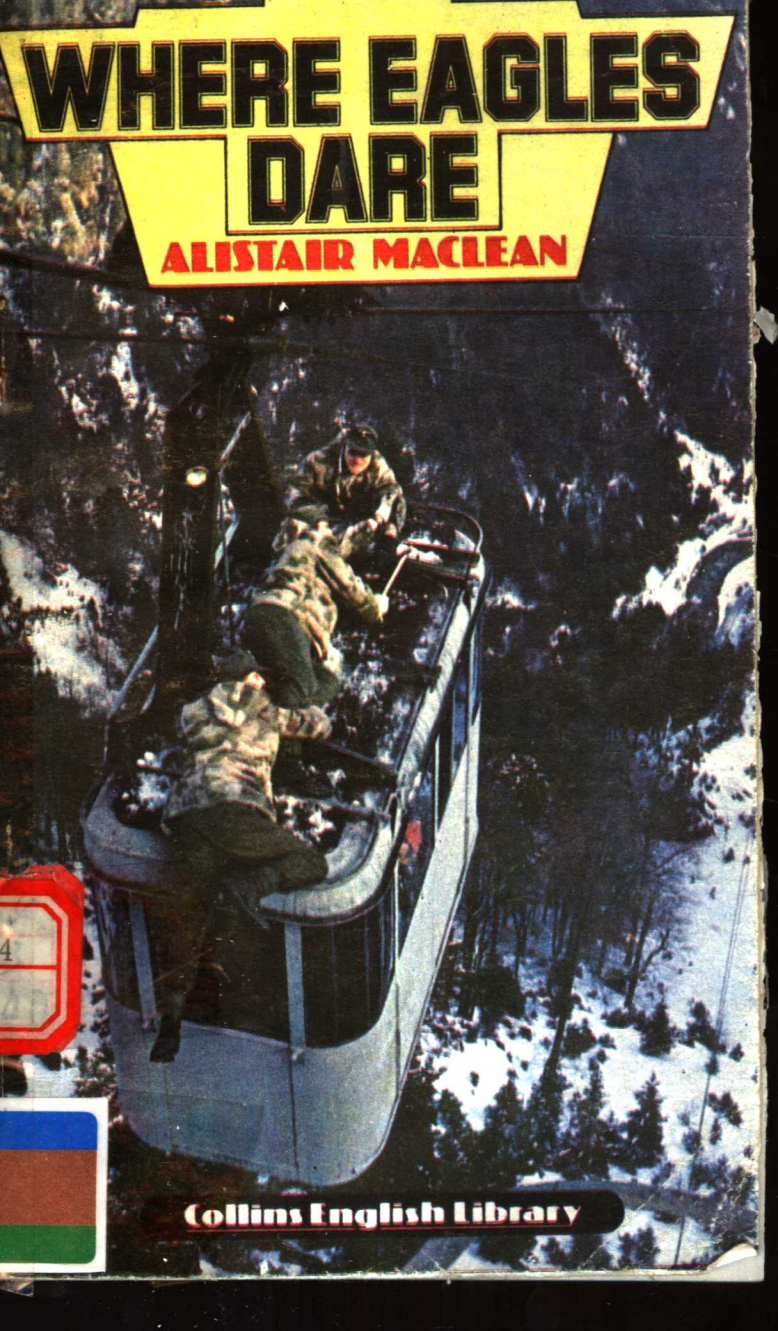


WHERE EAGLES DARE

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



Collins English Library

Collins English Library

Series editors: K R Cripwell and Lewis Jones

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WHERE EAGLES DARE

ALISTAIR MACLEAN

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**The photograph which appears on the cover is from the
film version of 'Where Eagles Dare' 1969, starring
Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood.**

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Chapter One

The pilot raised his left hand and touched an overhead switch. Above the door in the middle of the plane a red light came on. The sergeant who waited there laid his hand on the door.

"One minute, gentlemen." He pulled the door wide open and a storm of icy wind and snow filled the plane. "When the red light turns green...."

He left the sentence unfinished. The seven men who were waiting to jump did not need his instructions. No one else said anything; it was nearly impossible to shout over the combined roar of wind and engines. In any case, the men's thoughts showed clearly in their expressions: If it was like that inside, what the hell was it like outside?

