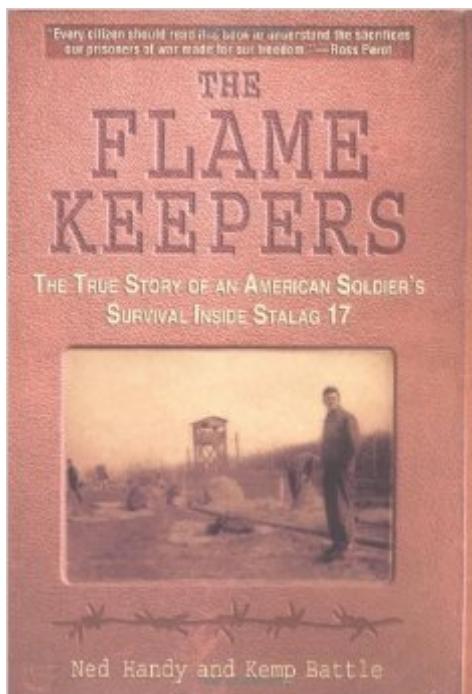


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# The Flame Keepers: The True Story Of An American Soldier's Survival Inside Stalag 17



## Synopsis

Ned Handy was captured by Germans in April 1944, after his B-24 was shot down. Sent to Stalag 17, the infamous Nazi prison camp, Handy soon led an escape team determined to tunnel to freedom. Along with the unforgettable comrades he vividly describes, Handy worked relentlessly for months on a tunnel that was to prove instrumental in saving the lives of four fugitives sought by the Gestapo. One of those fugitives would become the only American ever to escape permanently from Stalag 17. *The Flame Keepers* is a vivid first-hand account of an American soldier's experience as a prisoner of war in Nazi Germany and a poignant portrait of the POWs who worked to survive within the wire and their German captors. Illustrated with original photographs taken inside the camp from a smuggled camera and published for the first time in the trade press, *The Flame Keepers* recounts one of World War II's great untold stories.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

My Dad was a POW in Stalag 17 during the same period of time as Handy. Dad had a hard time of it and it really was difficult for him to talk much about it. I now know that it would have been much better for him, and us, if he had been able to talk about it. He died in 2004. Many of the things he did tell me in bits and pieces over the years about his experiences Handy described also. The Kriegie who killed himself by deliberately crossing over 'the wire', the tunneling efforts, the dirt in the rafters, the sawdust bread, the interrogations, solitary, the bunks, the cold, the hunger, the frightened guards, the end in the forest. Lot and lots of pieces of the puzzle. Dad was a most devout Catholic and, as it turned out, the only prisoner in camp who had been trained to be an Altar Boy. He gave

lessons in Latin to train many other prisoners who were 'getting religion' in those desperate times. Dad described the Christams Mass in great detail, and it was striking to read Handy's account of that sermon. It was eerie to read Handy's account of it all and how identical it was to Dad's. It was a very uplifting sermon that Dad and Handy never forgot. My Mother told me about this book and I ordered it immediately from and couldn't put it down until I had read all the way through. It was as if Dad was sitting in the room and describing the whole horror, step by step, and in chronological sequence for the first time which enabled me to put it all together for the first time. Now I have an even deeper understanding and appreciation for what Dad had endured, and how tragic his ongoing suffering had been, what it meant for his life, how much he had sacrificed, not only for those 16 months as a POW - but throughout the remainder of his life.

It is not hyperbole to say that *The Flame Keepers* is an excellent, well-paced book that will captivate readers of all ages and backgrounds - from teens to seasoned citizens. Not only about World War II, or even strictly a "war story," the book covers the effects on human behavior of war, imprisonment and defiance of one's enemies -- all well beyond the armored battles that raged. Author and protagonist Ned Handy tells the unvarnished story through his eyes of a network of men and comrades-at-arms whose sudden imprisonment brought out their individual and collective ingenuity, bravery, stamina and perseverance in ways they could not have imagined. These qualities possessed by so many "ordinary" sergeants came to the fore when they faced the stark choice of surviving or giving up behind a wire, while watched by armed guards, deep in enemy territory, and in spite of brutal weather and a starvation diet. The incredible story of a brash and brilliantly conceived escape attempt from Stalag Luft XVII-B plays a major part in the narrative, and it is spell-binding. Mr. Handy employs simple but eloquent language that takes the reader on a hard-to-put-down journey through five seasons in the life of a 21-year-old B-24 flight engineer and top turret gunner, who survives a shoot-down only to be imprisoned in infamous Stalag XVII-B. Events inside Stalag 17 are interwoven with interesting vignettes that bring to life Mr. Handy's memories of home, family and early life, which inform his ability to survive the prison ordeal. He ascribes well-deserved credit to his colleagues, from his crewmates to POWs with whom he lived in extremely close quarters for more than a year.

I finished reading this book around the anniversary of my father's death. Sixty years earlier, he had flown with the American forces based in England and the parallels to the the men of Stalag XVII moved me considerably. My emotions surged. Take "The great escape", "Stalag 17", and mix in

"Band of Brothers" and you will have a good sense of the story. In April 1944, a young, optimistic flier loses his plane and two comrades in one of the "last, big" Nazi efforts to thwart American daylight bombing. The crippled plane struggles to make it back to safe territory, but fails. Local people and soldiers round up the dispersed crew for a harrowing journey by rail to a camp for American fliers -- Stalag XVII -- in Austria. Kindness and cruelty quickly become evident and random. The camp has a history, and the older 'kriegies' resent the newly arrived, only recently shot down fliers. Some of the 'old' men have been there a year or more already. In a stroke of luck, Handy finds a link that leads him to the leadership of a tunnel detail. While the escape attempt loses steam, the tunnel plays a critical role in saving the life of a famed escape artist and saboteur who owes his life to Handy. This leads to a second escape attempt, only with audacity and a twist. Read the book to see who gets out, who dies, and who hangs on to April 1945 when the Nazis march the remaining prisoners west, towards Patton and the Americans. The beauty of the book can be found in Handy's stories of the men, their lives, their dreams, and their consistent efforts to stay alive and to stay focused on home, if not escape.

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