘alternate timeline’. And in this alternate timeline,

¹⁰ “Counterfactual History: A User’s Guide”, History Cooperative, published October 13th, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20041013011910/http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.3/bunzl.html>.

¹¹ “Peklo Beneš”, Databáze Knih, accessed April 5th, 2019, <https://www.databazeknih.cz/knihy/peklo-benes-ostatnejsim-ceskoslovensku-20005>.

¹² “Man in the High Castle”, GoodReads.com, accessed April 5th, 2019, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/216363.The_Man_in_the_High_Castle.

¹³ “Alternate History 101”, WebCite, August 13th, 2001, <https://www.webcitation.org/5kmXXAhDa?url=http://www.geocities.com/Athens/4824/ah101.htm>.

¹⁴ “Fatherland”, GoodReads.com, accessed April 5th, 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56842.Fatherland>.

the story unfolds.¹⁵ As mentioned previously, it can deal with the historic change directly as a central plot, or it can be used as a background to a different story.

On the other hand, the Secret History isn't a genre of its own instead it is a blend between historical fiction and alternative history, an area where these two genres merge. Secret history utilizes elements from both as is explained further.

Firstly, the term secret history is applied in two distinct yet quite similar circumstances. Primary definition, according to Collins Dictionary is as follows: "a version of historical events which differs from the official or commonly accepted record and purports to be the true version"¹⁶. This however applies to the secret histories of the real world, such as *The Hidden History of 9/11* by Paul Zarembka,¹⁷ where the author questions the official narrative presented by the US authorities.

These works try to contradict the official version of events presented or accepted by the government or the public and by doing so they allude to a government cover up or other types of conspiracies, which earns them a label of being a conspiracy theory or they are classified as historical revisionism, defined by Learners Dictionary as: "support of ideas and beliefs that differ from and try to change accepted ideas and beliefs especially in a way that is seen as wrong or dishonest"¹⁸. While it is true that revisionism is being used as a weapon of various political ideologies trying to justify themselves, dismissing it as completely wrong is also not a correct course of action, since how can one be sure that what is written in the history books actually happened? For that reason, the validity of the claims provided in secret history books needs to be judged on case by case basis. As evidenced by a quote by Napoleon who was once asked "What is the truth in history?" to which he replied "A fable agreed upon."¹⁹ Real world secret history, or histories, is a genre of books where authors challenge the official narrative of historic events and try to uncover the truth and while they are often described as historical revisionists, this does not necessarily mean that what they say is false.

Secondary definition is very much the same as the first one, except it is tied to a work of literary fiction, where the author presents his version of history in the background of a well-known historic event, for example *Eye of the Needle* by Ken Follet, in which a German

¹⁵ WebCite, "Alternate History 101."

¹⁶ "Secret history definition", Collins Dictionary, Accessed April 8th, 2019, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/secret-history>.

¹⁷ Paul Zarembka, *The Hidden History of 9/11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008).

¹⁸ "Revisionism", Learner's Dictionary, Accessed April 10th, 2019, <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/revisionism>.

¹⁹ Emmanuel-Auguste-Dieudonné comte de Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte Hélène: Journal of the Private Life and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena*, Volume 4 (Unknown: H. Colburn and Company, 1823), 251.

spy learns the truth about D-Day Landings, that they are to take place in Normandy and not Calais-Dover pass as is believed by the German High Command, and he is ready to transmit that information to Berlin but is stopped at the very last second. Therefore, nobody, except the people involved, will ever know that it happened in the first place. However, while the author is claiming that it happened the way he wrote it, him saying that is part of the story itself, the readers know very well, or at least they should, that it is a work of fiction, which is supposed to entertain, and it has nothing to do with historical revisionism.

In contrast to alternate (alternative) history and its structure, secret history is what precedes it in many cases. Alternative history follows previously mentioned structure of: history proceeds as normal then an event happens that changes it (point of divergence) and from that point on it is no longer our history, rather an alternative one. Secret history on the other hand proceeds as follows, history happens as it should, then an event occurs threatening to change history as it is known, but at the very last second this change is averted, history returns to its regular course and the whole occurrence is forgotten or covered up. This is why *The Eagle has Landed* falls into the latter category. The kidnapping of Winston Churchill would be the incident that alters the course of history and perhaps the outcome of the war, but the German commando is stopped and to prevent any loss of morale of the British population the incident is covered up. After all, the accuracy of such realities is a matter of debate, since that is all that can be done about presented alternative histories without evidence to back it up.

1.3. About the author

This chapter briefly summarizes the life of Harry Patterson, known better under his pseudonym, Jack Higgins. This particular book is not inspired by any events in his life, thus, this chapter contains a very brief summary.

Jack Higgins, real name Harry Patterson, was born on 27th July 1929 in England, but after his father abandoned him, he moved to Belfast with his mother, where he lived until the age of twelve. His mother later remarried and he moved with her back to England, where he attended a grammar school that he left in 1945 with no qualifications.²⁰

²⁰ Crace, "Jack Higgins."

Two years later he went into National Service after which he was stationed on a checkpoint in West Germany as a wireless operator. It was there he had discovered his talent for teaching and writing and was even encouraged to do so by his regimental officer, Major David Smiley, who advised him to ‘keep up with his scribblings’.²¹ After his service he moved to London and got a degree in sociology at the London School of Economics, he enjoyed his stay there as he said in an interview with the Guardian: “I admired its history of nonconformism, the way it said 'Fuck the critics' and honoured people such as HG Wells, Nelson Mandela and Wole Soyinka long before anyone else did.”²² While being a nonconformist himself, defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as “refusal to conform to an established or conventional creed, rule, or practice”²³, he wrote strictly for money with a goal of earning a million pounds by the time he retired. This goal was achieved in a mere week after publishing *The Eagle has Landed* in 1975.

Due to a high income tax that was in England at the time, the highest rate being 83p in a pound²⁴, he became a ‘tax exile’. As advised, he hastily moved to Channel Islands, which is also a place where Steiner and his men are serving their penal duties in his book, where the income tax was supposedly much lower. Mr Higgins has lived there ever since.²⁵

²¹ “Jack Higgins Biography”, The Queen Alexandria Hospital Home, September 14th, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160914030237/http://www.qahh.org.uk/jack-higgins-biography/>.

²² Crace, “Jack Higgins.”

²³ Nonconformity, Merriam-Webster, Accessed April 7th, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nonconformity>.

²⁴ Rates of Income Tax, 1973-74 to 1989-90, World Of Stuart, Accessed April 7th, 2019, http://worldofstuart.excellentcontent.com/repository/incometaxrates_1974to1990.pdf.

²⁵ Crace, “Jack Higgins.”

2. Historical Context

Before examining the plausibility of the novel, the in-book historical context also needs to be established due to the fact, that it plays a central role in any historical fiction novel. In order for the reader to feel immersed in the plot its setting needs to be accurately or believably presented, preferably both. This chapter looks at the specific time of the Second World War the story takes place and also provides extensive information about the Raid on Gran Sasso, which kick-starts the plot of the novel aside from being the most significant commando raid of the War.

2.1. State of the War

The story takes place between September and November of 1943. At this point the tide of the war has turned against Germany. The military was running out of available manpower after massive losses in Russia, the industry was outpaced by the enemy, Wehrmacht stood on the defensive on all fronts and started to slowly lose ground. Defeat was still far away, but victory, was without a doubt, out of reach.

It has been over four years since the War began. On September 1st 1939 German tanks crossed into Poland and rushed through the country in a never before seen fashion and speed. Polish army was caught completely off guard, cavalry and infantry had a hard time resisting the Blitzkrieg, a lightning war tank focused tactic invented by Germany and a complete opposite of the way the war was fought up until then.²⁶ Poland was expected to resist for months, in the end, it fell in 36 days. Not all of that was due to Germans, on September 17th the Red Army, back then an ally of German Reich, attacked Poland from the east. The country was conquered and divided among the superpowers.²⁷

In May 1940 France met a similar fate. Although, the French generals hoped to stall the German offensive using the Maginot line, a massive line of fortifications on the Franco-German border, German Army circumvented the forts by going through the Ardennes forest, a place deemed inaccessible to tanks, declaring the war on Luxembourg, Belgium and Netherlands in the process. France used tanks in large numbers and on paper, they were superior to their German counterpart, however, Germany possessed talented new officers capable of taking full advantage of the new force on the battlefield, unlike France whose

²⁶ Donald Sommerville, *Encyclopedie Druhé světové války*, trans. Leonid Křížek, 2nd ed. (Praha: Naše Vojsko, 2007), 18.

