

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #003

The Most Amazing Prison Escapes in History

December 3, 2019

[00:00:02] Hello and welcome to the English Learning for Curious Minds podcast by Leonardo English.

[00:00:09] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about prison escapes, and looking at some of the most amazing prison escapes in history.

[00:00:20] Prison is evidently not the kind of place where most people want to stay, and so it goes without saying, for as long as prisons have existed, well, people have tried to escape from them.

[00:00:33] Some of our, I should probably not say heroes, but let's say [protagonists](#)¹, so some of our protagonists in today's episode used all sorts of [ingenious](#)² tricks, including wooden pistols, [dummies](#)³, yoga, and even hockey sticks to escape from prison.

¹ the leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel, etc

² (of a machine or idea) cleverly and originally devised and well suited to its purpose

³ a model or replica of a human being

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[00:00:53] And I'll reveal exactly how they did it shortly.

[00:00:57] Before we get right into it though, I want to remind those of you listening on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you might get your podcasts that you can get the transcript and key vocabulary for this podcast on the website, so that's leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:16] There's also a load of information on how to use podcasts to learn English over on the blog.

[00:01:21] So that's well worth a look if you haven't done so already.

[00:01:24] Okay. [Without further ado⁴](#), let's take a look at five of the most amazing prison escapes in history. Firstly, John Herbert Dillinger Junior, born in 1903. If that name is [ringing a bell⁵](#) for you, well, you may remember him from the 2009 film Public Enemies with Johnny Depp.

[00:01:49] Dillinger was a [notorious⁶](#) bank robber in the Great Depression era. When he was caught in 1934, after having robbed a bank, naturally, he was held at the Lake County jail in Indiana.

[00:02:05] Local police were so proud of this jail that they declared it to be escape proof.

[00:02:11] Well, it didn't prove to be quite as escape proof as they had hoped.

[00:02:16] Shortly after being put in jail, he [carved⁷](#) a fake pistol out of a shelf that was in his cell and then proceeded to take 17 hostages. He [lured⁸](#) the guards back to his cell

⁴ immediately

⁵ sound familiar

⁶ famous or well known, typically for some bad quality or deed

⁷ cut into a shape

⁸ tricked into coming into a place

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block, and then he locked them in his own cell. Only then was he able to force his way out. But if you remember the film, this freedom wasn't to last for long for Dillinger and he was killed later on that year in a [shootout](#)⁹.

[00:02:47] Our second escape comes from Korea, from a prisoner called Choi Gap Bok. Now one way you can get out of a prison cell is through [brute](#)¹⁰ force, so forcing open the bars and breaking free. Choi Gap Bok had another idea, which was to make himself so flexible that he could [wriggle](#)¹¹ out. He was an expert in yoga and spent countless hours making his body as flexible as possible.

[00:03:19] His aim was to squeeze himself out of the tiny hole at the bottom of the door that was used to give prisoners food. If you can imagine what this looks like, it's one of those really small holes at the bottom of the door where they pass the food through. Tiny, right? This hole was only 15 centimetres tall and 45 centimetres wide.

[00:03:41] While the guards were sleeping, he managed to [wriggle](#)¹² out and the entire escape took only 34 seconds and he was finally free. It wasn't to last though, as he was arrested just six days later, and it goes without saying that the next cell he was put in had a much smaller food hole.

[00:04:04] Our third story of escape, I should point out, is still debated and we don't know whether the prisoners actually managed to escape and are now living in some far corner of the world with new identities or whether they [perished](#)¹³ in the Bay of San Francisco.

⁹ fight with guns

¹⁰ merely physical - 'brute' is typically used before 'force' to emphasis the physicality of the force

¹¹ twist and turn with quick writhing movements, in this case to get out of something

¹² twist and turn with quick writhing movements, in this case to get out of something

¹³ die

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[00:04:19] If you haven't guessed it, I'm talking about the escape from the maximum security prison two kilometres offshore from San Francisco, Alcatraz.

[00:04:29] If you've seen the [cult¹⁴](#) film, The Rock, you'll know what I'm talking about. It's a maximum security prison on a rock in ice-cold, [shark-infested¹⁵](#) waters with very fast [tides¹⁶](#), so certainly no easy [feat¹⁷](#) to escape from.

