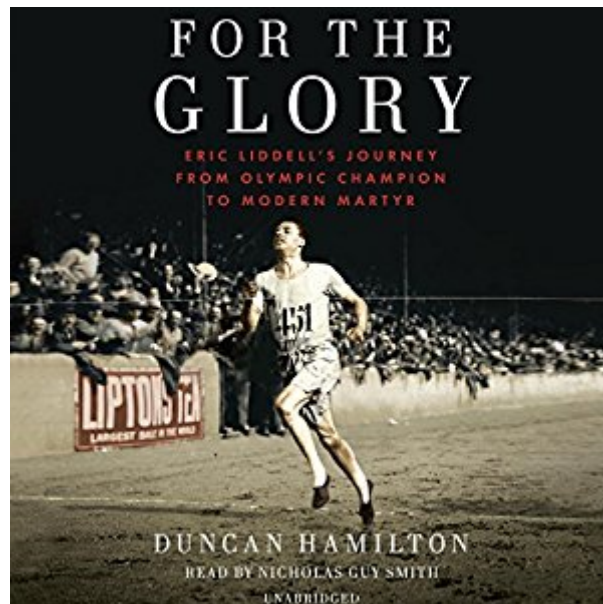


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# For The Glory: Eric Liddell's Journey From Olympic Champion To Modern Martyr



## Synopsis

The untold and inspiring story of Eric Liddell, hero of *Chariots of Fire*, from his Olympic medal to his missionary work in China to his last brave years in a Japanese work camp during WWII. Many people will remember Eric Liddell as the Olympic gold medalist from the Academy Award-winning film *Chariots of Fire*. Famously, Liddell would not run on Sunday because of his strict observance of the Christian Sabbath, and so he did not compete in his signature event, the 100 meters, at the 1924 Paris Olympics. He was the greatest sprinter in the world at the time, and his choice not to run was ridiculed by the British Olympic committee, his fellow athletes, and most of the world press. Yet Liddell triumphed in a new event, winning the 400 meters in Paris. Liddell ran - and lived - for the glory of his god. After winning gold, he dedicated himself to missionary work. He travelled to China to work in a local school and as a missionary. He married and had children there. By the time he could see war on the horizon, Liddell put Florence, his pregnant wife, and his children on a boat to Canada while he stayed behind, his conscience compelling him to stay among the Chinese. He and thousands of other Westerners were eventually interned at a Japanese work camp. Once imprisoned, Liddell did what he was born to do: practice his faith and his sport. He became the moral center of an unbearable world. He was the hardest worker in the camp, he counseled many of the other prisoners, he gave up his own meager portion of meals many days, and he organized games for the children there. He even raced again. For his ailing, malnourished body, it was all too much. Liddell died of a brain tumor just before the end of the war. His passing was mourned around the world, and his story still inspires. In the spirit of *The Boys in the Boat* and *Unbroken*, *For the Glory* is both a compelling narrative of athletic heroism and a gripping story of faith in the darkest circumstances.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 13 hours and 41 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Penguin Audio

Audible.com Release Date: May 10, 2016

Language: English

ASIN: B01DPVAJ7O

Best Sellers Rank: #9 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > China #19

