



Unlikely Soldiers: how Two Canadians Fought The Secret War Against

Jonathan Vance

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When Nazi Germany's Buchenwald concentration camp was liberated in 1945, its records revealed that two young Canadians, Ken Macalister and Frank Pickersgill, were among its countless victims. At 30 and 31 years of age, they had been agents of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE), an undercover unit established by Winston Churchill that used sabotage and subversion to bring down the Nazi regime from within.

Jonathan F. Vance brings us the dramatic, untold story of two men who were the most unlikely of soldiers. Pickersgill, an up-and-coming journalist, and Macalister, one of the finest law students ever to attend the University of Toronto, were both living in France when the Nazis seized power. Pickersgill, arrested as an enemy alien, spent two years in prison before escaping to England.

The men's intelligence, resourcefulness and familiarity with French customs and language caught the attention of the SOE. Trained in special-operations techniques, from radio control to killing, they were paired together and parachuted into France—just as the underground network they were to join was cracked open by the Germans.

Unlikely Soldiers is an extraordinary tale of unsung heroes, intrigue and tragic error. With access to the recently opened SOE archives, Vance draws new material into a fascinating narrative that will appeal to anyone interested in military history, the evolution of espionage, or simply the remarkable story of two heroic Canadians.

Above the village of Châtillon-sur-Cher on the night of June 15/16, 1943, Frank and Ken sat in the fuselage of the Halifax and watched as the dispatcher hooked their parachutes to the static line. Seconds later, the red light blinked on, the dispatcher pulled the cover off the chute in the floor, and the two Canadians sat down. . . Then the green light flashed . . . and Ken and Frank were gone.

—From *Unlikely Soldiers*

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