²⁷ Sommerville, *Second World War*, 21.

leadership was stuck in the previous war and could not utilize them properly. France fell in 46 days.²⁸

After the Fall of France, the attention of the Reich turned to Britain. This time, the battle was fought in the air over the English Channel and southern Britain itself. Luftwaffe was unable to achieve air superiority, which was a condition for successfully executing Operation Sea Lion²⁹, the invasion of the British Isles, after which the German attention turned elsewhere, mainly the Balkans and Africa, but the Battle of Britain continued in various forms up until June 1941, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union.³⁰

After successes in Poland and France, the German Army seemed unstoppable, therefore, in an excellent position to take out its main ideological and strategic rival, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. On June 22nd 1941 the Axis powers launched the largest land invasion of all time with Operation Barbarossa. According to *Encyclopedia of the Second World War* by Donald Sommerville, Germany attacked the Soviet Union with 140 divisions, consisting of 3,000,000 men, 7,100 guns and 3300 tanks. The Soviet border force consisted of 134 divisions, including 32 tank divisions. While Soviets had considerably more tanks, around 24,000, only about one quarter were functional.³¹ Despite the numerical advantage, Germans pushed through the Soviet territory and on December 2nd 1941 they arrived near Moscow, approximately 30 km from Kremlin, which the German units could see in the distance.³² Four days later Soviets launched a counterattack along the entire front pushing the Germans back.³³ German army suffered its first operational defeat.

Despite the initial failure, the Germans would not give up so easily and after a few months of resupply and reorganizations, they were ready to launch another offensive. The 'second summer offensive' codenamed Fall Blau (Plan Blue) began on June 28th 1942 when Army Group South attacked in the direction of the Caucasus.³⁴ Their primary objectives were the local oilfields and the city of Stalingrad. However, due to various factors like overextension of the frontline, organizational issues and the coming winter, the operation ended in failure. Fall Blau is known mainly for the battle of Stalingrad, which ended on February 2nd 1943 with the encirclement and destruction of the German Sixth Army.³⁵

²⁸ Ibid, 36–46.

²⁹ Ibid, 49–86.

³⁰ Ibid, 84.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 103.

³³ Ibid, 105.

³⁴ Ibid., 137.

³⁵ Ibid, 168–169.

On July 5th 1943 the German Army began its ‘third summer offensive’ codenamed Unternehmen Zitadelle (Operation Citadel), more commonly known as the Battle of Kursk. Soviets and Germans gathered 2,000,000 men, 6,000 tanks and 5,000 aircraft for the greatest tank battle of the Second World War. Germans attacked the Kursk salient in early hours of July 5th from north and south but were unable to break through the Soviet defences, casualties ran high and on July 12th Adolf Hitler cancelled the offensive. The Soviets responded with a swift counterattack and German army lost additional ground. This was the last German offensive of the Eastern Front after which, the Soviets took the initiative and continued to push Germans out of the Soviet Union.³⁶

While the battles of the Eastern Front were raging on, Britain slowly regained the air supremacy over its country and parts of France and from 1941 began the strategic bombing campaign against the German cities and industrial centres.³⁷ In August 1941 Winston Churchill named Arthur Harris as the Commander-in-Chief of the RAF Bomber Command. This man believed in the absolute power of strategic bombardment and was committed to turning German cities into dust. He launched his first massive air raid on May 30th 1942, when 1046 RAF bombers attacked Cologne. While only 40 of them were lost, the effects were minimal, German industry was largely unaffected and civilians were still very much resolved to the war.³⁸ Even after the Americans joined the war and sent their 8th Air Army to Britain the results from the bombings were not that impressive. But in January 1943, the British and American Airforce started a combined bombing offensive in which the British would fly during the night and Americans would fly during the day. In 1943, the Allied planes dropped around 203,200 tonnes of bombs mainly on production centres in Rhineland and on Berlin, but in this period the Germans were still putting up significant resistance, be it with defensive perimeters and radar networks or fighter planes so the Allied losses were quite high. And despite all of that the German production kept increasing thanks to Albert Speer and the morale of German populace was still high.³⁹

In the final years of the war the bombing targeted oil production which noticeably hurt the German war machine, but at that point the German industry was already crumbling and this was just another nail in the coffin. To conclude, Germany lost 400,000 civilians and

³⁶ Ibid, 185–186.

³⁷ Andrew Weist, David Jordan, *Atlas of the Second World War – Over 160 Detailed Battle & Campaign Maps*, (Great Britain: Silverdale Books, 2004), 43.

³⁸ Ibid, 44.

³⁹ Ibid, 47.

suffered slight damage to its industry compared to 40,000 Allied planes and 160,000 crewmen. It didn't fulfil the optimistic predictions of Arthur Harris and cost too many lives.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Germany assisted their Italian ally in their disastrous conquest of North Africa. After losing Ethiopia and East Africa, Italians tried their luck again and attacked Egypt from Libya on September 13th 1940, they made marginal gains before being pushed back in December. Force of 250,000 Italians was stopped and encircled by 36,000 British troops. In a resulting counterattack, British managed to capture 40,000 Italian troops and encircle Tobruk with further 70,000 troops captured. To prevent a total collapse of Italian presence in North Africa, Hitler decided to send two divisions to help, these divisions were organized in a taskforce called The Afrikakorps, later reinforced and reorganized into Panzerarmee Afrika, under the command of Erwin Rommel. Rommel would chase the British back and forth with insufficient fuel and numerical disadvantage before finally being beaten and forced to retreat after the battle of El Alamein in October 1942. During the following month the American troops landed in Morocco as a part of Operation Torch and the Afrika Korps was surrounded. They made their last stand in Tunis before being fractured and destroyed. The attempt to help their Italian ally cost Germany 150,000 troops and opened a way for an invasion of Sicily and later Italy.⁴¹

On July 10th 1943, the Allies landed in Sicily and took over the island by August 17th.⁴² As a result of his failures, Mussolini was invited to meet with the King of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele, on July 25th, who relieved him of his duties and had him arrested by Marshall Badoglio, who was named his interim successor. While Badoglio was publicly loyal to Germany he sought to secretly broker a peace deal with the Allies.⁴³ British troops landed on the Italian mainland after crossing a strait from Sicily on September 3rd and continued to push north.⁴⁴ On the same day, Italy left the Axis and joined the Allies, the surrender was kept secret as there were numerous German forces throughout the country.⁴⁵ Not even a week later, on September 9th, Italians tried to evacuate their navy to Malta but were attacked by German airplanes, German troops clashed with Italian units near Rome, after which the city was occupied by the Germans.⁴⁶ Three days later, on September 12th, SS commandos under the

⁴⁰ Ibid, 49.

⁴¹ Ibid, 65-87.

⁴² Ibid, 88.

⁴³ Sommerville, *Second World War*, 189.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 194.

⁴⁵ Weist and Jordan, *Atlas of the Second World War*, 89.

⁴⁶ Sommerville, *Second World War*, 195.

command of Otto Skorzeny rescued Mussolini from Gran Sasso and escorted him to Germany. Few days later he resumed his post as an Italian dictator.

This summarizes all the crucial events that happened preceding the books plot. The story begins during the meeting of Mussolini and Hitler after he is brought to Germany by Skorzeny on September 14th.

2.2. The Raid on Gran Sasso

The most famous commando operation of the war that inspired the plot of the book was the rescue of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini led by Otto Skorzeny, Hauptsturmführer (Captain⁴⁷) of the SS and a capable officer.

According to his own autobiography book, he visited Hitler's Headquarters in Rastenburg on July 26, 1943 as one of the six candidates, all officers of various branches of the German Armed Forces. He had the lowest rank of them all. After greeting them all he asked a simple question. Which one of them was familiar with Italy. Skorzeny was the first to respond, after a brief moment of silence, that he travelled as far as Naples twice on his motorcycle. When asked, what do they think of Italy, other officers started talking about the army and the anti-Comintern pact. Skorzeny merely said: "I am Austrian, mein Fuhrer!" Hitler sent the other officers away and explained the details of this task in private to him. "We must find out where the Duce is being held and free him. That is the mission I have for you Skorzeny." He accepted.

After that he met with General Kurt Student of the Luftwaffe, who was providing transportation for the mission. Himmler himself was in the room with the General. According to Skorzeny, he had many illusions and went on a rant of a huge conspiracy against the Duce. He was not able to remember all the names so he wrote some of them down in his notebook only to be scolded by Himmler. And once again shortly after that, for not possessing enough will power to stop smoking. All that encapsulated by "I can see that you're not the right man for the job!"⁴⁸

Nonetheless, after that he travelled to Italy with General Student where he spent the next three weeks hunting for the Duce. After numerous false leads he found out that the Duce was being held at a villa on the island of Santa Maddalena. He returned to Hitler's HQ to inform him of this plan. Hitler told him if the attack fails or they will not recover Duce he

⁴⁷ "Equivalent Army Ranks", Second World War, accessed January 8,2019, <http://secondworldwar.co.uk/index.php/army-sizes-a-ranks/87-equivalent-army-ranks>.