## Customer Reviews

There are some historical figures who stand out because of their amazing accomplishments and there are some who stand out because of the depth of their character. There are a select few who stand out for both accomplishment and character, and prominent among them is the Flying Scotsman, Eric Liddell. Liddell accomplished great feats of athleticism, then left behind fame and fortune to pursue a much higher calling in the dangerous mission field of China. He did it all with the highest character, living a life that was very nearly unblemished before it came to an untimely end in a Japanese prison camp. His story has been told through books, movies, and documentaries, and it has just been told anew through Duncan Hamilton's *For the Glory: Eric Liddell's Journey from Olympic Champion to Modern Martyr*, easily my new favorite. Hamilton has woven together a brilliant, beautiful, stirring look at an incredible man. As far as I can tell, Hamilton does not profess to be a Christian and this gives him a different perspective on Liddell than most (or all) of his prior biographers. Many of Hamilton's other works focus on sports so perhaps it was Liddell the athlete that first drew him. Yet as he focused on the athlete he necessarily had to focus on his character and the faith that generated it. His work, then, tells far less of Liddell's inner man and far more of his words, his works, and the way others encountered and perceived him. Hamilton is especially keen to liberate Liddell from the way most of us know him—the film *Chariots of Fire*. Though that film was plenty good, it left those who viewed it with a skewed perspective of its hero. "Most of us are smart enough to realize that filmmakers who pick history as their subject tinker with the veracity of it. But our perception of an event or of a person still becomes inextricably bound to the image presented to us. So it is with *Chariots of Fire*. So it is with Liddell. We've ceased to see him. We see instead the actor Ian Charleson, who played him so compassionately." Hamilton remedies this by giving us Liddell as he was. And that is something special. There were a number of elements that made this biography stand out to me, the first of which was Hamilton's telling of the 1924 Olympics and especially of Liddell's gold medal triumph. He tells this in such a way that you can almost see it, you can almost feel the electricity of the crowd, you can almost hear them roar. It's brilliant. And yet he is sure to circle back at the end of the book, to Liddell's final race. Liddell was suffering deeply in this time, yet wanted to do something fun for the people who were with him in that Japanese prison camp. He ran one last race which, because of his failing body, he could not win. "Seen in

the terrible light of what awaited him, this race is Liddell's best and unquestionably his bravest. Where his initial speed came from, and how he managed to sustain it for so long, is unfathomable. The courage he summoned to run at all is extraordinary, a testament to his will. Liddell never competed again, and those privileged to see his farewell to athletics appreciated only retrospectively the absolute miracle he performed in front of them. The dying man had lost, but to them he was still the champion. Another element that stood out was the depth of the criticism that faced Liddell when he refused to complete his race on Sunday. The press maligned him and friends turned on him. He was regarded as daft and unpatriotic. Yet he let his character speak for itself, even as the games began. "No one was further removed from the bright young thing and the anything-goes bohemian than Eric Liddell. And an easy, but horribly flawed, assumption was made about him because of his character. His expression of religious faith was perceived as a sign of innate weakness. Because of his decision not to compete on a Sunday, Liddell was dismissed as a pacifist in top competition—a man with a soft center. The notion was ludicrous. Once, pointedly asked how he won races so often against the odds, Liddell answered: "I don't like to be beaten." On the track Liddell knew where to find the opposition's jugular—and he also knew how to rip it out. Paris was a test of temperament for Liddell long before it became a test of speed, requiring qualities no one could coach: fortitude, integrity, forgiveness, stoicism, will. You either possessed these or you didn't." He did in great measure. And then there is the account of what Liddell did with his fame. "There have always been personalities who hide only where the press and the photographers are certain to find them and plunge into fame, letting its riptide carry them away. Liddell wasn't one of them. Fame was only worthwhile because it made him much more likely to be listened to. He wasn't one of those Bible-thumping preachers who, good book in tow, had to wander peripatetically in search of audiences. The audiences came to him. The problem was finding meeting halls big enough to accommodate them." He did not seek fame, it sought him. And he used it to tell others about Jesus. But then he also left it behind to serve God in obscurity and great danger so he could tell even more people about Jesus. And then there is the account of Liddell's death and the mark it left not only on his family but on the whole community in that prison camp. Hamilton portrays Liddell as living an almost unbelievably good life that was followed by an agonizingly tragic death. His death came after much physical weakening and suffering but also much mental anguish. Not only was he separated from those he loved most, but he fell into a deep depression at least in part because doctors had told him his physical symptoms were a sign of mental weakness, that he was going through a nervous breakdown. He "felt inexplicably guilty about it [telling friends]." He said,

“There is just one thing that troubles me | I ought to have been able to cast it all on the Lord and not have broken down under it. He died without knowing the truth, that he had a malignant brain tumor that was destroying him from within. Still, he died as he lived, professing his love for God and his dependence upon him. His last words were fitting: complete surrender.” Hamilton’s telling of Liddell’s life is uniformly positive, perhaps because he simply couldn’t find any major blemishes. It’s almost like he finds himself shocked at the sheer goodness of his subject. His telling occasionally reflects a little bit of antagonism toward certain Christian organizations and includes a couple of unfortunate word choices and cultural references. But these are only minor quibbles with what is otherwise a brilliant book—one of 2016’s must-read biographies. I will let Hamilton speak once more as he reflects on the life he spent so much time studying. “Valorous lives like his—which must be calculated in terms of value rather than length—encourage us to make our own lives better somehow. In his case that’s because everything he did was selfless, each kind act bespoke for someone else’s benefit. He believed entirely that those to whom much is given are obliged to give much in return—and should do so without complaining about it. In adhering to this, he never demanded grand happiness or great comfort for himself. He grasped only for the things that mattered to him: worthwhile work and the care of his family.” May he inspire us to live such simple, meaningful, surrendered lives.