At a signal from the sergeant, they moved up in line to the open door. The first man, Harrod, took up his position. His face felt the full force of the snowstorm that hammered the plane.

The sergeant's encouraging hand fell on Harrod's shoulder. Harrod took half a step back inside the plane. He reached up and firmly removed the sergeant's hand.

"Don't push me, friend." He had to shout to make himself heard. "If I have to kill myself, let me do it in the old-fashioned way. By my own hand."

While his eyes remained fixed on the red light, Harrod's mind flew back several hours in time and several hundred kilometres in space. He was hearing again the voices of Vice-Admiral Rolland, head of the British Secret Service, and his second-in-command, Colonel Wyatt-Turner.

The big, red-faced colonel tapped his stick against a wall-map of Germany. He was pointing to a spot just north of the Austrian border.

"Our man was brought down here at two a.m. this morning." He tapped the map again. "Now he is here. In the Schloss Adler. The castle of the eagle. Believe me, it's well-named. Only a bird with the power of an eagle could get in there. Our job...."

Smith said: "How are you so sure he's there, sir?"

"We're sure. His plane crash-landed only fifteen kilometres away. The pilot got off a radio message just before the Germans got them." He paused, smiled sourly, continued: "Schloss Adler, Major Smith, is the combined headquarters in South Germany of the German Secret Service and the Secret Police — the Gestapo. Where else would they take him?"

"Where indeed? How was he brought down, sir?"

"Through the worst sort of bad luck, damn it! But that's unimportant. What's important is getting him out before he talks. *You* will get him out. You are all experts at surviving behind enemy lines. You all speak German. If anyone has a chance, you have."

"There is, of course, another way, sir,"

Carraciola said quietly. "A way sure of a hundred per cent success. Send over a flight of our heaviest bombers. Do you think *anyone* in the Schloss Adler would ever talk again?"

"I don't think so." Admiral Rolland spoke gently and for the first time. He moved from the wall-map to join the group. Admiral Rolland always spoke gently. When you hold his position of power, you don't have to talk loudly to make yourself heard. He was a short, grey-haired man, with a deeply lined face and an expression of great confidence. "No," he repeated, "I don't think so. The prisoner, Lieutenant General Carnaby, is an American. If we destroy him, the Americans would probably send their Second Front against us instead of against the Germans." He smiled gently. "There are certain standards to keep between friends. Wouldn't you agree?"

Carraciola didn't agree or disagree. He had, it seemed, nothing to say. Neither did anyone else. Colonel Wyatt-Turner cleared his throat.

"That's it then, gentlemen. Ten o'clock tonight at the airfield. No more questions, I take it?"

"Yes, sir, there bloody well is, begging the Colonel's pardon, sir." Sergeant George Harrod not only sounded heated, he looked it too. "What's all this about? Why's this chap so bloody important? Why the hell do we have to risk our necks...."

"That'll do, Sergeant." Wyatt-Turner's voice was sharp, commanding. "You know all you require to know...."

"If we're sending a man to what may be his

death, Colonel, I think he has the right to know why." Admiral Rolland broke in gently, almost apologetically. "The rest know. He should too. It's painfully simple, Sergeant. General Carnaby is the chief planner for our next attack on the Germans — the Second Front. It would be completely true to say that he knows more about the preparations for the Second Front than any man alive."

Silence lay heavy in the room. Harrod rubbed his hand across his eyes, then shook his head slowly as if to clear it. When he spoke again all the anger had gone from his voice. His words came very slowly.

"And if the General talks...."

"He'll talk." Rolland said. The voice was soft but quite firm. "They all talk...."

"And he'll tell them all the plans for the Second Front. — When, where, how — Good God, sir, we'll have to stop the whole thing!"

"Exactly. We stop it. No Second Front this year. Another nine months of war, another million lives needlessly lost. You understand the urgency, Sergeant?"

"I understand, sir. Now I understand. Sorry I spoke like that, sir. I'm afraid — well, I'm a bit nervous, sir."

