

# television

## The Maple Leaf rules the airwaves



**JOHN DOYLE**  
TELEVISION

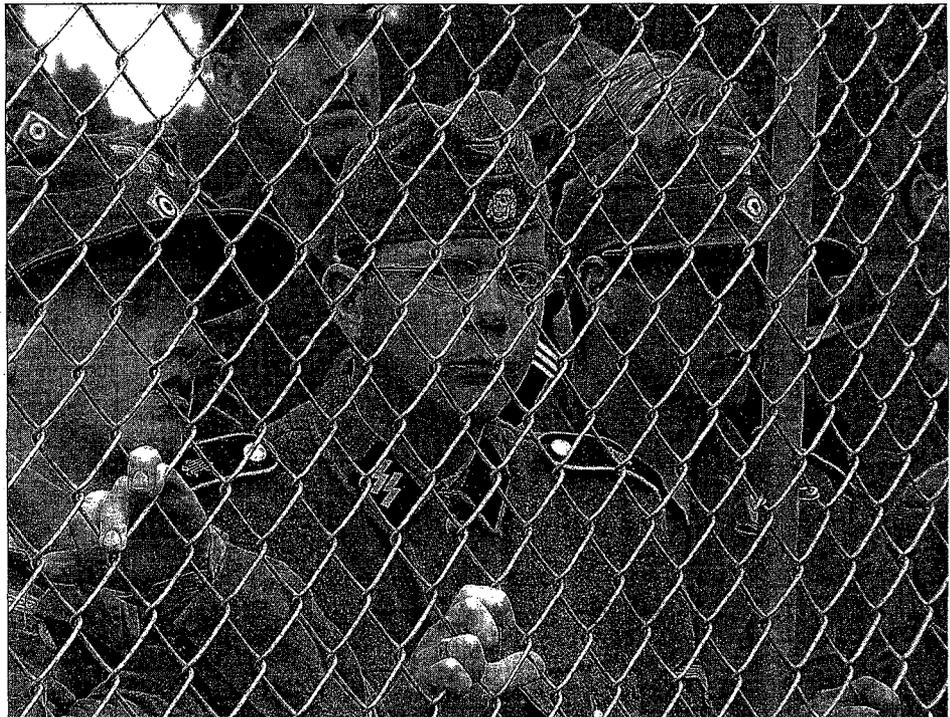
It's a way-Canadian weekend. That's how I'm looking at it anyway. You've got your **Championship Curling** (Saturday, CBC, 2:30 p.m., Sunday, CBC, 6:30 p.m.), a nifty doc about life in Canada for German PoWs during the Second World War, and Jann Arden goofing around on *Robson Arms*. There's other stuff, but let's stick with the Canadian content for now.

**Hitler's Canadians** (Sunday, History, 8 p.m.) is not about Nazi sympathizers in Canada. That documentary is coming, I imagine. This is about German prisoners of war who were held in Canada. We're told that Britain was worried about the number of captured German prisoners held over there and shipped 40,000 to Canada.

It is, as the producers (the doc was made by Ed Barreveld and Ted Biggs and directed by Douglas Williams) claim, a forgotten piece of Canadian history, and filled with intriguing detail and anecdotes. For a start, the program was inspired by what happened to the father of one of the producers in Germany in the 1950s. He was stranded overnight in a train station. An angry policeman shook him awake and demanded to see his papers. When he saw the passport, the policeman said, "I spent the war near your home as a PoW." The story eventually prompted Ted Biggs to begin researching the topic.

The German men were held in hastily constructed camps, usually guarded by veterans of the First World War, and while some simply sat back and used the time to relax or learn, most spent their time figuring out how to escape.

We hear about Oberleutenant Franz von Werra, the most famous escaper of them all. Shot down during the Battle of Britain, he was held in the north of England, made many escape attempts, but was sent to Canada. Here, he jumped off a train and crossed the border



HISTORY TELEVISION

**Hitler's Canadians** examines the imprisonment of German soldiers in Canada during the Second World War.

to the United States, which was still neutral. From there, he managed to return to Germany, and was the only German PoW to achieve that.

In fact, there were hundreds of escape attempts from the camps. The German officers were sworn to attempt to escape and some tried over and over again. As the program explains, the escape attempts became a game. Some prisoners thought of nothing else. But, as a Canadian who guarded the PoWs explains, often there was nowhere to go outside the camp, and the prisoners were easily found.

However, in what became the greatest mass escape in Canadian history, 28 men did escape from Camp 101 in Angler, Ont. The act was deliberately scheduled for April 20, Hitler's birthday, 1941. A tunnel was dug and the men fled the camp, but 26 were captured soon after. Two were shot dead in controversial circumstances — the Canadian forces were told to shoot only if the prisoners refused to sur-

render.

While much is made of the escapes, the documentary — which features a lot of dramatizations of better quality than you usually find in these productions — emphasizes that for many prisoners, "Canada's fundamental decency shone through." Interviewed today, one former PoW says, "We had a good time. There's nothing you can complain about."