⁴⁸ Otto Skorzeny, *My Commando Operations – The Memoirs of Hitler's Most Daring Commando* (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 1995), 228-231.

“might be forced to disapprove of your action publicly. [...] I will have to punish you against my will in the event of failure.”⁴⁹ He returned to Italy to prepare the operation. However, the Germans learned just in the nick of time, that Duce has been moved again and he no longer is on Santa Maddalena. What was further alarming, German ambassador in Italy received a note of protest from his counterpart that stated the Germans are planning a coup d’état on August 28, which was the day the rescue of the Duce was to take place.

Despite this setback, German Intelligence soon learned from the intercepted radio messages, that Duce was moved to Gran Sasso. General Cueli, the inspector general of the military police, reported that: “Security preparations around the Gran Sasso complete.”⁵⁰ This was a clever move by the Italians as a mountain hotel at an elevation of 2,212 meters only reachable by a cable car was considered a perfect prison. The location presented another problem, as it was in a mountain area, surveillance photos could only be acquired by air. And the surveillance aircraft requisitioned for the job had broken automatic cameras in the wing so Skorzeny had to take the photos himself in an unbelievable way:

The aircraft flew at a height of 5,000 meters at 370kph. The outside air temperature was minus eight degrees Celsius. I was in shirtsleeves and stuck my upper body half in the open through the dorsal turret’s entry hatch. Radl sat on my legs to prevent me from falling out. The co-pilot had to give Radl a hand to pull me back into the aircraft. At the end of our air journey I was completely frozen through.⁵¹

This either shows Skorzeny’s bravery or foolishness in his determination to follow Hitler’s orders. As a side note, this Radl was Skorzeny’s officer and has nothing to do with the character in the book. After acquiring the photos, the operation was put in motion, the landing would be done by gliders as paratroopers and cable car was out of the question, paratroopers would not be able to land there and using the cable car would sound the alarm. General Student of the Luftwaffe was very sceptical of this plan and estimated 80% losses of gliders and the men that they would be carrying. Skorzeny said that he would be glad to carry

⁴⁹ Ibid, 252.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

out any other plan as long as it was better than his. But since nobody came up with a better idea, even General Student reluctantly agreed.⁵²

Despite further smaller complications the gliders in tow of the leading planes took off towards Gran Sasso. During the trip Skorzeny learned that several gliders were missing and he had seven gliders at his disposal instead of eleven. Nonetheless, the mission continued. They landed quite roughly on a steep hill near the hotel, the glider didn't brake as good as was expected and as a result the glider slowed to a halt mere 15 meters from the hotel. The troopers disembarked and noticed a surprised Italian guard staring at them with a blank expression. Afterwards, Skorzeny and his men stormed the hotel and secured Duce in under four minutes without firing a single shot.⁵³

The operation could not have been planned at a better time, Skorzeny later learned that a man in civilian clothes he had found in the room was General Cueli, who was supposed to fly the Duce out of Gran Sasso and hand him over to the Allies that very afternoon. Afterwards, Skorzeny and the Duce boarded a plane and travelled to Rome, which was by then under control of the German forces, from there to Vienna and finally to Rastenburg where they were welcomed by Adolf Hitler. Skorzeny was commemorated and went on to lead many more commando operations during the war.⁵⁴

2.3. Other Raids of the War

The Skorzeny's feat was not a singular occurrence however. As both the Axis and the Allies had their own special forces who underwent various missions throughout the war, following are few examples.

In the second chapter of the book, Adolf Hitler mentions a raid of British Commandos on Rommel's Headquarters in Africa. The raid took place on November 17, 1941, however, the operation was unsuccessful due to poor communication between the men on the ground and the navy. During a rainy night four days earlier, two British submarines, *Torbay* and *Talisman*, appeared off the coast of Cyrenaica, North Africa, and disembarked close to 50 men of the British Commandos on daring raid to get the head of the German Afrika Korps, General Erwin Rommel. The British Officers were very sceptical of the chances of success;

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 266 – 267.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 270 – 273.

however, the pressing situation on the front left them very few viable options. When Rommel first arrived in February 1941 he managed to push the British back 500 miles back and beyond the Libyan borders, with only the fortress of Tobruk remaining. He was becoming a thorn in their side and as such, his removal would help the British in Africa immensely, so a commando operation like this was worth the risk. Commandos were split into two groups, one heading to destroy a communications pylon in Cerene and second one, to assassinate Rommel. The second group of Commandos raided Rommel's Villa, codenamed *Rommel-Haus*, near the village of Beda Littoria. While managing to be sneak right to the front door, the German soldier who opened managed to shout and raise the alarm before being killed. A massive firefight ensued, Commandos unsuccessfully tried to blow up the villa before retreating. Miscommunication prevented them from being evacuated by the submarines so they split up into groups to be either picked up by LRDG (Long Range Distance Group), by the, hopefully, advancing British 8th Army or by trying their luck again with the submarines. They learned that the first group managed to blow up the pylon, but they were all captured by the Germans. Eventually, all the men from the raid were captured as well, except Colonel Robert E. Laycock and Sergeant Jack Terry, who managed to meet up with the 8th Army after 41 days.⁵⁵

On the other hand, Germany also had their own branch of Special Forces, which in certain aspects outperformed the British Commandos, at least in the early stages of the war. The Brandenburgers were a proper Special Forces unit of Germany, not counting the various specialised SS battalions that were created after Skorzeny's successful operation, created before the war; they were the most distinguished unit of the German Army before their dismissal in late 1944. In their article on the unit, the Business Insider describes them as "secret multilingual warrior spies of Nazi Germany"⁵⁶ and judging by the list of their various accomplishments particularly during the early stages of the war, this description is fairly accurate. War History Online article (2018) on Brandenburgers summarizes their origin like this:

In 1935, the head of the Abwehr, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, enlisted the services of a veteran of the colonial wars, Captain Theodor von Hippel. Canaris

⁵⁵ "British Commandos Take on German General Erwin Rommel," Warfare History Network, October 26, 2018, <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/daily/wwii/british-commandos-take-on-german-general-erwin-rommel/>.

⁵⁶ "Hitler's Brandenburgers: secret multilingual warrior spies of Nazi Germany", Business Insider, August 20, 2015 <https://www.businessinsider.com/hitlers-brandenburgers-secret-multilingual-warrior-spies-of-nazi-germany-2015-8>.

decided to transfer the positive experience of the “colonial” sabotage used by the Germans in Tanganyika, during the East African Company, to the European theatre of military operations. The first such unit was the battalion “Ebbinghaus”. In September 1939, this battalion participated in battles on the Polish border. In its composition, Ebbinghaus were ethnic Germans, who had previously lived in Poland and knew the Polish language, and the country’s traditions. The soldiers of Ebbinghaus helped advance German troops through Poland, and seized or destroyed important communications. Despite the effectiveness of the actions of the Ebbinghaus soldiers, the unit was disbanded after the occupation of Poland. In September 1939, it was decided to create a special purpose unit. The following month, in October, an order was issued for the creation of the 800th Special Purpose Training and Construction Company within the city of Brandenburg. This name was assigned for the purpose of secrecy.⁵⁷

Brandenburgers were supposed to infiltrate countries bordering Germany that Hitler wanted to invade; therefore the Germans already living there were the perfect candidates. Requirements were very strict, aside from being volunteers, as “they had to master two languages, have a high level of intelligence, good self-discipline, and be in good physical shape and of course, support the ideology of the Third Reich.”⁵⁸ However, after the establishment of Brandenburg, the members no longer had to be of ethnic German ancestry, the first priority was, they had to look like the people they were infiltrating. “They had to know the customs and history of regions so they could blend in and move without being noticed. Even the mannerism of how to properly spit like the locals, for example, was ingrained during training.”⁵⁹ They played a key role during major German offensives, infiltrating the area a day before with weapons and vehicles of the enemy nation, and even wore enemy uniforms over their German ones. That was for them to be treated as enemy combatants and not shot as spies. They further served in Africa with limited success and in Italy, after the country switched sides. However they earned most of their prestige on the Eastern Front, where they helped to capture bridges during Operation Barbarossa, German

⁵⁷ “German Special Forces of WWII – Brandenburgers”, War History Online, Sep 2, 2018, <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/history/german-special-forces.html>.