"We're all a bit nervous, Sergeant," said Wyatt-Turner. "Well, be at the airfield at ten o'clock and we'll check your supplies. He smiled without humour. "I'm afraid the uniforms may not fit too well. This is early closing day at the tailor's!"

"Well, he was right about the bloody uniform," said Harrod to himself as he again took up position by the plane's open door.

At that moment the red light turned to green. Harrod put his head down, screwed shut his eyes and dropped out into the snow and the darkness. But instead of jumping out he had stepped out. He was already spinning in mid-air as the parachute opened. Schaffer was the next man to go, smoothly, cleanly, with feet and knees together. Then it was Carraciola's turn, followed by Smith.

Smith looked down below him and his lips tightened. In the greyness beneath he could just see Harrod swinging wildly across the sky. The parachute strings were crossed and the left-hand strings were pulled too far down. Harrod was losing air from one side of his parachute and was swinging away to his left. Smith watched the rapidly disappearing figure and hoped to God that he didn't side-slip over the edge of the mountain. Looking upwards he saw that there was no need to worry about the other three men. Christiansen, Thomas and Torrance-Smythe were all coming down in a perfectly normal manner.

Even before the last man had jumped out of the doorway, the sergeant was running towards the back of the plane. Quickly he pulled aside a curtain and reached down for the figure hiding there. A girl, quite small, with wide dark eyes in a delicate face. She wore a snow-suit and on top of that a parachute. She was so cold and sore that she could hardly stand. But the sergeant had his

orders.

"Come on, Miss Ellison. Not a second to lose." His arm around her waist, he half-led, half-carried her to the doorway. Mary Ellison half-turned as if to speak to him, then turned away and dropped out into the darkness.

For a long moment the sergeant looked down into the darkness. Then he rubbed his chin, shook his head in disbelief and closed the heavy door. The plane flew on into the snow and the sound of its engines died away in the night.

Chapter Two

Smith reached his hands up into the parachute and made a perfect landing in about a metre of snow. The wind pulled fiercely at his parachute. He quickly pulled it in, rolled it up and pressed it deeply into the snow.

With awkward, frozen hands, he pulled a torch and a whistle from his jacket. Facing east and west in turn, he blew on the whistle and flashed his torch. The first to appear was Thomas, then Schaffer, then all the others except Sergeant Harrod.

"Pile your parachutes there and bury them deep," Smith ordered. "Anyone seen Sergeant Harrod?" A shaking of heads. "Nobody? No sight of him at all?"

"I have a rough idea where he landed, Major," Schaffer said. "We were almost on the ground



before I lost sight of him."

"Use your torches," Smith said sharply.
"Find him."

They spread out. Three minutes passed and then came a shout from the right. Smith broke into a run.

It was Carraciola who had called. He was standing on the edge of a bare, windblown rock. His torch was shining down to where the ground fell away suddenly to a depth of several metres. In the shelter of the rock a deep pile of snow had formed. Half-buried in its white depths, about two metres from the rock, Harrod lay on his back. His eyes were open and his arms thrown wide. He did not seem to notice the snow falling on his eyes.

They were all there now, looking down at the motionless man. Smith jumped down into the snow and lifted Harrod to a sitting position. Harrod's head fell back like a broken doll's. Smith laid him back into the snow, paused for a moment with bent head, then climbed wearily to his feet.

"Dead?" Carraciola asked.

"He's dead. His neck is broken," Smith's face was without expression. "He must have got caught up in his parachute and made a bad landing."

"It happens," Schaffer said. "I've known it happen." A long pause, then: "Shall I take the radio, sir?"

"Yes."

Schaffer dropped to his knees and tried to unfasten the pack on Harrod's shoulders.

Smith said: "Sorry, no, not that way. There's a key around his neck under his shirt."

Schaffer found the key, unlocked the pack and managed to get out the radio from under the dead man's shoulders. He rose to his feet, the radio hanging from his hand and looked at Smith. "On second thoughts, what's the point? Any fall hard enough to break his neck wouldn't have done this radio any good."

Wordlessly, Smith took the radio and set it on the rock. He turned the switch to "Call" and a red light came on. He moved the switch to "Receive" and listened for a moment to some music.

"It made a better landing than Sergeant Harrod," he said, handing the radio back to Schaffer.

