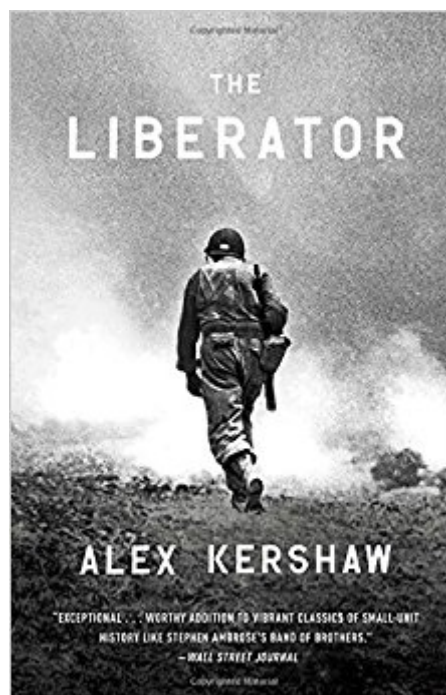




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# **The Liberator: One World War II Soldier's 500-Day Odyssey From The Beaches Of Sicily To The Gates Of Dachau**



## Synopsis

The untold story of the bloodiest and most dramatic march to victory of the Second World War. Written with Alex Kershaw's trademark narrative drive and vivid immediacy, *The Liberator* traces the remarkable battlefield journey of maverick U.S. Army officer Felix Sparks through the Allied liberation of Europe—from the first landing in Italy to the final death throes of the Third Reich. Over five hundred bloody days, Sparks and his infantry unit battled from the beaches of Sicily through the mountains of Italy and France, ultimately enduring bitter and desperate winter combat against the die-hard SS on the Fatherland's borders. Having miraculously survived the long, bloody march across Europe, Sparks was selected to lead a final charge to Bavaria, where he and his men experienced some of the most intense street fighting suffered by Americans in World War II. And when he finally arrived at the gates of Dachau, Sparks confronted scenes that robbed the mind of reason and put his humanity to the ultimate test.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Kershaw writes for the *New York Times* and has also written several books on the experiences of American soldiers during WWII. Here he chronicles the saga of the 157th Infantry from July 1943 to the end of the war. At the center of the narrative is Felix Sparks, who, born in Texas and raised in Arizona, enlisted in the army in 1936 and rose to the rank of colonel by the end of the war. He was in the thick of action as he and his regiment fought in Sicily, moved up the Italian coast and into Germany, and liberated the concentration camp at Dachau in Bavaria. Using interviews with Sparks as well as his letters and those of his men, Kershaw tells a grim but also inspiring story. There is

little glory here. Rather, it is a tale of death and destruction climaxed by the horror of countless rotting corpses at Dachau, where enraged G.I.s slaughtered German camp guards until stopped by Sparks. Still, the ability of Sparks and his men to endure and persevere endows them with a degree of nobility. This is a gripping and superbly told account of men in war. --Jay Freeman  
--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Exceptional”. The Liberator balances evocative prose with attention to detail and is a worthy addition to vibrant classics of small-unit history like Stephen Ambrose’s Band of Brothers. From the desert of Arizona to the moral crypt of Dachau, Mr. Kershaw’s book bears witness to the hell that America’s innocents came through, and the humanity they struggled to keep in their hearts. “A revealing portrait of a man who led by example and suffered a deep emotional wound with the loss of each soldier under his command. The Liberator is a worthwhile and fast-paced examination of a dedicated officer navigating and somehow surviving World War II.” “A history of the American war experience in miniature, from the hard-charging enthusiasm of the initial landings to the clear-eyed horror of the liberation of the concentration camps. An uncynical, patriotic look at our finest hour.” “Kershaw has ensured that individuals and entire battles that might have been lost to history, or overshadowed by more important people and events, have their own place in the vast, protean tale of World War II....Where Kershaw succeeds, and where The Liberator is at its most riveting and satisfying, is in its delineation of Felix Sparks as a good man that other men would follow into Hell and in its unblinking, matter-of-fact description, in battle after battle, of just how gruesome, terrifying and dehumanizing that Hell could be.” “Kershaw’s accounts of the battles Sparks survived are clear and grisly and gripping.” “[Kershaw] is a captivating narrator, hammering home the chaos and carnage of war, sparing no sensory detail to paint a cohesive picture. [His] portrayal of his subject (based on interviews with Sparks, who died in 2007, and other survivors) makes for a riveting, almost epic tale of a larger-than-life, underappreciated figure.” “This engrossing wartime narrative offers a fresh look at the European campaign and an intimate sense of