⁵⁸ War History Online, “German Special Forces”.

⁵⁹ Business Insider, “Hitler’s Brandenburgers”.

invasion of the Soviet Union, and later during the following major offensives. They were finally disbanded in 1944.⁶⁰

To summarize, this chapter should illustrate, that the events described in the book are not far-fetched or unbelievable in any way. The specific way how they are described by the author may be questionable and questioned in the following chapter, but sending a commando unit to perform a small but crucial task, a task which may even alter the course of the war, is not something unfathomable and based on the few examples provided here, it is something that happened quite often.

⁶⁰ Bradenburgers: Germany's Special Forces in World War II, Warfare History Network, December 13, 2018, <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/daily/wwii/bradenburgers-germanys-special-forces-in-world-war-ii/>.

3. Plausibility in the Book

The final chapter is focused on examining selected events and scenes from the book after the summary of the entire story and arguing whether or not they are plausible, based on the information presented in the second chapter and additional information from other sources.

3.1. The Eagle has Landed

This chapter will summarize the plot of the novel *Eagle has Landed*, so its individual parts can be closely examined in the following chapters. The book follows the author himself as he discovers the remnants of German paratroopers in a small British village, he then uncovers the operation that sent them there and presents the story to the reader, followed by author's summary and his interviews with the characters from the book that he managed to track down.

The book opens with a chapter told from the first person, by Jack Higgins himself. He explores the Church of St Mary and All the Saints in Studley Constable, while searching for the remnants of a sea captain Charles Gascoigne. A fictional village, as is cleverly hinted by the author in the following sentence: "The kind of village that you find by accident one day and can never find again, so that you begin to question whether it ever existed in the first place."⁶¹ He accidentally discovers a gravestone with a German Cross that belongs to Kurt Steiner and 13 other German paratroopers. Author cannot believe this himself as he states: "My German is indifferent at the best of times, mainly from lack of use, but it was good enough for this. *Here lies Lieutenant-Colonel Kurt Steiner and 13 German paratroopers, killed in action on the 6th November, 1943.* I crouched there in the rain, checking my translation carefully but no, I was right, and that didn't make any kind of sense."⁶² After inquiring about it further, despite the villagers hostility he receives this answer from the sexton of the church, Laker Amrsby, "He grinned, the eyes furtive again, that sly, cunning smile on his lips. 'That's easy,' he said. 'He was the German lad who came here with his men to shoot Mr Churchill.'"⁶³ This answer sends him on a yearlong wild hunt around the world where he deciphers "the enigma that was Kurt Steiner."⁶⁴

The story itself is told in retrospect, the opening scene describes a meeting between Duce, the Führer and other high ranking members of the Third Reich where Hitler in a fit of rage presents the idea of kidnapping the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill,

⁶¹ Higgins, *The Eagle has Landed*, 12.

⁶² Higgins, *The Eagle has Landed*, 9-10.

⁶³ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 19.

proclaiming if the SS can get Duce out of Italy, Abwehr, the German Intelligence, can organize and execute a similar operation. As Skorzeny, the leader of the commandos, was an officer of the SS, Himmler naturally used this opportunity to boast about SS superiority to Canaris, Hitler agreed with him saying to Canaris, “after all, an English commando unit attacked Rommel’s headquarters in Africa. [...] Am I to believe that the German boys are capable of less?”⁶⁵

As it turns out, they aren’t. Canaris issues a feasibility study to placate Hitler, hoping it would get buried and forgotten about eventually. He orders Colonel Max Radl to do so. In a surprising turn of events Radl finds out that it is possible and that soon, they will have a prime opportunity to pull this mission off. Canaris tells him to sit on it and do nothing. However, Himmler finds out about this and orders Radl to proceed with it unbeknownst to Canaris.

Radl then proceeds to recruit a team of soldiers to airdrop into Britain consisting of a disgraced paratrooper unit under the command of Kurt Steiner, a half-German half-American Paratrooper, and convinces Liam Devlin, an Irishman lecturing in Germany, to drop in advance and act as a liaison on the ground. On the orders of Himmler, a man from British Free Corps named Harvey Preston joins the group.

Liam drops into Ireland and makes his way to Studley Constable near Norfolk, where Churchill is supposed to be staying. He is helped by Joanna Grey, a Boer turned Nazi spy, who has been living in England for years. While waiting for the German paradrop, Liam plays his role and falls in love with Molly Prior despite being told numerous times by Joanna Grey to don’t do it. Aside from that, Liam buys army truck and a jeep from Jewish Black market dealing brothers, who attempt to double cross him, after which, he shoots one of their aides and shots the older one through the knee.

The team makes the drop on the beach few miles from the village. They move to the barn nearby and pretend to be Polish Paratrooper Squadron on manoeuvres. Steiner is introduced to Harry Kane, leader of the US Rangers also in the area.

During a pretend exercise a little girl falls into a stream followed by her brother, one of Steiner’s men jumps in and saves them both before he is swept by the mill. The others try to resuscitate him and accidentally expose the German uniform he was wearing underneath his British jacket. Steiner orders his men to round up the villagers to the church and to cut off the town from the outside world as they can still complete their mission. One of the villagers escapes and warns the US Ranger unit. A bored commander of the unit, Shafto, seeing this as

⁶⁵ Ibid, 25.

quick way through the ranks, orders his men to charge the town, however they are no match for the skilled paratroopers, the veterans of Crete, Stalingrad and Leningrad, and most of the Americans are killed along with Shafto himself.

Harry Kane, who warned Churchill in the meantime, takes command and proves to be a match to Steiner. He manages to push the paratroopers into the church. To his surprise, Steiner releases all the civilians and prepares to defend himself. Most of the Germans are killed. Steiner, Liam Devlin and a wounded soldier make it out through a secret tunnel. Churchill's convoy itself was redirected to Meltham House, the headquarters of the Rangers, where he is joined by Kane and senior British officers. Steiner manages to slip in disguised as a Military Police officer. He slowly approaches the porch where the Prime Minister is enjoying his cigar and just as he is about to fire, he is killed by Harry Kane.

In an epilogue, the author explains what happened to the characters after the war and how he met some of them and put the story together. At the end, he reveals that even if Steiner managed to pull the trigger, it would not have made a difference anyway, since it was not the real Churchill, but a double. The real one was on his way to Teheran conference. Hence, this whole incident was covered up to preserve civilian morale, making this part of history a secret.

3.2. Meeting with Hitler

During a meeting with Admiral Canaris, Chief of Military Intelligence and Abwehr, Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer of the SS, Dr. Goebbels, Reich's Minister of Propaganda, and finally, the newly rescued Benito Mussolini, the Fuhrer shocks everyone in the room with his bold idea to kidnap Winston Churchill.⁶⁶

This meeting happened as mentioned the part about Gran Sasso. Mussolini arrived to Hitler's Headquarters in Rastenburg in East Prussia two days after his rescue, which would place this meeting on September 15, 1943.⁶⁷ Hitler commemorated the raid leader Otto Skorzeny and his men for achieving the seemingly impossible and rescuing Duce from Gran Sasso and safely getting him into Germany. In the book, Himmler used this opportunity to boast about SS superiority to Canaris as Skorzeny was an officer of the SS. Hitler agreed with him. And as Hitler boasted about his idea to appoint Otto Skorzeny as the head of the unit to

⁶⁶ Ibid, 22.

⁶⁷ „Operation Eiche“, World War II Database, accessed January 9, 2019, https://ww2db.com/battle_spec.php?battle_id=248.

rescue Duce, he also belittled the efforts of Admiral Canaris and his Brandenburgers. In his words they had done “nothing worth a moments’ discussion.”⁶⁸

From a historical point of view, this is fairly plausible, with some minor inaccuracies that will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, it was Hitler’s decision to choose Skorzeny as the leader out of the presented candidates, Himmler not only had nothing to do with it and even belittled him for his lack of will and made his disappointment with his selection quite clear as Skorzeny himself noted in his memoirs. But as the memoirs were published in the same year as this book, in 1975, it is logical to assume that the author did not have access to this information while crafting the story and this seemed like a logical assumption based on the knowledge that he had. But on the other hand, even if the author knew, the scene might remain the same because Himmler would not mention his lack of faith in front of Canaris or Hitler as his reputation would suffer greatly.