[00:04:47] In any case, in June, 1962 three prisoners escaped and then mysteriously went missing.

[00:04:56] These prisoners, Frank Morris, John Anglin, and his brother Clarence spent two years digging a tunnel through the walls and building a [raft¹⁸](#) made out of raincoats to sail to freedom.

[00:05:10] On the night of the escape, they placed dummies, so fake bodies, fake copies of themselves, they placed them in their bed to trick the guards and it worked.

[00:05:20] It wasn't until the next morning that the guards realised that they had gone.

[00:05:26] Later on, parts of the raft, as well as some of the men's personal belongings were found in the Bay of San Francisco leading investigators to conclude that the men had drowned in the escape.

[00:05:38] However, their bodies have never been found, and there are those that still believe that the men made it out alive and are now in hiding.

¹⁴ a person or thing that is popular or fashionable among a particular group or section of society

¹⁵ full of sharks

¹⁶ the alternate rising and falling of the sea, usually twice in each lunar day at a particular place, due to the attraction of the moon and sun

¹⁷ an achievement that requires great courage, skill, or strength

¹⁸ a small inflatable rubber or plastic boat, especially one for use in emergencies

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[00:05:48] I don't really know what happened, and it's certainly more [intriguing](#)¹⁹ to think that they did manage to get away and are now sipping margaritas on a beach somewhere rather than in a cold watery grave.

[00:05:59] Any list of great prison escapes wouldn't be complete without, well, The Great Escape.

[00:06:07] Forever [immortalized](#)²⁰ in the 1963 film, The Great Escape, the escape from Stalag Luft III during World War II must go down as one of history's most amazing prison escapes.

[00:06:20] In 1943 after having been captured by the Germans, Royal Air Force [squadron](#)²¹ leader, Roger Bushel thought up a plan for a mass escape from the prison where he was being held with other British and Commonwealth airmen, men who were fighting in the allied air force. It's a remarkable escape for many reasons, but mainly for the [sheer](#)²² amount of people involved.

[00:06:44] More than 600 prisoners were involved in the preparation, and 76 managed to escape. Now, the prisoners dug three long tunnels from their huts under the camp, past two sets of [barbed wire](#)²³ and out to the treeline. The idea behind having three tunnels was that if one of them was discovered, well, there would be another two and the prison guards would hardly guess that the prisoners were working on more than one tunnel.

¹⁹ arousing one's curiosity or interest; fascinating

²⁰ become famous forever

²¹ an operational unit in an air force consisting of two or more flights of aircraft and the personnel required to fly them

²² nothing other than; unmitigated (used for emphasis)

²³ wire with clusters of short, sharp spikes, used to make fences or in warfare as an obstruction

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[00:07:14] These tunnels were very deep down, around nine metres below the surface.

[00:07:20] They were supported with wood from the prisoners' beds with over half of all the wood from the beds being removed. It's a miracle that the guards didn't discover this.

[00:07:31] These tunnels were over a hundred metres long, but only 60 centimetres wide. This meant that they had to create air pumps, which were built out of random items such as hockey sticks and food tins.

[00:07:46] It was an [ingenious²⁴](#) plan, and despite numerous problems that they encountered along the way, 76 men were able to escape on the night of the 24th of March, 1944.

[00:07:57] Even though it was an incredibly brave escape, it wasn't to last for long, and 73 of the 76 men who escaped were captured and 50 were then executed by the Gestapo.

[00:08:10] If you haven't seen it, The Great Escape is a fantastic film. Well worth a watch. Watch it with English subtitles, of course, and you'll probably see that the accents are a little different to the kind of accents that you might hear today.

[00:08:22] Last, but not least, we have a more recent escape from none other than Mexican drug lord Joaquin El Chapo Guzman. Now, El Chapo could probably appear in this list more than once as he has quite a record when it comes to prison escapes.

[00:08:40] In 2001, while in the maximum security prison Puente Grande, he managed to escape in a laundry basket pushed by a prison worker.

²⁴ (of a machine or idea) cleverly and originally devised and well suited to its purpose

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[00:08:50] After this first escape, a total of 78 people have been [implicated](#)²⁵ in helping him, including the director of the prison.