the war's toll on individual participants. • Kirkus

Reviews • "Inspiring | A gripping and superbly told account of men in war. • Booklist • "Alex Kershaw's gripping account of one man's wartime experiences has both the intimacy of a diary and the epic reach of a military history. • The Liberator • reminds us of the complexity and moral ambiguity of the Second World War. • Amanda Foreman, author of A World on Fire • "A searing, brilliantly told story of the heroism and horror of war, Alex Kershaw's The Liberator is a book that's impossible to put down. A must read for anyone who loved Band of Brothers. • Lynne Olson, author of Citizens of London • "Alex Kershaw, long acclaimed for his terse, lightning-fast narratives of true wartime action and heroism, reaches his full maturity with this sweeping saga of a legendary infantry unit and the leader who spurred it to glory. • Ron Powers, co-author of Flags of Our Fathers • "A literary tour de force. • Kershaw brilliantly captures the pathos and untold perspective of WWII through the eyes of one of its most courageous, unsung officers • a great leader, who always put his men first. • The Liberator is a compelling, cinematic story of the highest order." • Patrick K. O'Donnell, combat historian and author of Dog Company

Felix Sparks another unsung hero from WW2. He helped with the invasion of Italy and fought all the way into Germany. Along the way he liberated the Dachau concentration Camp. Here some of his men slaughtered the brutal SS that they captured. The aftermath had a full investigation into the conduct of those killing the SS. It eventually was squashed by Patton himself. The writer pulls no punches. He lets the reader know when a General messed up and how it affected the outcome of the battle. Felix Sparks is a true American Hero. Once you start reading it will be hard to put the book down.

"The strongest personality, subjected to sufficient stress over a sufficient length of time, is going to disintegrate." This is the story of one man, one platoon, one battalion that saw 500 days of action in the European theater. The 45th Infantry Division, The Thunderbirds, was part of the Oklahoma Army National Guard and Felix Sparks was a greenhorn second lieutenant. This incredible tale is told in an engaging narrative that brings Sparks' combat odyssey to life. That odyssey includes fighting up the boot of Italy, landing in the south of France, battling into Germany and eventually liberating Dachau. For the vast majority of the book it is a fairly conventional telling albeit through the eyes of Sparks. It is also great that the Thunderbirds get the recognition they have long deserved. The

battles against the SS and scenes of disintegrating Germany are incredibly graphic. What made it compelling was the controversy at Dachau that followed and haunted Sparks. And in later life how this super citizen-soldier continued to serve and championed a cause one may find counterintuitive to his life. Another fine job by Kershaw.

A wholesome adventure read about bravery and respect. One can only honor and respect Sparks for his courageous duty for freedom and respect for fellow humans he so loved respected cared for. My uncle who didn't come from this theater certainly would have honored and loved him too!

A great book! Such passionate words. I have read many books on WW2, but this one set it straight. Be prepared for tears as you read this remarkable recount of one soldier's love of country, and guardian angel to all his men. He stands for humanity and freedom

I am a modest history buff and there is much I don't know about the Second World War. However, there were significant details, for example, about Paton's behavior, which I had not encountered anywhere else in my reading. There is not a lot of fanfare in this read. It is, however, a wonderfully detailed journey through the life of Colonel Sparks, the emphasis was on the history of the war. He was one of the finest examples of a military officer that I have come across. First and foremost, dedicated to the well-being of his men, and doing his job to the highest standards. Colonel Sparks was a warrior with a keen mind, necessary to perform in an often chaotic and desperate environment, and yet he was a man of great compassion. This book was a joy to read!

I have become a self-professed student of World War II, and am constantly learning of the greatness of some of the men whose stories I have come to know by reading the accounts of their experiences and sacrifices during the second World War. Mr. Felix Sparks's story is one of the standouts. Where these men found their courage, bravery, devotion to duty and their kinship that developed between them has always amazed me. My own father was one of them, and in my mind they truly are and deserve the title of "The Greatest Generation."

Great book about a war hero who went on to lead a great civilian life.

Compelling read. I thought the writing about Anzio and the mountains near Germany was particularly gripping, as well as the treatment of their discovery at Dachau.

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