Secondly, Canaris and Himmler illustrate the rivalry between the Wehrmacht, the official German Armed Forces, and the SS, a paramilitary branch of the Nazi Party that slowly evolved into a parallel army. Although, this rivalry primarily happened in the upper echelons of the command structure and to some extent was even encouraged by Adolf Hitler, as Albert Speer said in his book, *Inside The Third Reich*: “He [Hitler] also did not like establishing clear lines of jurisdiction. Sometimes he deliberately assigned bureaus or individuals the same or similar tasks. ‘That way’ he used to say, ‘the stronger one does the job.’”⁶⁹ Rivalry between the branches of the armed forces is a common phenomenon. Japanese Empire suffered from similar duality between their navy and air force on the onset and during the Second World War. However, this rivalry limited itself to the High Command, where the generals and admirals of Japan continued to steal valuable resources off of each other for their perspective branches, on the front however, they managed to cooperate without major problems, at least during the Guadalcanal operations. United States suffered from inter-service rivalries as well, although in different ranks compared to their Pacific adversary. Also during the Guadalcanal campaign, Admiral Chester Nimitz and General Douglas MacArthur refused to help one another with their forces forcing the US president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to step in and order them to do so with an Executive Order.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid, 24.

⁶⁹ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 210.

⁷⁰ Masanori Ito, *The End of the Imperial Japanese Navy*, trans. Andrew Y. Kuroda and Roger Pineau (New York City: Jove Books, 1984), 88-92.

Thirdly, as previously mentioned, Hitler's comments regarding the Brandenburgers are entirely unfounded. They were incredibly helpful during the invasions of the early war years, excelling at blending in and subterfuge, wearing enemy uniforms and speaking their language. As a matter of fact, Kurt Steiner's actions resemble those of the Brandenburgers. On the other hand it is possible that this is a portrayal of Adolf Hitler in his late war fits of rage. And the misinterpretation of their status is a deliberate choice by the author, this is even more plausible option given the fact that prior to writing this book, the author had to do extensive research and must have been familiar with the unit and their accomplishments.

To summarize, this meeting, as is depicted in the book, is plausible. If the plan of kidnapping Winston Churchill was indeed discussed, this is a very convincing dramatization alluding to many factors of war-time Germany.

3.3. The Team

The team recruited by Radl to go into Britain is comprised out of people of various backgrounds. In the following chapter, the thesis will examine the most interesting members and discuss the plausibility.

3.3.1. Kurt Steiner

Lieutenant-Colonel Kurt Steiner is the leader of the German commando who is described as a tough, charismatic soldier and a decisive commander of his men, who are completely loyal to him and throughout the book, his men often rely on him for leadership and advice, since he always has a plan. He is a son of a German father and an American mother and even jokes about it by saying that if his parents' nationalities were reversed, he might have been fighting on the other side.

He seems like a perfect soldier and a candidate to lead that mission, almost too perfect and not real, but that is not entirely true as either directly or indirectly the commander might be based on an existing German paratrooper. Kurt Steiner's character could be inspired by Hermann Bernhard Ramcke. The parallels between Ramcke and Steiner are significant. Ramcke was a commander of German paratroopers and took part in the airborne invasion of Crete, same as Steiner. Then Ramcke was assigned to Afrika Korps under Rommel, which Steiner did not. However, after Africa, Ramcke was sent to the Eastern Front, where Steiner and his men were also deployed.

While in Africa, Ramcke and his men were stranded behind enemy lines following the Field Marshall Montgomery's counterattack at El Alamein in October 1942. They marched

through the desert exhausted and without supplies. Then during one night they ambushed a column of trucks that stopped near their position, they overpowered the crews without firing a single shot. And when they drove away, the British tanks gave them covering fire because the tank crews thought the trucks are under attack by the Germans. Not only that, on their way back they encountered another column of trucks, also British. The British crews were shocked when suddenly German paratroopers disembarked the trucks and captured them. The other trucks were transporting German and Italian prisoners of war. Ramcke's men rescued them, then gave the British crews some water and sent them away while they crossed the frontline and joined Field Marshall Rommel's army.⁷¹

This incident has some elements similar with the story of the book, specifically, German paratroopers using the equipment of the enemy to move around the enemy territory in order to accomplish their objective.

Ramcke then defended the port of Brest in France against Allied attacks after the Normandy landings until his men surrendered to the American forces. During the siege of Brest, Ramcke decided to evacuate the civilians from the city, so he made an arrangement with the American General Troy H. Middleton. Civilians were evacuated, except for those who claimed to refuse to leave out of sentimentality, but instead, they were resistance fighters who sabotaged German troops. Even as their situation became hopeless, the paratroopers defended the port as best as they could, suffering losses due to enemy numerical superiority. General Middleton asked Ramcke to surrender, but he responded with: "I refuse!". Eventually, Americans broke their defences causing the whole situation to turn hopeless for the Germans forcing Ramcke and his remaining men to surrender.⁷²

This is quite similar to how a final conflict between Kurt Steiner and US Ranger Captain Harry Kane goes down. After Steiner's cover is blown, due to his man sacrificing his life saving two children from the mill, a villager escapes and warns the local Ranger Unit of the German presence. After a bloody battle in the village, Steiner and his men retreat to the church, where they hold the village population as hostage, similarly to Ramcke, seeing the inevitable conflict between the opposing sides, Steiner lets all the villagers go as they might be caught in the crossfire and he is not interested in getting civilians killed. A fact which surprises Harry Kane as evidenced by the following exchange:

⁷¹ Gunther Frashka: *Knights of the Reich*, trans. David Johnston, (Atlgem: Schiffer Publishing, 1994) 160–162.

⁷² Frashka, *Knights* 162–164.

‘Take him [a wounded Father Vereker] by all means,’ Steiner said. ‘Take all of them.’ Garvey glanced at Kane, then picked Vereker up and carried him to the jeep.

Kane said, ‘You’ll let the villagers go?’

‘The obvious thing to do since a further outbreak of hostilities seems imminent.’ Steiner looked faintly amused. ‘Why, did you think we’d hold the entire village hostage or come out fighting, driving the women in front of us? The brutal Hun? Sorry I can’t oblige.’ He turned.⁷³

Furthermore, all German soldiers are depicted as normal and kind human beings, who just happen to be enemy combatants. They are not evil for evil’s sake, like many other pieces of film or popular media depict them. The only exception is Harvey Preston, who fits this description perfectly as he is a fanatical SS man. Unlike the real life counterpart, German paratroopers in the book do not surrender and are eventually killed except for Steiner, Neumann and their Irish associate Devlin, who manage to escape from the church.

Another example is Sergeant Sturm, who without hesitation jumps into the stream to rescue two children that have fallen in, and is killed in the process. Steiner later reveals that Sturm’s family was killed in an RAF bombing. All in all, Steiner is a proud soldier and is irritated by the myths about the German army and SS in Britain as he says:

‘...Do you imagine all German soldiers serve in Himmler’s private army?’

Father Vereker responds. ‘No, perhaps it is just that they behave as if they do.’

‘Like Sergeant Sturm, I suppose.’⁷⁴

Steiner is referring to Sturm’s heroic deed as mentioned above, the conversation then strays from the topic but afterwards Steiner and Vereker talk about Westminster and what has the Luftwaffe done to it, Steiner counters with a mention of Allied bombing of Berlin and other German cities:

⁷³ Higgins, *Eagle has Landed*, 431.

⁷⁴ Higgins, *Eagle has Landed*, 377.

‘[Getting Mussolini out of Gran Sasso] is quite the feat of arms as Mr Churchill himself conceded in a speech at Westminster.’

‘Or what’s left of it after your damned bombs,’ Vereker said.

‘Berlin isn’t looking too good either these days,’ Steiner pointed out, ‘and if your friend Wilde is interested, tell him that the five-year-old daughter and wife of the man who died to save his son, were killed by RAF bombs four months ago.’⁷⁵

Father Vereker here represents a prejudiced and disgruntled man who had created his image of the Germans long time ago and is refusing to believe otherwise. On the other hand Steiner, not wanting to be bunched up with the actual murderers and animals, particularly in the SS, counters with arguments from his point of view.

To summarize, Kurt Steiner is a fictional character and while he was created for the purposes of the story, there are parts of him that are based on actual German soldiers, mainly Hermann Bernard Ramcke with whom he shares many similarities, from the branch of German armed forces they both served in to their professional and honourable conduct on the battlefield.

3.3.2. Harvey Preston

Harvey Preston is the one of the few fictional negative characters. As mentioned previously, the Germans are presented more favourably than the British, which is unusual for the World War Two setting as evidenced by other popular works of fiction either historical or ahistorical.

Harvey Preston is assigned to the team by the order of Heinrich Himmler himself, since Preston is an Englishman and he joined the British Free Corps, a British SS division. Of course, if Himmler had known an ordinary lieutenant or even bothered talking to someone of lower rank and foreign nationality is subject to discussion. Himmler was the architect of the foreign SS divisions that recruited members from most of the European and even non-European nations.⁷⁶

However, the name of the SS division is out of place as it was originally known as the *Legion of Saint George* but renamed *British Free Corps (Britisches Freikorps)* later in

⁷⁵ Higgins, *Eagle has Landed*, 379.