British sports journalist Duncan Hamilton in *FOR THE GLORY* has given us a biography of the Olympic medal gold winner and missionary Eric Liddell that should appeal to everyone: sports enthusiasts, the faith community, those who are so taken aback with where college sports, professional sports, the Olympics have become, and those of us desperate to believe that the entire world is not going to hell on roller-skates. Reverend Liddell “he would probably wince at that characterization although he did become an ordained minister—the son of Scottish missionaries, was born in Tientsin, China in 1902 and died in 1945 in a Japanese concentration camp in Weih sien, Shandong Province, China—was thrust into the limelight for my generation because of the film *Chariots of Fire*—that won the Oscar for the best picture in 1981. As anyone who knows anything about the movie—although Mr. Hamilton points out the historical inaccuracies in the film—Eric Liddell famously refused to run in an event in the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris that fell on a Sunday, his Christian Sabbath, although he did go on to win the gold medal in the men’s 400 metre sprint. Given the corruption in sports that we read about constantly now, it is difficult to get one’s head around such honor and principles.

(The only other person who comes to mind is Sandy Koufax, who refused to pitch in Game One of the World Series on October 7, 1965 between the Minnesota Twins and his Los Angeles Dodgers because the date fell on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish religion.) Roughly a third of this amazing book is about Liddell's early life as a runner; the rest is about his going back to China as a missionary and capture by the Japanese and ultimate death just before the other inmates of the camp were liberated as World War Two was over. While he was highly competitive and loved winning, apparently he never looked back and was content to trade the glory of winning for the glory of serving his Christian God. Unlike most of us lesser mortals, there seems to be nothing that Liddell had to hide. What you saw was what you got. He performed all kinds of horrific as well as dull duties--even giving his running shoes to a fellow inmate, his friend Steve Metcalf-- in the camp and never complained, living by the teaching of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount, therefore turning the other cheek and loving the enemy, in this instance, the Japanese soldiers who guarded him. When he died from a brain tumor in 1945, the entire camp honored him in what was called "one of the most moving events in the whole of camp life." The congregation sang Liddell's favorite hymn "Be Still, My Soul." Someone read from the Sermon on the Mount, and his friends gave eulogies. One was quoted as saying that "In his presence I felt it was impossible to speak or do anything less than the best, the purest, the noblest." Even the Japanese guards stood at a respectful distance as one Chinese and one American internee dug Liddell's grave, a task deeply symbolic as this kind man of faith believed that "there are no foreign lands." Mr. Hamilton has done a tremendous amount of research to bring this modern-day hero to life, visiting continents, going through newspaper articles and ultimately visiting China, where he saw the monument that has been erected in Liddell's memory, a seven feet high by two and a half feet across slab of rose granite that contains a few lines of his biography as well as the verse from Isaiah: "They shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not be faint." (No one knows now where Liddell's grave with the simple wooden cross is because the graveyard has long since been built over.) The author also met with some members of Liddell's family whom he had sent to Canada while he stayed behind in China, including his daughter Maureen whom, sadly, he never met. And Mr. Hamilton names this moving last chapter or Epilogue with that beautiful last line from "An Arundel Tomb" by the British poet Philip Larkin: "What will survive of us is love." Perhaps it should also be noted that the young Scottish man who played Liddell in "Chariots of Fire," Ian Charleson (who bore a striking resemblance to him) died of complications from AIDS in 1990 and requested that the world

be made aware of how he died in order to help remove some of the stigma associated with this disease. He was the first actor in the United Kingdom whose death was attributed to AIDS. Mr. Charleson was the recipient of many awards including having the Royal Free Hospital's Ian Charleson Day Centre for people with HIV in London named in his honor. (I think Eric Liddell would have been pleased that Charleson received such an honor.) This incredible story that this writer tells so well will make your soul sing.

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