



The Forgotten 500: The Untold Story of the Men Who Risked All for the Greatest Rescue Mission of World War II

By Gregory A. Freeman

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The astonishing, never before told story of the greatest rescue mission of World War II—when the OSS set out to recover more than 500 airmen trapped behind enemy lines in Yugoslavia...

During a bombing campaign over Romanian oil fields, hundreds of American airmen were shot down in Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia. Local Serbian farmers and peasants risked their own lives to give refuge to the soldiers while they waited for rescue, and in 1944, Operation Halyard was born. The risks were incredible. The starving Americans in Yugoslavia had to construct a landing strip large enough for C-47 cargo planes—without tools, without alerting the Germans, and without endangering the villagers. And the cargo planes had to make it through enemy airspace and back—without getting shot down themselves.

Classified for over half a century for political reasons, the full account of this unforgettable story of loyalty, self-sacrifice, and bravery is now being told for the first time ever. *The Forgotten 500* is the gripping, behind-the-scenes look at the greatest escape of World War II.

“Amazing [and] riveting.”—James Bradley, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Flags of Our Fathers*

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Editorial Review

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Bombing of the Ploiesti, Romania, oil refineries, a key German resource, started in 1942. Allied pilots sustaining damage frequently bailed out over Serbia in German-occupied Yugoslavia, where the resistance and others hid them. By 1944, more than 500 were stranded and slowly starving. The OSS concocted the daring Operation Halyard to airlift them, but they had to construct a landing strip without tools and without alerting the Germans or endangering local villagers, and then the rescuers had to avoid being shot down themselves. The operation's story is an exciting tale, but it was kept from general knowledge for decades; the resistance leader most responsible was a rival to Tito. Nazi-baited by a Stalinist mole in British intelligence, he was executed in 1946 with the consent of Britain and America, which thereafter refused to acknowledge having been snookered (the State Department kept many details classified more than 50 years). Evoking the rescuees' successive desperation, wild hope, and joy, and their gratitude to the Serbians who risked their lives to help, Freeman produces a breathtaking popular account. Murray, Frieda

Review

"A literary and journalistic achievement of the highest order, a book that illuminates, thrills, and reminds us that heroes sometimes do live among us. It will take your breath away."—Gregg Olsen, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Deep Dark*

"The daring rescue effort to save hundreds of downed airmen in dangerous enemy territory is an amazing but unknown WWII adventure story. Told in riveting detail for the first time, *The Forgotten 500* is a tale of unsung heroes who went above and beyond."—James Bradley, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Flyboys*

"The operation's story is an exciting tale...Evoking the rescuees' successive desperation, wild hope, and joy, and their gratitude to the Serbians who risked their lives to help, Freeman produces a breathtaking popular account."—*Booklist*

"[F]ascinating...full of romance, action, and adventure...This untold story of World War II has finally been told with skill and grace."—*America in WWII* magazine

"Greg Freeman has written a riveting account of the greatest escape during World War II. It is a remarkable adventure story of courage and daring that is superbly told."—Anthony C. Zinni, General USMC (Retired)

"This is an exciting, powerful story of escape and rescue. It has been buried for too long..."—Tony Koltz, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Battle for Peace*

"[A] gripping, true-life narrative of one of the most heroic and inspiring—but virtually unknown—military operations of World War II....Freeman chronicles it with a master's touch for detail. Although this book reads like a fast-paced novel, it is based on scores of probing interviews and meticulous archival research. *The Forgotten 500* is destined to become required reading for serious students of the Second World War."—Malcolm McConnell, #1 *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of *American Soldier*

About the Author

Gregory A. Freeman is an award-winning writer and a leader in the field of narrative nonfiction. Known for books that make a true story read like a gripping, fast-paced novel, his works include *The Forgotten 500*, *The Gathering Wind*, *Sailors to the End*, *Troubled Water*, and *The Last Mission of the Wham Bam Boys*. He lives in the Atlanta area.

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