⁷⁶ Chris Bishop, *SS: Hitler’s Foreign Divisions: Foreign Volunteers in The Waffen-SS 1940-1945*, (London: Amber Books Ltd, 2005), 8–10.

January 1944.⁷⁷ This name change is mentioned in the book by Himmler, but about four months too soon.⁷⁸ In regards to historical background, it is not clear if Preston shares any similarities with a specific member of the Free Corps, as aside from members of the British Union of Fascists or other anti-communist believers, large portion of the unit was comprised of POWs or even criminals. It could be argued, that Preston is a general summary of all the members of the Corps.⁷⁹ But Harvey Preston shares the same fate as the Corps founder, John Amery, who was a son of Leo Amery, Secretary of State for India and a member of the Winston Churchill's war cabinet, which is quite ironic in it of itself.

John Amery was in Paris when it was captured in 1940 and tried to create this division as an instrument of war against communism, which is the reason why most of the volunteers joined the SS foreign divisions, but could not find but one volunteer. The word of this got to Himmler and he expressed a great interest in the concept and so the division was born and a new recruitment drive started. About 300 soldiers in total expressed interest, which was a very low number compared to other SS divisions like the Dutch or Belgian ones, who had from 40,000 to 50,000 volunteers each.⁸⁰ Because of the low numbers, the unit served as a propaganda tool and some members took part in the Battle of Berlin. After the war, Amery was caught in Milan and subsequently tried for treason and executed by hanging.

Harvey Preston dies by similar means. During the occupation of Studley Constable, he gets into a fight with Seymour, a less intelligent brute and a farm help in the village, and beats him with the butt of his rifle. Afterwards he is knocked out by Ritter von Neumann in the church for shooting a civilian and left behind as the others escape. Seymour, who was brought to the church with other civilians, but forgotten about when Steiner let them go, gets out of his bindings and uses a rope to hang him from the ceiling.

3.3.3. Joanna Grey

Joanna Grey could be considered a side character but it is her presence in the story, specifically her living in Britain and being an active German agent that presents the greatest problem with the story's plausibility.

The fact that she is an active agent, transmitting regularly to Germany by a radio station placed in her attic is a great historical error. As noted in *D-DAY Operation Overlord* by Tony Hall, by the year 1943, every German agent was caught or killed. Several agents

⁷⁷ Bishop, *SS: Foreign Divisions*, 184–185.

⁷⁸ Higgins, *Eagle has Landed*, 150.

⁷⁹ Bishop, *SS: Foreign Divisions*, 184–185.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 26–31.

were held captive by the British and forced to transmit false information, which was used to a great effect few months later to make Germans unaware of the D-Day landings true location.⁸¹

Therefore, if she has transmitted so often she would have been found out by the British counterintelligence and caught as German network of agents was virtually non-existent in the year 1943

3.4. Wartime Britain

The war measures in Britain were drastic during the Second World War as Britain was an island nation and its resources were threatened by the German U-boats, this led to ration system and the emergence of the black market as is hinted at several times throughout the book. This chapter will examine these parts and compare them to various sources as well as examining the role of the US soldiers in Britain prior to D-Day landings.

After Devlin arrives in Britain he is met with Joanna Grey who explains to him all the bureaucratic loops he has to go through to go unnoticed for the time being, mainly applying for a ration book, identity card and clothing coupons.

As was the case in the First World War, Britain had to implement ration system, which was supposed to insure that “every member of the public would be able to obtain a fair share of the national food supply at a reasonable price” as Sir William Beveridge, the Permanent Secretary to the Minister of Food at the time put it.⁸² Unlike the First World War, where supplies began to be a problem after 1916, rationing in Britain started much sooner the second time around. On National Registration Day, 29 September 1939, ration books were issued to the public, Juliet Gardiner wrote in her book *Wartime Britain 1939 – 1945* the following:

On that day [29 September, 1939] each householder had been obliged to fill in a form giving details of everyone living in the house and, when these were collected, an identity card was issued, and the information was used by food offices to fill in names and addresses on ration books and post the books out.⁸³

Registration was a pre-emptive measure for the government to be able to print out and distribute the proper document before the rationing started, which was on January 8, 1940

⁸¹ Tony Hall, *D-Day: Operation Overlord From the Landing at Normandy to the Liberation of Paris* (London: Salamander Books Ltd, 1993), 39.

⁸² Juliet Gardner, *Wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, 139.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 139.

with food being the first category to be rationed. To put things into perspective, Britain as an industrial nation was an importer of food, for example 70 per cent of cheese and sugar and around 50 per cent of meat.⁸⁴ Therefore, by the 1943, everyone in Britain had to have their papers in order if he wished to receive any rations, although the quantity of various items differed greatly during the war due to Lend Lease from the US and German U-boat campaign.⁸⁵ Subsequently, this caused a rise in unauthorised dealings with the coupons themselves or the rations and the rise of the black market. However, even sharing of food amongst friends was considered illegal, because the rations were official only transferable among the residents of a single household.⁸⁶

Mr Devlin then has several altercations in the local pub, which is often full of life as is evidenced by the fact, that beer was not rationed, along with cigarettes, not only were they a big source of tax revenues, but their rationing would hurt the civilian morale. Beer was manufactured throughout the war in watered-down version; nonetheless, its consumption rose by a quarter.⁸⁷

Unsurprisingly, the crime in Britain rose during the war, from 303,771 reported crimes in 1939 to 478,394 in 1945. People mainly committed more crimes, because, due to war measures, there were more laws to break. Be it from abundant and often overly complicated regulations to security forces simply discovering more crimes as the war situation gave them power to enter and search any premises and detain people without trial.⁸⁸ Some crimes were war specific, for example being unable to provide an identity card when required to⁸⁹, as is Mr Devlin warned by Joanna Grey, or rationing offences, which the Jewish brothers commit in the book.

After arriving in Britain, Mr Devlin is given a motorbike and three gallons of petrol per month. This is probably due to him being a warden of the marches who is expected to travel a lot around the countryside. According to Wartime Britain, fuel for private use was banned in 1942, however, people could still receive petrol on the grounds of 'necessary business allowance' or 'essential war work'⁹⁰, in Mr Devlin's case it is probably the former, rather than the latter, as being a warden hardly qualifies for essential war work, unlike Joanna

⁸⁴ Ibid, 139.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 148.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 158.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 147.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 505.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 505.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 507.

Grey, who owns an automobile which she uses frequently, due to her being a nurse, therefore needing to visit patients when requested.

Further in the book, when the Garvald brothers, the black market dealers, try to double cross Devlin, he shoots one of them through the knee. His brother takes him to a corrupt Indian doctor named Das. While initially refusing to treat Ben Garvald, he tells him he knows of his illegal operations and if not treated he will report him to the police. This is consistent with Juliet Gardiner's book, because dishonest medical practitioners could be bribed not only to perform various illegal operations as is the case here, but also to produce discharge papers or certificates for military exemption to avoid military service. And Doctors participating in these illegal activities faced prison time, such as Dr William St John Sutton who was jailed for nine months in January 1943 for filling out exemption certificates without even seeing the man in question.⁹¹

To conclude, the author's depiction of wartime Britain is very accurate as evidenced by Juliet Gardiner's book *Wartime Britain*. Aside from ration books and identity cards he utilizes corrupt doctors and black market dealers in his plot all of which were present and active during the period.

3.4.1. American Troops in Britain

To some people it might come as a surprise that the troops battling the German paratroopers are American, but during the time leading up to the D-Day landings, the number of American G.I.'s (government issued) soldiers kept increasing by the month.

While it was probably a choice of the author to use American troops as adversaries for the Germans because the British public might not view the paratroopers battling the Home Guard very favourably, it has a basis in history. One could argue that Britain was indeed invaded during the war, but not by the Germans, but by the Americans. On 26 January 1942, the so-called invasion began with the first American GI setting foot on the British soil, first out of a 1,500,000 troopers, which have gathered in Britain by May 1944 for the Operation Overlord, a codename for the Normandy landings.⁹²

Harry Kane, Steiner's rival in the book, ends up marrying Pamela Vereker and moving back to the US after the war. This is nothing unusual as about 70,000 British women married US soldiers. While it was not looked upon positively by the US officers, who would have rather avoided the extra bureaucracy or the families of the British girls, who did not had the

⁹¹ Ibid, 508.