[00:08:58] But escaping doesn't come cheap. It's estimated that this prison escape cost El Chapo around two and a half million dollars.

[00:09:05] However, it is the second escape that I think is more impressive. While at Federal Social Readaptation center number one, another maximum security prison, El Chapo managed to [evade](#)²⁶ the authorities and again, break out.

[00:09:21] How did he do it?

[00:09:22] Well, his associates had dug a tunnel from inside a construction site about one and a half kilometres away, ten metres underground, all the way up to the prison and into Guzman's cell.

[00:09:34] The tunnel appeared in Guzman's shower area, which was the only part of the cell that the security cameras couldn't see.

[00:09:42] He was last seen at eight minutes to nine going into the shower area. When he didn't reappear for 25 minutes, the guards decided to go and look for him, and only then they found the entrance to the tunnel, but it was too late.

[00:09:56] They found a motorbike in the tunnel with which they expect he used to escape.

[00:10:01] So where is El Chapo now? Well, if you weren't aware, he's back in prison and it looks like this time it might be for good. He was [extradited](#)²⁷ to the United States in

²⁵ show (someone) to be involved in a crime

²⁶ escape

²⁷ hand over (a person accused or convicted of a crime) to a foreign state in which the crime was committed

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January of 2017 and is currently at ADX Florence, the most secure supermax prison in America.

[00:10:21] Despite the fact that he seems to be a bit of an expert at escaping from prison, well, I wouldn't fancy his chances right now.

[00:10:30] Okay. That's a quick look at the most amazing prison escapes in history.

[00:10:34] We've learnt that you can get out of prison with a fake pistol, if you're really good at yoga, if you make some dummies of yourself, if you have 600 men and can dig a large tunnel, and if you have two and a half million dollars to spare to [bribe](#)²⁸ the guards.

[00:10:49] But escaping from prison is certainly not easy, and if our examples are anything to go by, you don't manage to stay out for long, even if you do manage to escape.

[00:10:58] As always, if you have thoughts, questions, suggestions, or things you didn't quite understand, then do let us know.

[00:11:05] You can send us a message on the website that's leonardoenglish.com or on Facebook or Instagram.

[00:11:11] If you've enjoyed the podcast, then do tell a friend, colleague, family member or random person in the street. The more people know about the podcast, the more listeners we'll have and the better it'll get. You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English with me, Alastair Budge.

[00:11:29] I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

²⁸ dishonestly persuade (someone) to act in one's favour by a gift of money or other inducement

Key vocabulary

<u>Word</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Protagonists	the leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel, etc
Ingenious	(of a machine or idea) cleverly and originally devised and well suited to its purpose
Dummies	a model or replica of a human being
Without further ado	immediately
Ringing a bell	sound familiar
Notorious	famous or well known, typically for some bad quality or deed
Carved	cut into a shape
Lured	tricked into coming into a place
Shootout	fight with guns
Brute	merely physical - 'brute' is typically used before 'force' to emphasis the physicality of the force
Wriggle	twist and turn with quick writhing movements, in this case to get out of something
Perished	die
Cult	a person or thing that is popular or fashionable among a particular group or section of society
Shark-infested	full of sharks
Tides	the alternate rising and falling of the sea, usually twice in each lunar day at a particular place, due to the attraction of the moon and sun
Feat	an achievement that requires great courage, skill, or strength

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Raft	a small inflatable rubber or plastic boat, especially one for use in emergencies
Intriguing	arousing one's curiosity or interest; fascinating
Immortalized	become famous forever
Squadron	an operational unit in an air force consisting of two or more flights of aircraft and the personnel required to fly them
Sheer	nothing other than; unmitigated (used for emphasis)
Barbed wire	wire with clusters of short, sharp spikes, used to make fences or in warfare as an obstruction
Implicated	show (someone) to be involved in a crime
Evade	escape
Extradited	hand over (a person accused or convicted of a crime) to a foreign state in which the crime was committed
Bribe	dishonestly persuade (someone) to act in one's favour by a gift of money or other inducement

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

You can email us at hi@leonardoenglish.com.