



# Von Ryan's Express (RosettaBooks Into Film Book 22)

*David Westheimer*

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Set in an Italian POW camp at the height of World War II, Von Ryan's Express has a hero who acts like a villain for much of the story--a rather arrogant, by-the-book American colonel who manages to save the men in his charge after nearly assuring their doom. Westheimer captures the gritty oblivion of POW life, while the suspense builds as the prisoners try to plot their escape.

Shot down over Italy, Col. Joseph Ryan of the United States Army Air Force is captured and detained in a POW camp in southern Italy. What he finds is a demoralized, slovenly group of fellow prisoners, men he determines to whip into shape under his authority as the senior ranking officer. Ryan is so relentless and demanding (he seems at times like a Nazi officer obsessed with his orders) that the men grow to despise him. They call him Von Ryan, insisting that he is in the wrong army. His sense of order and respect for military conduct are so complete that he even keeps the prisoners together when their captors vanish after the Italian surrender, believing that a trick has been played on them by the Germans that delivers them right back into enemy hands. Realizing his mistake, Ryan concocts an unlikely escape on a train that becomes known as Von Ryan's Express.

Westheimer was in fact a POW in World War II, and he clearly drew on his experience to create a finely detailed environment and successful plot for Von Ryan's Express. Ryan is a fascinating character--not unlike the rather tragic figure of Col. Nicholson in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*--and his plan to save his men brings the novel to a breathtaking conclusion. Von Ryan's Express is a provocative story of heroism in the face of utterly hopeless odds; it is the perfect setting for a tense thriller.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Personal experience inspired David Westheimer to write Von Ryan's Express. The Houston-born writer had served with distinction in World War II as a B-24 navigator (Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal) and had been a prisoner of war in both Italy and Germany. His fictional recreation of the tension, fear, and absurdities of the situation bring suspense and sharp humor to this story of unlikely heroism.

Westheimer is the author of twelve novels, the first of which--*Summer on the Water*--was published in 1948. A graduate of Rice University, he worked for the Houston Post before turning his attention to writing full-time. His novels include *Watching Out for Dulie*, *The Magic Fallacy* and in 1970 a sequel to Von Ryan's Express called *Von Ryan's Return*. Westheimer's 1965 novel *My Sweet Charlie* became a play and, in 1968, an acclaimed television film. Westheimer continued to serve in the Air Force Reserve, holding the rank of lieutenant colonel when Von Ryan's Express was published--and he returned to the Houston Post briefly to write a column after the book was finished.

## SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

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