⁹² Juliet Gardiner, *Over Here: The GI's in Wartime Britain* (London: Collins & Brown Limited, 1992), 6.

best impression of the Americans in mind, they could hardly prevent the entire US army from finding and marrying British girls as it was not expressively forbidden.⁹³

3.5. Various other inaccuracies

This chapter concerns other, comparatively minor inaccuracies that have been found in the book that should be noted and considered in the overall conclusion.

In the beginning of the novel, Kurt Steiner and his men are conducting naval raids in the English Channel as part of their punishment for defying orders during the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. Steiner and his second-in-command Ritter von Neumann attack a Liberty class ship named Joseph Johnston.⁹⁴ While there wasn't any ship named in this exact way, there was a ship, also Liberty class, named Joseph E. Johnston after a Confederate General of the same name. However, it was never sunk, it set sail in November 1942 and it was in use for 76 days, then decommissioned and sold to private ownership and finally scrapped in 1969.⁹⁵ This is understandable, as it is a fictional story about a fictional unit, therefore by that logic, they will also be attacking fictional ship, but the author probably chose to closely imitate a name of an existing American cargo ship to further ground the plot in history.

Furthermore, they attack Allied ships in a near suicidal "torpedo attacks", although not precisely named, based on the description, the "torpedo" that Steiner and his men pilot could be the Neger, German for Negro, torpedo carrying craft. However, while they were commissioned in 1943, their first recorded use was in March 1944.⁹⁶ Additionally, according to the book character Colonel Max Radl, these attacks are a part of an Operation Swordfish, but there are no records of any German operation by that name occurring during World War II.

However, an inaccuracy, which at first didn't make any sense, is that characters such as Max Radl or Kurt Steiner wear a Winter War Ribbon. As the name implies it is a ribbon awarded for service in the Winter War. But Germany did not participate in that conflict, neither did it send volunteers, since at that time they were still allied to the Soviet Union, which was the aggressor in that war and no ribbon by that exact name was ever issued by the German military. It could not have been awarded after Finland joined Germany in Operation Barbarossa because the renewed conflict between Finland and Soviet Union was called the Continuation War. Winter War medals were issued by Finland for their own troops and a

⁹³ Juliet Gardiner, *Over Here: The GI's in Wartime Britain*, 139–141

⁹⁴ Higgins, *The Eagle has Landed*, 62–67

⁹⁵ Shipbuilding History, Updated April 8, 2008, <http://shipbuildinghistory.com/merchantships/2libertyships1.htm>

⁹⁶ "Neger," Uboat Net, accessed May 11, 2019, <https://www.uboa.net/types/neger.htm>

special variant was made for volunteers, which the Germans were not. It is then quite puzzling as to how those characters got the ribbons. Further in the book, Radl reminisces about the “Winter War”:

Radl raised his glass. ‘To our comrades, Karl, the three hundred and ten of the regiment who died in the Winter War, I’m pot sure what for. If you find out, let me know.’ Hofer stared at him and Radl smiled.⁹⁷

This does not make sense as there wasn’t any German battalion in the Winter War. One possible explanation is that the Winter War refers to another conflict as the paragraph describing Steiner’s achievements on the page 60 of the book alludes to:

Greece came next – the Corinth Canal, and then a new kind of hell. May, 1941, a captain by then, in the big drop over Crete, severely wounded in savage fighting for Maleme airfield.

Afterwards, the Winter War. Radl was aware of a sudden chill in his bones at the very name. *God, will we ever forger Russia?* he asked himself, *those of us who were there then?*⁹⁸

This would imply that the so called Winter War came after the Invasion of Crete, which happened on May 1941 and took place in Russia. The only reasonable option would then be Operation Barbarossa from June 1941. Which is not referred to as Winter War, at least not officially. The widely recognized Winter War conflict is the Soviet attack on Finland in winter of 1939.

Further research into this subject revealed that the Winter War medal is most probably the German *Winterschlacht im Osten 1941/42* medal. According to *For Führer and Fatherland: Military Awards of the Third Reich* by John Angolia, it was indeed a medal given to German soldiers and other Axis allies who partake in the fighting on the Eastern Front during the winter of 1941/1942. It is more commonly referred to as the *Ostmedaille* (East/Eastern Medal) or Russian Front Medal.⁹⁹ The initial misunderstanding was probably caused due to a translation error. The name ‘*Winterschalcht*’ was translated in the book as a

⁹⁷ Higgins, *The Eagle has Landed*, 308.

⁹⁸ Higgins, *The Eagle has Landed*, 60.

⁹⁹ John Angolia, *For Führer and Fatherland: Military Awards of the Third Reich* (San Jose: R. James Bender Publishing, 1987). 69–71.

Winter War, which of course points to a different conflict, however, the Collins Dictionary translates the word ‘*schlacht*’ differently and in context a bit more accurately as ‘battle’.¹⁰⁰ This fits better as the medal was given not for fighting on the Eastern Front as a whole, but during the Soviet winter counteroffensive of 1941/1942, that pushed the Germans away from Moscow, which could be classified as large battle or a series of skirmishes taking place on the Eastern Front. Therefore, the Winter War medal is not a historical inaccuracy, rather, just a mistakenly translated German name.

Another slight or major inaccuracy, depending on the point of view, is the character of Master Sergeant Garvey. He is described as a: “large rugged Negro with a master sergeant’s stripes on his arm”. The key part being the Negro, since during the Second World War and some years after, the US Army was segregated by race. Whites and blacks did not fight in the same units. Segregation was an official army policy and while there was significant progress made throughout the war, such as Army Air Force starting to train black pilots in 1941¹⁰¹, the officer schools also accepted black candidates; however, after the training they returned to segregated units, the United States Army remained segregated throughout the war.¹⁰² The notable exception to this rule occurred during the Battle of the Bulge, where black soldiers were assigned as replacements to battered white units and their fighting spirit was even commended by their white comrades.¹⁰³ The segregation of US Armed Forces officially ended in 1948 with some elements of it continuing into the Korean War, specifically the year 1951.¹⁰⁴ To conclude, it is out of place for a black soldier to be in otherwise white Ranger Company in the year 1943.

¹⁰⁰ “English translation of *schlacht*,” Collins Dictionary, accessed May 10 2019, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/german-english/schlacht>.

¹⁰¹ Phillip McGuire, "Desegregation of the Armed Forces: Black Leadership, Protest and World War II," *The Journal of Negro History* 68, no. 2 (1983): 147–58. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2717718>.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Alfred H. Hausrath, "Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army," *Journal of the Operations Research Society of America* 2, no. 1 (1954): 18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/166535>.

¹⁰⁴ Hausrath, "Utilization," 19 .

4. Conclusion

This thesis focused on the literary depiction of Second World War in *The Eagle has Landed* by Jack Higgins. It explored various events and characters depicted in the book and how they fit in this time period. The main aim of this thesis was to judge the possibility of the book's overall plot.

World War Two historical fiction came a long way since the war, while initially the Germans were depicted as the enemy, cold and ruthless killers, as time went on their depictions became more sympathetic, so after thirty years since the war a story about a German commando going to Britain to kidnap Churchill could be published and critically acclaimed. Jack Higgins took a story of a movie '*Went the day well?*' that was made during the war, adapted it and expanded its characters and depth to make it more presentable to the general public. In his story the German soldiers are not monsters, but human beings often more virtuous than the British villagers. This is evidenced by Sergeant Sturm, who, despite losing his family to British bombing raid, without hesitation jumps into a stream to save two British children from drowning, effectively sacrificing his own life. It is perhaps a dose of irony that this act of good will dooms the entire mission and leads to the deaths of most of the unit. As they say 'No good deed ever goes unpunished'. Another example is of course, Kurt Steiner, leader of the German commandos, who points out the prejudiced judgements of the German troops by the British villagers, stating on several occasions, that it is incorrect and they hold on to that idea even if confronted with evidence proving them otherwise, because maybe it is easier to hold to that misconception than to except that your enemy is also human. His men are soldiers first and foremost; they fight because of their duty, not hate. This does not apply to Harvey Preston as he is exactly the kind of man the villagers think all Germans are. But he is not German; he is a British POW turned traitor and a fanatical SS man.