"Do we bury him, Major?" Carraciola asked.

"No need." Smith shook his head and waved with his torch at the falling snow. "He'll be buried within the hour. Let's move. I want to get down as far as the tree-level."

"So close?" The surprise in Schaffer's voice showed that he didn't think much of the idea. "Shouldn't we get as far down this mountain as possible tonight, Major?"

"I agree with Schaffer," Carraciola said reasonably. "Let's get as far as we can tonight. What do you think, Christiansen?"

"It doesn't matter what Christiansen thinks." Smith's voice was quiet but as cold as the mountain air itself. "Nor you, Carraciola. This isn't a round-table discussion, it's a military operation. Whether you like it or not, Admiral

Rolland put me in charge. We camp among the nearest trees. Then hot food, hot coffee and a try for London on the radio."

The five men looked questioningly at one another, then began to walk. There was no longer any question about who was in charge.

"Damn!"

The other men seated in the poorly-lit tent looked at Smith in surprise.

"The radio," Smith explained. "There's only one list of call-signs and codes. And that one list is inside Sergeant Harrod's jacket."

"I'll get it for you if you like," Christiansen said.

"Thanks. But it's my fault and I'll get it."

He rose and put his head through the door to take a look at the weather. "It may take me an hour. But if the snow is much deeper up there...."

"It's a bad night," Schaffer said. "I'll come and give you a hand."

"Thanks. No need. But I'll tell you what you can do." He went out of the tent and reappeared shortly afterwards carrying the radio. "I don't want to go all the way up there for nothing. Some careless fool may fall over this and put his great boot through it. Guard it with your life, Lieutenant Schaffer."

"Yes, sir!" Schaffer said smartly.

It was hard physical work going back up the mountain. By the time Smith reached the top of the steep slope he was fighting for breath. He

had forgotten the effect of thin air at two and a half thousand metres.

He stopped for several minutes until his breathing returned to normal and then walked on, whistling. It was the German tune "Lorelei". A figure appeared out of the night and came running towards him, slipping about in the deep snow.

It was Mary Ellison. She stopped a metre away and put her hands on her hips.

"Well!" She was shaking uncontrollably with the cold. "You took your time about it, didn't you?"

"Never wasted a minute," Smith replied sounding hurt. "I had to have a hot meal and coffee first."

"You had to have — you monster, you selfish monster!" She took a quick step forward and threw her arms around his neck. "I hate you."

"I know." He pulled off a glove and gently touched her cheek. "You're frozen."

"You're frozen, he says! Of course I'm frozen. I almost *died* in that plane. Why didn't you bring me a hot water bottle — or — an electrically heated suit or — or — something? I thought you loved me!"

"I can't help what you think," Smith said kindly. "Come on. Let's fetch your stuff."

They climbed upwards through the deep snow, Mary holding his arm tightly. She said curiously: "What excuse did you give for coming back up here? Lost your comb?"

"There was something I had to come for, something apart from you. I pretended I had

forgotten the radio code-book inside Sergeant Harrod's jacket."

"He — he lost it? He dropped it? How — how could he have been so criminally careless?" She stopped, puzzled. "But it's chained...."

"It's still inside Sergeant Harrod's jacket, Smith said darkly. "He's up here dead."

"Dead?" She stopped and held tightly onto his arm. After a long pause, she repeated: "He's dead! That — that nice man. A bad landing?"

"So it seems."

They found Mary's pack in silence. Smith took her arm and they moved on. The snow was heavier now and even with their torches they could see no further than two metres. But Smith recognized the large rock which the wind had kept free of snow. Two minutes later he uncovered Harrod's body. He undid the dead man's jacket and found the code-book. Then he hung the chain round his neck and buttoned the book safely inside his own uniform.

Then came the unpleasant job of turning Harrod over on his side. The effort nearly defeated him. The dead man was as solid as a board — frozen in the position into which he had fallen. But eventually Smith had him over, the frozen right arm pointing up into the snow-filled sky. Smith knelt, brought his torch close and carefully examined the back of the dead man's head.

"What are you looking for?" Mary asked. Her voice was a whisper.

"His neck is broken. I want to find out just *how* it was broken." He looked up at the girl.