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THE REAL GREAT ESCAPE: Foreign Correspondent Tuesday April 25

Airs Tuesday 25 April on ABC and ABC iView at 9.30pm

Foreign Correspondent tells the true story behind the legendary movie The Great Escape – and the overlooked role of Australians in breaking out of the “escape proof” German POW camp.

It's one of cinema's memorable moments: American Steve McQueen powering a motorcycle through paddocks and hurtling over fences after breaking out of a German POW camp.

Small problem...

Among the 76 Allied airmen who escaped via the ingeniously built tunnels under Stalag Luft III, there was not one American. There were, however, six Australians.

To round off Anzac Day, Foreign Correspondent reprises the true story of two of those Australians – John “Willy” Williams and Reg “Rusty” Kierath, old schoolmates who were joined again by circumstance at Stalag Luft.

Reporter Eric Campbell accompanies Willy's niece – journalist Louise Williams – and Rusty's nephew Peter Kierath – as they return to what's left of Stalag Luft and meet up with the relatives of other Great Escapers.

That was definitely Mission Impossible – Peter Kierath

The planning and construction of the tunnel, the fooling of the Nazis and the climactic escape make for a rousing story of derring do. But cruelty prevailed in the end. Nearly all the prisoners were recaptured. An incensed Hitler ordered 50 of them shot, Willy and Rusty among them.

It was really quite a pivotal turning point in the war in terms of exposing the Nazis for who they really were and how absolutely amoral and brutal they were – Louise Williams

This story, first aired in 2012, is updated and introduced by Louise Williams, who has chronicled the event in her recent book “A True Story of the Great Escape”.

“The *Real* Great Escape” airs on Foreign Correspondent at 9.30 pm Tuesday April 25 (Anzac Day) and 10.30 am Thursday April 27 on ABC TV and 6.30 pm Sunday April 30 on the ABC NEWS channel. Also on iView.

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