

The greater escape

KANIKA DATTA

In World War II lore, *The Wooden Horse*, and *The Great Escape* get star billing as heroic stories of Allied prisoners of war escaping German captivity from the Stalag Luft III in occupied Poland. Both accounts appeared as books that were made into popular movies. The heavily fictionalised version of *The Great Escape* went on to become a blockbuster with its stellar cast of Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, and Richard Attenborough. *The Great Escape* may not have the ingredients of a Hollywood (or Bollywood) hit, but as a story it is long overdue in the telling. *The Great Escape* involved much larger numbers. In *The Wooden Horse*, three British officers escaped (successfully) after building an escape tunnel under a vaulting horse in the prison camp gym. In *The Great Escape*, 50 officers made it out through a maze of tunnels, only to be caught and executed in cold blood. In *The Great Escape*, over 500 prisoners of war (POWs) of all ranks escaped from a German prison camp in occupied France and made it to neutral Switzerland. Yet this episode remained unknown in war histories because, as the author Ghee Bowman points out, "...the escapees' faces were brown, not white, and as many were not officers, their experience has languished in the pool of the unremembered for years."

Bowman is a rare British historian who has chosen to focus on the Indian army in World War II, a contingent gaining grudging recognition in the multiple histories of the 1939-1945 conflict. Over 2.5 million soldiers of undivided India fought under the British flag in a global conflagration that scholarship increasingly presents as a European imperialist war. Since most were enlisted men rather than officers — the Indian army began the "Indianisation" of officer ranks after World War I but the process had a way to go at the outbreak of World War II — accounts from colonial sources are sparse. Bowman sought to bridge this information deficit in 2020 with *The Indian Contingent: The Forgotten Muslim Soldiers of the Battle of Dunkirk*.

The Great Epinal Escape goes beyond the narrow story of this extraordinary 1944 breakout to present a wider history of the roughly 15,000 Indian Army POWs in German hands. Bowman reminds us of the innately multicultural nature of the Indian Army. "They were Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Indian Christians, and Gurkhas from right across South Asia...They had been taken prisoner in North Africa, France, Italy, Greece and Ethiopia, and on the high seas. They endured up to five long years

behind barbed wire, making music, learning languages, grumbling about the food, and praying to god." Among the more celebrated POWs (though he was not at Epinal) was P P Kumaramangalam, later chief of the army staff in independent India.

Combining prodigious research, archival and physical, Bowman tells the story of subaltern soldiers and the minutiae of camp life in alien lands against the larger picture of the shifting fortunes of battle and of popular racist theories that roiled Europe (not just Germany). Bowman paints a picture of soldiers who were also awakening to the freedom struggle. Like many Indians back home, they too had their allegiances to Jinnah, Gandhi, Nehru, and often with mixed feelings, Subhas Chandra Bose.

Not all the Indian POWs were soldiers. The earliest prisoners were lascars of the merchant marine, sailors earning one-sixth of their European counterparts but who were the "lifeblood of the empire". The first Indian soldiers to be imprisoned were from the animal transport company of the Royal Indian Army Service Corp, and became the longest-serving Indian POWs. Of camp life and their struggles, Bowman shows the different religions appeared to coexist peacefully if separately.

Unlike their brutal treatment of POWs of French colonial soldiers from Africa — which little has been written — and Russians, who were seen as *Untermenschen* or subhumans, the Germans equated Indians with Aryans and, therefore, equivalent to Nordic Germans, so their treatment was relatively less cruel.

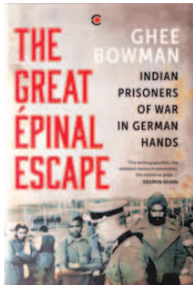
The town of Epinal (pronounced *ippinal*), in north-west France, had been occupied by the Germans since 1940. Two of its military barracks became Frontistag 315 with Indians occupying four large buildings, overseen by a friendly, elderly officer, Oberst (Colonel) Luhrten affectionately known as Papa-di-Epinal. He treated his charges, who behaved like "spoilt or badly brought-up children," with patient forbearance. When the Indians arrived in January 1944, the Germans were already on the back

foot; Hitler's invasion of Russia had stalled, the Allies had prevailed in North Africa, the bombing campaign over European skies was sapping Wehrmacht morale, and the French Resistance was gaining traction.

