

A Novel of Dunkirk



MAGGIE BRIGHT

Any boat that goes may not return. Yet this could be her finest hour.



TRACY GROOT

Praise for novels by Tracy Groot

The Sentinels of Andersonville

“Groot’s well-researched, inspirational historical tale . . . will be compelling and memorable for a diverse audience.”

BOOKLIST

“Groot has done good historical homework. . . . The pacing is page-turning. . . . This Civil War–era story grapples with fundamental moral questions about decency and conscience—questions that can be asked about all wars.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW

“Richly detailed, engrossing historical fiction.”

KIRKUS REVIEWS

“If the truth hurts, this devastating story is like a knife to the heart. . . . This story of a Good Samaritan shines brightly as the characters place themselves in danger.”

ROMANTIC TIMES, TOP PICK REVIEW

“Fast-paced, with endearing protagonists and a thoughtful exploration of why some people do nothing in the face of evil and others risk everything to battle it.”

CBA RETAILERS + RESOURCES

Flame of Resistance

“Groot . . . does good historical work with details and subtle psychological work with her characters. WWII-era novels are popular; this is a superior, page-turning entry in that niche.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“This well-researched novel is filled with intrigue and captivating characters that should please fans of World War II fiction.”

CBA RETAILERS + RESOURCES

“Groot ensnares readers with accurate historical detail and gripping prose. With complex characters, authentically reflecting good and evil . . . , this story overflows with intrigue, passion, sacrifice, and humanity.”

RELZ REVIEWS

“Scrupulously researched and lovingly written, *Flame of Resistance* plunges the reader into an exhilarating story of courage, grace, and one endearing woman’s leap of faith.”

THE BANNER

“Groot’s impeccable research lends credibility and depth to this riveting tale based on real-life history. . . . Betrayal, unexpected allies, suspense, and heroism share in the drama of the tale.”

WEST MICHIGAN CHRISTIAN NEWS

“Tracy Groot adds fine research on [D-Day] and [the] World War II environment, both of which make *Flame of Resistance* a powerful saga.”

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

“The suspense is great, the characters excellent, the romance held in check, and the spiritual elements are extremely encouraging.”

THE CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO

Madman

“[A] well-paced, beautifully written historical novel. . . . Entertaining and compelling.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW

“Groot cleverly combines historical research, Scripture, and thrilling imagination to create an ingenious story built around the Gerasene demoniac described in Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels. It’s one of the best fictional adaptations of a biblical event I’ve had the pleasure to read.”

ASPIRING RETAIL MAGAZINE



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TRACY GROOT



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Maggie Bright: A Novel of Dunkirk

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Maggie Bright is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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SOMEWHERE IN BELGIUM

MAY 1940

There is nothing more disturbing than the sound of an animal in pain. Animals can be put out of their misery, but men, men cannot.

“What in me is dark, illumine! What is low, raise and support!”

“Will someone *please* shut him up?” shouted the British officer.

Artillery shook the hut. Bits of dried earth rained down on the officer’s map. He flicked away a single lump. The British Army was in *retreat*. Had England ever met such a rout as this? How would they face those at home—if they made it home?

The man in the corner howled. When he didn’t shout strange things, he howled, and not just any old howl; it came up in an eerie building groan and let loose at a peak, put the hair straight up one’s neck.

At the peak of the latest unholy howl, a figure appeared in the doorway, hesitant, uncertain—just the person.

“You there!” said the officer. “Yes, you. See the man over there? He’s yours.”

The private looked at the bandaged man. “What do you mean, sir?”

“Get him to Dunkirk. He’s done something heroic.”

“I only came to tell you—”

“Yes, yes, we’re overrun!” A boom shook the hut. “Bronson!” he shouted over the private’s head. “Get *over* that canal and tell McIntire’s unit to *pull out*. *God*, have mercy!” He stared at the private. “Still here?”