Jack Higgins utilizes a lot of historical events to set up his story, namely Otto Skorzeny's raid on Gran Sasso, where he rescued Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator. The story of the book uses the same formula of German commandos going to a hostile land, as Italy switched sides later in the war, extracting a highly important person to bring with them back to Germany. As was shown in other examples in this thesis, many actions of various degrees of importance and impact took place during the war, namely the British raid on Rommel's Headquarters in Africa and various actions of the German Brandenburgers. While Jack Higgins got many things right, he also missed few important details. To the author's credit he manages to capture the atmosphere of wartime Britain with great accuracy,

mentioning several wartime measures, ration books, black markets and corrupt officials but he makes several anachronistic errors, namely the incorrect designation of the British Free Corps, when the story takes place it was still named the Legion of Saint George, the torpedoes, which were in use much later in the war and desegregated US Army units, which did not exist back then with the exception of the Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944/1945. Furthermore, the existence of someone like Joanna Grey, who could still freely communicate with Berlin and not get caught, is highly unlikely, perhaps completely impossible.

Does that mean that the story proposed by the author is impossible? Yes and no. No, because a similar thing could have happened and if it did, perhaps it would have been Otto Skorzeny who would pull it off because Gran Sasso is only one of his successful missions. On the other hand, yes, it is impossible the way the author describes it. If the story was revised and some details and plot elements changed, one could create a believable secret history thriller, that would have next to none anachronisms and other errors.

To conclude, the book was a part of the trend which saw German soldiers being depicted as humans again and while the author does a great job at remaking a plot from a wartime movie, he makes several historic errors which prevent this specific story from being historically plausible.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá přesností vyobrazení druhé světové války v díle *Orel Přistál* od Jacka Higginse.

První část rozebírala teorii příslušných žánrů populární fikce a jiné informace potřebné pro zbytek této práce. Zejména, kdo to byl Jack Higgins, co to je alternativní a tajná historie a historický kontext. Jack Higgins je britský autor historické fikce, který za svůj život zatím napsal kolem šedesáti knih, jeho nejznámější a nejvíce čtený román je *Orel Přistál*, který prodal více než 50 milionů kusů. Během svého života vystřídal mnoho profesí a odsloužil si i pár let v armádě, kde ho jeho nadřízený nabádal, ať se dá na kariéru spisovatele. Historická fikce je velice široký termín, pro účel této práce bylo potřeba definovat její podkategorie alternativní historii a tajnou historii. Alternativní historie se zaměřuje na děj ve světě, kde se historie jednou či více událostmi liší od té naší. Buďto se díla zaměřují na tyto změny přímo a zkoumají, jaké by měli následky, nebo je používají jako pozadí pro svůj vlastní příběh. Tajná historie se nachází na pomezí mezi historickou fikcí a alternativní historií. Příběhy tajné historie popisují události, které by vedly ke změně historie, tak jak jí známe, kdyby jim v tom nebylo zabráněno. Jelikož jde často o nový nelichotivý úhel pohledu na již dobře známou událost, děj těchto děl je tak skryt před veřejností vládou. Autoři tajné historie často tvrdí, že příběh nenapsali, ale pouze odkryli z různých dochovaných a odtajněných materiálů, toto celé je však součástí celkového příběhu a čtenáři to neberou vážně.

Druhá část práce pak ustanovila historický kontext zasazení díla a určila důležité události druhé světové války, které na děj mají zásadní vliv, jmenovitě nájezd na Gran Sasso a osvobození Benita Mussoliniho speciálním komandem vedeným Otto Skorzenym. Druhá světová válka je dosud největší a nejničivější válka, kterou tato planeta zažila a bez pochyby má i největší vliv na vývoj moderních dějin. Válka byla rozpoutána v roce 1939 Německým útokem na Polsko, po rychlém vítězství Wehrmacht o rok později napadl Dánsko a Norsko, než v květnu 1940 vtrhl do Francie, po pádu Francie následovala letecká bitva o Británii, která pokračovala vzájemným britským a německým bombardováním. V roce 1941 napadlo Německo Sovětský Svaz a byla otevřena nová východní fronta, kde se bojovalo necelé čtyři roky. Mezitím se Němci museli starat o své neúspěšné italské spojence v Africe, vyslali jim na pomoc Afrikakorps, který byl nakonec obklíčen a zničen. Posléze se Spojenci vylodili na Sicílii a Itálii, kde byl následně Mussolini sesazen a uvězněn. Z jeho zajetí ho vysvobodili SS komanda pod velením Otta Skorzenyho. Nejen Hitler, ale i celý svět, byli uchvázeni tímto vojenským výkonem. V kontextu speciálních operací však nešlo o ojedinělý úkon, neboli jak

Němci, tak Spojenci do té doby podnikly několik úspěšných i neúspěšných operací. Například se Spojenci pokusili zabít Erwina Rommela v Africe, neúspěšně. Dále práce zmiňovala činnost Brandenburgerů, německých speciálních jednotek, a jejich operace v prvních letech druhé světové války.

Třetí část práce se zabývala vybranými událostmi z děje knihy a zkoumala, zda by se mohly historicky stát. Autorovi je nutno pochválit jeho práci s historickými postavami, neboli úvodní schůze s Hitlerem, Himmlerem, Canarisem a Mussolinim je sice neověřitelná, ale z historických záznamů a chování zúčastněných postav je velice pravděpodobná a poukazuje na několik historických skutečností, například rivalitu mezi Himmlerem a Canarisem. Dále byly detailně rozebrány a analyzovány některé fiktivní postavy vystupující v knize, hlavně Kurt Steiner, velitel německých komand. Bylo zjištěno, že se buď úmyslně, či neúmyslně, podobá skutečnému vojákovi a veliteli parašutistických vojsk Hermannu Ramckemu. Podobné byly nejen situace a bitvy, kde oba vojáci bojovali, ale i jejich přístup k boji a respekt a profesionalita ke svému protivníkovi. Dále byla prověřena postava Harveyho Prestona, britského člena SS, a Joanny Greyové, německé špiónky v Anglii. Ačkoli byl Harvey Preston historicky možnou postavou, Joanna Greyová nikoli, neboť byla německá špiónážní síť v Británii zničena v roce 1943 a tím pádem není možné, aby mohla s naprostým klidem vysílat zprávy do Berlína. Harvey Preston se zdá být celkovým souhrnem všech členů Britské SS divize, neboť byla složena především ze sympatizantů, zločinců a válečných vězňů, kteří se chtěli dostat pryč ze zajateckých táborů všemi možnými prostředky, včetně vlastizrady. On jako postava má všechny tyto záporné vlastnosti. Dále bylo prozkoumáno téma válečné Británie, které je v knize zachyceno velice věrně a bez větších historických chyb. Krátká podkapitola se věnuje americkým vojskům ve Velké Británii, zde je na postavě Harryho Kanea ukázáno několik aspektů soužití vojáků s britskou veřejností. Poslední kapitola vyjmenovává několik menších historických chyb či anachronismů. Jmenovitě trestanecký prapor, kde němečtí parašutisti slouží, neexistuje. Vzhledem k tomu, že autor staví na historických událostech, mohl založit tento příběhový bod na nějaké z nich. Torpédo, na kterém parašutisti přepadávají britské lodě v kanále La Manche se v té době ještě nepoužívalo. Ačkoli není přímo jmenováno, na základě popisu v knize bylo určeno jako říditelné torpédo Neger, které ačkoli bylo postaveno v roce 1943, jeho první bojové nasazení bylo až následující rok. Dále němečtí parašutisté, ale i ostatní vojáci nosí vyznamenání ze „Zimní války“, zprvu se zdálo, že se jedná o nesmyslnou chybu, po důkladnějším výzkumu vyšlo najevo, že jde pouze o překladatelskou chybu. Medaile ze „Zimní války“ má být ve skutečnosti ze zimních bojů východní fronty na přelomu let 1941 a 1942. Poslední historická

chyba zkoumaná v této práci je rasová segregace amerických jednotek. Segregace na bílé a barevné oddíly trvala až do roku 1951, přesto je součástí bílé jednotky Rangers černý seržant. Toto se nedělo, jediná situace, kde toto míchání vojáků nastalo, byla bitva v Ardenách, kde kvůli nedostatku mužů během německé ofenzívy, byly narychlo slučovány všechny možné jednotky, tudíž i bílé a černé prapory.

Ve finále tato práce dospěla k názoru, že myšlenka shození komanda do Británie, aby unesla důležitou postavu, je pravděpodobná. Na základě jiných operací, které byly provedeny speciálními jednotkami, by nešlo o žádný nesmyslný koncept. Avšak způsob, jakým je tato akce vyobrazena autorem v jeho knize je historicky nemožná právě kvůli výše zmíněným důvodům. Hlavní problém představuje Joanna Grey a její komunikace s Berlínem. Špatně pojmenovaná jednotka britských SS či nesprávná medaile by se ještě dala přehlédnout jako nedůležitý nedostatek, ale aktivita Joanny je klíčová pro start celého příběhu a právě u ní se celý děj z historického hlediska rozpadá.

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