The opportunity to escape *en masse* came not from *The Great Escape* — type derring-do, but from an Allied bombing attack on May 11, 1944, that almost levelled the camp and enabled POWs to take their chance in the ensuing melee. Crossing the barbed wire individually or in groups was only the start. POWs had to navigate the enormous challenges of making it to the Swiss border, a little over 100 km away, through miles of uncharted terrain, thick wooded valleys, in snow and freezing temperatures alien to men of the north Indian plains, dodging German patrols, some equipped with sniffer dogs.

If most of the POWs made it successfully to "their promised land" of Switzerland, much of the credit goes to the French Resistance providing food, shelter, and medical aid to escaping POWs and risking their lives to act as scouts and guides along the escape routes against many odds. This is a story of understated heroism that rarely attracts headlines in war. Several Resistants were discovered and executed by the Germans. Apart from interviews and a re-creation of the Epinal-Swiss border terrain, this part of the story draws on a remarkable secret diary kept by Jules Perret, a 59-year-old blacksmith and farrier. A key member of the Resistance, Perret and his family played a seminal role in rescuing Indian POWs. Other ordinary folk like him — housewives, pastors, schoolchildren — did their bit. For them, the POWs' brown skin counted for less than the fact that they had played their part in liberating Europe from the Nazis.

With its rare photographs, *The Great Epinal Escape* is an important record of the lives of the Indian Army in combat and captivity in major theatres of war in the west. It stands as testimony to a time when Europeans relied heavily on men from Asia and Africa to save them from Nazi tyranny. At a time when refugees from these nations are being shunned by this same continent, this book reminds us of the ironies and failings of 21st century xenophobia.



The Great Epinal Escape: Indian Prisoners of War in German Hands by Ghee Bowman
Published by Westland
272 pages ₹699



BOOKS & IDEAS

TECHDIGEST mybs.in/tech

Sony unveils WH-1000XM6 headphones

Sony has launched its latest flagship wireless headphones, the WH-1000XM6. Developed in partnership with prominent recording studios — Sterling Sound, Battery Studios, and Coast Mastering — the headphones aim to deliver studio-grade audio precision along with notably enhanced noise cancellation. The company has not yet announced details regarding India's availability.



Amazfit launches BIP 6 smartwatch

Amazfit has debuted its new BIP 6 smartwatch in India. The device features a 1.97-inch AMOLED screen with a peak brightness of 2,000 nits and offers a comprehensive suite of health monitoring tools.



Chrome, Android get AI updates

Google has announced a range of new accessibility updates, set to roll out on the Android platform and Chrome web browser. Among them are AI-based real-time Expressive Captions.

Microsoft offers to price Office without Teams at cheaper rate

REUTERS
16 May

Microsoft has offered to make its Office product without Teams cheaper than when sold with Teams, EU antitrust regulators said on Friday, which could spare the company a big fine and ease tensions with the United States.

The European Commission said it would seek feedback from rivals and customers before deciding whether to accept the offer.

If accepted, it would end a long-running case triggered by a 2020 complaint from Salesforce-owned Slack, which could have resulted in a massive antitrust fine for the US tech giant. Germany's antitrust also complained.

Microsoft's Vice President for European Government Affairs Nanna-Louise Linde said in a blogpost the proposal was a clear and complete resolution to concerns raised by rivals and would give Europeans more choice.

It would allow Europeans to buy Office 365 and Microsoft 365 suites without Teams for less than corresponding suites that include Teams, the EU competition enforcer said.

Microsoft said the maximum price differential between the two suites would be 8 euros.

Customers in Europe would be able to extract their Teams messaging data for use in competing solutions. The pricing offer would be valid for seven years and interoperability for 10 years.

Microsoft, which has accrued 2.2 billion euros in EU antitrust fines in past years, said it would align the options and pricing for its suites and Teams service globally if the EU regulator accepts its offer.