“But, sir—”

“Let me be clear: You are no longer part of any unit. You’ve been plucked from your lovely little fraternity, you now have an independent commission, and *he* is *yours*. Move!” Then, bellowing, “Bronson!”

Private Jamie Elliott went to the bandaged man making the horrible sound. A medic finished the last of his dressing, and looked at Elliott with some sympathy.

“All yours, mate. At least he can walk.”

“What’s wrong with him?” said Elliott.

“Shell went off, right by his head. When he’s not howling, he quotes Shakespeare.”

“Milton, actually,” said another medic, bandaging another man.

“Who cares? It’s poetry, and it’s awful.”

“I think it’s rather interesting. I like to listen to him.”

“That’s because you’re a pansy, aren’t you?” said the first medic. He looked at Jamie and shook his head. Then he looked at his charge, who had quieted at last, and said, gentler, “He’s a captain. Lost all his men, poor sod. Risked his life to bring a message to another unit, saved *their* lives, came back to his own and they were blown to bits. Last one died ten minutes ago. A brigadier put him in for the Victoria Cross.”

A boom, and earth rained down.

“Their fatal hands no second stroke intend!” shouted the bandaged captain.

“Well, that was relevant.” The medic grabbed the captain’s rucksack and stuffed in rolled bandages. “Change it as often as you can; keep it clean as you can. It’s a great rotten hole, but I have no time to stitch it. Keep the bandage *tight*. He’s lost a lot of blood. He’ll need water as often as you can scrounge it.” He thrust the rucksack at Elliott. “Go.”

The ground shuddered, earth rained, and Elliott grabbed the captain’s arm.

“Which way to Dunkirk?”

“That way, mate, twenty miles or so. You can’t miss it—it’s burning.”

A Note from the Author

In the midst of our defeat, glory came to the island people, united and unconquerable; and the tale of the Dunkirk beaches will shine in whatever records are preserved of our affairs.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

The evacuation of Dunkirk shines as the greatest military rescue in history. Approximately 340,000 men were saved from certain death or imprisonment by the Herculean efforts of many.

Yet what of those left behind?

Many British and Allied soldiers paid a heavy price to buy time for others to make it home. They defended the retreat by protecting the ever-shrinking corridor to Dunkirk, often fighting down to the last man and bullet until they were killed or taken captive. Thousands of these defenders died. Forty thousand spent five years in captivity.

Forty thousand.

One of these men was John Borland.

John Borland was a Cameron Highlander serving with the 51st Highland Division. He never reached Dunkirk but was forced to hold the line further west. . . . As he was marched away to five years of captivity, Mr. Borland spotted a scrap of paper blowing across his path. He has it still. "It was a biblical text, with the words 'Don't give up' scrawled in pencil, probably by the man who'd dropped it. Those words stayed with me through my time in the POW camps."

[Borland was asked,] had he ever given up? The answer was unequivocal: “Never.”

ROBERT HALL, BBC News UK, May 28, 2010

Let this shine, too.

Authors of historical fiction often face conundrums in deciding what words to use for sensitive topics or conditions. I faced such a dilemma in identifying the disability of the young German boy, Erich von Wechsler. I chose to use the contemporary name for his condition, Down syndrome, although at the time he would have been described as a mongoloid. I wanted to make sure readers understood, and I did not want to risk giving offense over what has become, in our society, an offensive term. This condition was specific to the T-4 program; I wanted you to be as astonished as I was when you learned children like him were being experimented on and euthanized.

I have also played with the time line in giving Clare a Revised Standard Version of the Bible, although this version was not published until 1946. Its specific wording of Nahum 2:1 fit perfectly into the image I wanted to develop. I hope careful readers will forgive my artistic license.

Many books are available on the story of Dunkirk. Some of my own favorites include Richard Collier’s classic, *The Sands of Dunkirk*, and *The Miracle of Dunkirk* by Walter Lord. For an in-depth study of the withdrawal of the BEF, check out *Dunkirk: Retreat to Victory* by Major General Julian Thompson.