

The Colditz Cock

Titre(s): The Colditz Cock

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Résumé ou extrait: In one of the most ambitious escape attempts from Colditz, the idea of building a glider was dreamt up by two pilots, Jack Best and Bill Goldfinch, who had been sent to Colditz after escaping from another POW camp. They were encouraged by two army officers, Tony Rolt and David Walker, who had recently arrived in the camp. It would be Tony Rolt who would recommend the chapel roof, since he noticed it was obscured from the view of the Germans. The plan was to construct a two-man glider part by part. The glider was assembled by Bill Goldfinch and Jack Best in the lower attic above the chapel, and was to be launched from the roof in order to fly across the river Mulde, which was about 200 feet (60 m) below. The runway was to be constructed from tables and the glider was to be launched using a pulley system based on a falling metal bathtub full of concrete, using a gravity assisted acceleration to 30 mph (50 km/h). The officers who took part in the project built a false wall, to hide the secret space in the attic where they slowly built the glider out of stolen pieces of wood. Since the Germans were accustomed to looking down for tunnels, not up for secret workshops, they felt rather safe from detection. However they still placed lookouts, and created an electric alarm system, to warn the builders of approaching guards. Hundreds of ribs had to be constructed, predominantly formed from bed slats, but also from every other piece of wood the POW's could surreptitiously obtain. The wing spars were constructed from floor boards. Control wires were made from electrical wiring in unused portions of the castle. A glider expert, Lorne Welch, was asked to review the stress diagrams and calculations made by Goldfinch. The glider constructed was a lightweight, two-seater, high wing, monoplane design. It had a Mooney style rudder and square elevators. The wingspan, tip to tip, was 32 ft (9.75 m), and it was 19 ft 9 in (6 m) from nose to tail. Prison sleeping bags of blue and white checked cotton were used to skin the glider, and German ration millet was boiled and used to seal the cloth pores. The materials they had to work with caused it to weigh a mere 240 lb (109 kg). However the war ended before the glider was finished. A replica of the Colditz glider was built for the NOVA television series, and flew successfully on its first attempt in 1999 with Best and Goldfinch in tearful attendance. Another replica was created for the Channel 4 documentary on Colditz, which is currently housed at the Imperial War Museum in London

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