On April 4, 1943, ten American prisoners of war and two Filipino convicts executed a daring escape from one of Japan's most notorious prison camps. The prisoners were survivors of the infamous Bataan Death March and the Fall of Corregidor, and the prison from which they escaped was surrounded by an impenetrable swamp and reputedly escape-proof. Theirs was the only successful group escape from a Japanese POW camp during the Pacific war. Escape from Davao is the story of one of the most remarkable incidents in the Second World War and of what happened when the Americans returned home to tell the world what they had witnessed.

Davao Penal Colony, on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, was a prison plantation where thousands of American POWs toiled alongside Filipino criminals and suffered from tropical diseases and malnutrition, as well as the cruelty of their captors. The American servicemen were rotting in a hellhole from which escape was considered impossible, but ten of them, realizing that inaction meant certain death, planned to escape. Their bold plan succeeded with the help of Filipino allies, both patriots and the guerrillas who fought the Japanese sent to recapture them. Their trek to freedom repeatedly put the Americans in jeopardy, yet they eventually succeeded in returning home to the United States to fulfill their self-appointed mission: to tell Americans about Japanese atrocities and to rally the country to the plight of their comrades still in captivity. But the government and the military had a different timetable for the liberation of the Philippines and ordered the men to remain silent. Their testimony,
when it finally emerged, galvanized the nation behind the Pacific war effort and made the men celebrities.

Over the decades this remarkable story, called the greatest story of the war in the Pacific by the War Department in 1944, has faded away. Because of wartime censorship, the full story has never been told until now. John D. Lukacs spent years researching this heroic event, interviewing survivors, reading their letters, searching archival documents, and traveling to the decaying prison camp and its surroundings. His dramatic, gripping account of the escape brings this remarkable tale back to life, where a new generation can admire the resourcefulness and patriotism of the men who fought the Pacific war.

My Personal Review:
As June 6 is observed as a day of commemoration for D-Day, the world pays their respect to those who fought the European theater of World War II off the shores of Normandy in 1944. But another greater part of the war had also been occurring within the other side of world, the War in the Pacific, and a war within the home front involving disclosure of POWs within this front of the war and uplifting the censorship that same year that would reveal the complexities and misconceptions that took place two years prior, a few months later after Pearl Harbor, and in the Philippines, the infamous Bataan Death March in 1942. John D. Lukacs takes into account and clarifies the major events by acknowledging and recognizing the forgotten heroes that returned as well as those who did not in his detailed narrative Escape From Davao: The Forgotten Story of the Most Daring Prison Break of the Pacific War.

Lukacs elaborately documents the circumstances surrounding the Bataan Death March and the American and Filipino forces that were taken prisoner by the Imperial Japanese Army and sent to Davao Penal Colony awaiting the imminent. However, this would be one of the successful prison breaks to occur during the war, and Major William E. Dyess would be responsible for leading the men to freedom earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and later recommended to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor but also pursuing another war, exposing the horrid conditions that thousands of individuals had to experience during the torrential ordeal that would eventually be posthumously shown in his own account Bataan Death March: A Survivors Account. But the interesting element about Lukacss narrative is that he does not recycle Dyesss story but rather expands upon it providing a chilling and haunting aspect to this historical narrative of the survivors and the major participants, and the controversy centering on the full disclosure and the limiting of information that would be dispersed to the press and the public, which contributed to the misconceptions generated during the war as depicted in a Chicago Tribune political cartoon in January 1944 that shows POWs in a desperate, helpless, and dying state with the caption that reads: I Guess the
European Front is More Important. Indeed, cartoons as well as the various references in the book are suggestive of the political atmosphere that permeated and appalled those who survived as well as their families.

After reading Escape From Davao, one may see that this story is an important part of the War in the Pacific and World War II. In addition, it further shows the continuous need to examine this part of the war and different perspectives that existed that one is still not aware of or have forgotten. Without the key participants, such as Edward Dyess and his story, the historical narrative puzzle of understanding would not be possible. Beyond the prominent names of leaders that one has read or studied in their history textbooks, Dyess's experience and the many unnamed individuals of those who endured the struggles are relevant in telling and examining the subject of history, and again, another teachable moment.

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