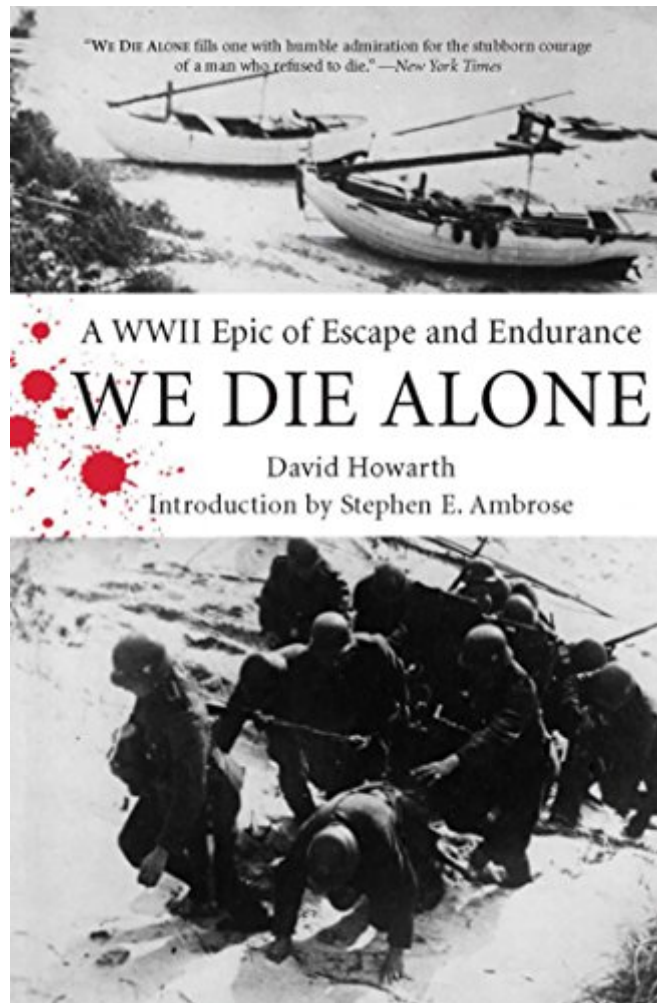


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We Die Alone: A WWII Epic Of Escape And Endurance



Synopsis

We Die Alone recounts one of the most exciting escape stories to emerge from the challenges and miseries of World War II. In March 1943, a team of expatriate Norwegian commandos sailed from northern England for Nazi-occupied arctic Norway to organize and supply the Norwegian resistance. But they were betrayed and the Nazis ambushed them. Only one man survived--Jan Baalsrud. This is the incredible and gripping story of his escape. Frostbitten and snowblind, pursued by the Nazis, he dragged himself on until he reached a small arctic village. He was near death, delirious, and a virtual cripple. But the villagers, at mortal risk to themselves, were determined to save him, and--through impossible feats--they did. We Die Alone is an astonishing true story of heroism and endurance. Like Slavomir Rawicz's The Long Walk, it is also an unforgettable portrait of the determination of the human spirit.

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Customer Reviews

This book was excellent and well written. Great descriptions that took me to the places described in Norway. Horrendous survival story. Like none I have ever heard of. It was hard to put down. Anyone

who picks it up will love reading it and living through some of the experiences with the heroes and others involved. The Norwegian people who worked to save this man were amazing and so heroic and determined. The young man's name escapes me at the moment, but to me any other person would have given up hope. He did not and survived to tell the tale. This was one of the best true story books I have read in a while.

I loved this book. It's about Jan Baalsrud, a Norwegian. He begins WWII as a courier between Stockholm and Oslo, gets caught by the Swedes, imprisoned, and then manages to make his way to England and join a group of other Norwegians being trained to return to their country and fight the Nazis. That's where the book begins, with Jan and the other men on his mission approaching the Norwegian coast. Their plan is to hide their sabotage gear, train local groups to resist the Nazis, and then attack a German airfield that's wrecking havoc on convoys between England and the Soviet Union. But their plans fall apart pretty quickly, and Jan soon finds himself alone in the snow with nothing but his clothing, his pistol, and one boot. What follows is how he survives and eventually makes it back to Sweden, with a lot of help along the way. I was initially interested in this book because of its title. I like titles with the words like "death" or "die" or "dead" in them. But the title isn't entirely accurate: Jan doesn't die (comes close several times). And the people who do die don't die alone--there's usually at least a gestapo agent around. But enough about the title. Jan is brave and resourceful and he can ski like something else. But then events leave him gradually more and more at the mercy of others, and the tough commando becomes vulnerable. Howarth did a wonderful job of finding an amazing story, researching it thoroughly, and then writing it in a way that uses good principles of storytelling so that this true story reads like a novel. *We Die Alone* is one of those books I recommend for just about everyone. Readers that enjoy *Unbroken* or *The Long Walk* may be especially interested in adding this to their to-read list.

There are so many other reviews that I won't even bother discussing the main events in this book. Suffice it to say that it is among the most incredible tales of survival that you will ever read, fiction or non-fiction. Jack London would have been afraid to submit such an outlandish tale to his publishers. That said, a few thoughts: 1. I found the actions of the local Norwegian "Resistance Movement" almost more interesting than the actual tale. To be caught helping Baalsrud was an act the occupying Nazis would have punished severely, both the actual person that did it, his family and maybe even the whole village. And yet the local villagers were, for the most part, not intimidated. The bigger concern seemed to be that if too many people found out about the rescue effort, their

attempts to help would be noticed by the Nazi occupiers and raise suspicions.² Even more amazing, people in the next village were recruited based just on a request from a respected member of the first village. All this, without the use of a telephone, which was probably tapped by the Germans. Imagine your reaction if someone you don't know showed up at your door and said that so-and-so from the next town over wants you to climb a mountain in a blizzard and rescue someone...nevermind that the Germans will kill you and your family if you get caught...just do it.³ Baalsrud spends several weeks in a snow cave on the Norwegian "Outback", sometimes completely buried, with very limited supplies of food, fresh water, blankets or medical supplies. I am not sure I believe this is even possible, but yet the author seems to have done a credible job of researching the story. There are multiple sources for research material, and a credible looking timeline. Either Baalsrud is capable of hibernating, or memories have been corrupted in the ten years between the events and the story being told. I would believe either scenario.⁴ As many have pointed out, the editing and proofreading on this book were horrible. These sorts of errors ruin my reading experience, and most times I would abandon reading a book with this level of problems. In this instance, the story was captivating enough that I powered through the mistakes. The story was better than the proofreading was bad.⁵ The Kindle edition did not have a map-something sorely needed. Even Google-maps seemed unable to rise to the task for some of the locations mentioned in the story. An old Atlas that I hadn't used in years, showing topography and little hamlets of Norway, greatly enhanced the story. So find a good map, ignore the grammar and writing style, and start reading. You might have to suspend disbelief at some of the details, but no doubt the major points of the story are true. If nothing else, the tale of Jan Baalsrud and the Norwegian villagers will reaffirm your faith in the human will and spirit. Finally, since the characters in the story seemed to run on brandy, pour yourself a glass and toast these men and women...preferably on a cold, windy winter evening.

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