यूको बैंक UCO BANK
(A Govt. of India Undertaking)
Head Office-II, Department of Information Technology
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NOTICE INVITING TENDER
UCO Bank invites following tenders through GeM Portal
1. Supply, Installation and Maintenance of Modular UPS with batteries
2. Installation, Implementation, Management & Support of Merchant Acquiring Business through POS on aggregator model
For more details, please refer to <https://www.ucobank.com> & <https://gem.gov.in>
Date: 17.05.2025
Assistant General Manager
Department of Information Technology

The Singareni Collieries Company Limited
(A Government Company)
Regd. Office: KOTHAJUDA-507101, Telangana.

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
Tenders have been published for the following Services/Material Procurement through e-procurement platform. For details, please visit <https://tender.telangana.gov.in> or <https://ncimines.com>
TIT/Enquiry No. Description / Subject / Last date and time for Submission of bids)
E1175900042: Drilling, excavation, loading, transportation, dumping, spreading and levelling etc., of 417.790 LCBM of R-SITU OB (which includes 2269 LCBM of top soil, 9.083 LCBM of sub soil, 374.127 LCBM of hard OB and 32.311 LCBM of coal), and excavation of 0.894 LCBM of loose sand with conventional equipment and additional works viz., 1000 shovel hours, 18,000 RMT of drilling at Venkatesh Khan coal mine, Kothagudem Area during a period of 36 months- **23.05.2025-15:00 Hrs.**
E612508008: Design, Engineering, Procurement, Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of cumulative capacity of 5000 Kw(DC) on-grid Rooftop Solar Plants on the Colony residential buildings and office buildings at different areas of SCCL with 10 years comprehensive O and M contract- **23.05.2025-17:00 Hrs.**
E112500004: Procurement of ESAB Make ETH-500 Thru-Hardened Liner Plates for 2X600MM STPP on Rate Contract basis for a period of two years- **03.06.2025-17:00 Hrs. GM (MP)**
TIT/Enquiry No. Description / Subject / Estimated Contract Value - Last date and time:
T.E.M. SPA/CUL/1EP-160(04)/2025-26 Dt. 05.2025 - Arresting roof leakages by laying APP (Atactic Polypropylene Polymeric) sheet and miscellaneous civil repair works such as replacement of damaged doors, windows, floor tiles, plumbing fixtures including painting works at casualty block, OP room, X-ray wing, central pharmacy and O/CMD office at Area Hospital, Bellampalli Township in Bellampalli Area, Mancherial Dist., Telangana State - Rs. 44,10,57,7/- **30.05.2025-04:30 PM. GM BPA**
CW/KSM/6-06/2025-26, Dt.12.05.2025 - Coloring works to SC Women's Degree College building on the occasion of Golden Jubilee celebrations at SCWC, Kothagudem Corporate, Bhadrachalam District, Telangana State. **(Invited under e-marketed works SCCL registered contractors belonging to SC Community only are eligible to participate)** **GM (Civil)**
PR/2025/ADVT/MP/BPA/CUL/48 **DPR R.O. No.: 142-PP/CL/AGENCY/ADVT/1/2025-26**

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NOTICE OF POSTAL BALLOT

Notice is hereby given pursuant to the provisions of Section 108, 110 and all other applicable provisions, if any, of the Companies Act, 2013, read with Rules 20 and 22 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 (including any statutory modification(s) or re-enactment(s) thereof for the time being in force), Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, Secretarial Standard on General Meetings issued by the Institute of Company Secretaries of India, General Circular No. 14/2020 dated April 8, 2020, No. 17/2020 dated April 13, 2020 and subsequent circulars issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs ("MCA") (hereinafter collectively referred to as "MCA Circulars") the latest being No. 09/2024 dated September 19, 2024 and such other applicable laws and regulations, the approval of the Shareholder of Shree Rama Multi-Tech Limited ("the Company") is being sought for the following Resolution by way of Postal Ballot, only through remote e-voting process ("e-voting"):

Sr. No.	Description of the Special Resolution
1.	Re-designation of Mr. Mittal K. Patel (DIN: 03619139) as an Independent Director of the Company for a period of 5 (Five) years
2.	Appointment of Mr. Anuj J. Desai (DIN:11044101) as an Independent Director of the Company for a period of 5 (Five) years

In terms of the MCA Circulars, the Company has sent the Postal Ballot Notice along with Explanatory Statement on Friday, May 16, 2025, to all the Members of the Company whose name appears on the Register of Members / List of Beneficial Owners as on Friday, May 9, 2025 (cut-off date) through electronic mode only to those Members whose email address are registered with the Registrar and Share Transfer Agent, KFin Technologies Limited of the Company (in respect of shares held by them in physical form) or with their Depository Participants (in respect of shares held by them in dematerialized form).

The Postal Ballot Notice is also available on the Company's website at www.srmtl.com the website of the Stock Exchanges where the shares of the Company are listed i.e. BSE Limited and National Stock Exchange of India Limited at www.bseindia.com and www.nseindia.com respectively, and on the website of NSDL at www.evoting.nsdl.com. The hard copy of the Postal Ballot Notice along with postal ballot pre-paid business reply envelope will be sent to the members, pursuant to the MCA Circulars. The Communication of the assent or dissent of the members would take place through the remote e-voting system only.

The voting rights of the Members shall be in proportion to the paid-up value of their shares in the Equity Share capital of the Company as on the cut-off date, i.e. Friday, May 9, 2025. A person who is not a member as on the cut-off date is requested to treat this Notice for information purposes only.

The Company has engaged the services of National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) as its agency for providing E-voting facility to all its Members. Members are requested to note that the e-voting on the business specified in the Notice will commence on Monday, May 19, 2025 (09:00 a.m.) (IST) and will end on Wednesday, June 18, 2025 (05:00 p.m.) (IST). The e-voting module will be disable for voting thereafter and remote e-voting shall not be allowed beyond the said date and time. Once the vote on a resolution is cast by a member, the member shall not be allowed to change it subsequently.

The Board of Directors of the Company has appointed Mr. Chirag Shah, (Membership No.: F5545) of M/s. Chirag Shah & Associates, Practicing Company Secretary or failing him Mr. Raimen Maradiya, (Membership No. F11283) of M/s. Chirag Shah and Associates, Practicing Company Secretary, as Scrutinizer for conducting the Postal Ballot process through E-voting in a fair and transparent manner.

The Scrutinizer will submit his report, after the completion of scrutiny, to the Chairman of the Company or any person authorized by him. The results of e-voting will be announced on or before Friday, June 20, 2025 and will be displayed on the Company's website www.srmtl.com and the website of NSDL at www.evoting.nsdl.com. The results will simultaneously be communicated to the Stock Exchanges and will also be displayed at the registered office of the Company.

The instructions on the process of e-voting, including the manner in which shareholders who are holding shares in physical form or who have not registered their e-mail addresses can cast their vote through e-voting, are provided in the Postal Ballot Notice.

In case of any queries, you may refer the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Shareholders and e-voting user manual for Shareholders available at the download section of www.evoting.nsdl.com or call on: 022-4886 7000 and 022-2499 7000 or send a request at evoting@nsdl.com

Helpdesk for Individual Shareholders holding securities in Demat mode for any technical issues related to login through Depository i.e. NSDL and CDSL.

Login type	Helpdesk details
Securities held with NSDL	Please contact NSDL helpdesk by sending a request at evoting@nsdl.co.in or call at toll free no.: 022-4886 7000
Securities held with CDSL	Please contact CDSL helpdesk by sending a request at helpdesk.evoting@cdsindia.com or contact at 1800-21-09911

Please keep your updated email ID registered with the Company/ your Depository Participant(s) to receive timely communications.

By Order of the Board of Directors
For, Shree Rama Multi-Tech Limited

Sd/-
Mirtunjay S. Mishra
Company Secretary & Compliance Officer,
Membership No.: A-76112

Place: Moti-Bhoiyar
Date: May 16, 2025

The ups and
downs are the same –
the way you
read them isn't.

New look.
Same insight.

Business Standard
Insight Out

