

PAUL GORDON ROYLE — TRIBUTE

Statement by Minister for Veterans

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Veterans) [12.10 pm]: It is with sadness that I acknowledge the passing of Mr Paul Gordon Royle, an Australian Royal Air Force pilot who took part in the mass breakout from a German prison camp during the Second World War. The escape was the subject of Paul Brickhill's 1950 book *The Great Escape*. A prewar journalist, Brickhill served with the Royal Australian Air Force and was a prisoner of war at the same camp. The book was the basis for the famous Hollywood movie of the same name; however, Royle did not approve of this version, complaining there were no Americans or motorbikes in the real escape.

Mr Royle was one of 76 prisoners who made it through a 10-metre deep, 110-metre long tunnel to escape their captors in Poland in 1944. Although three Allied prisoners made it to freedom, 50 others from 12 nations were executed by the SS and the Gestapo, reportedly on Adolf Hitler's orders. Five of the 50 were Australian. Mr Royle spent two days hiding in a bitterly cold, snow-covered forest before he was recaptured. He was lucky enough to be one of the 23 escapees spared execution.

Mr Royle's contribution to the escape operation included disposing of soil dug from the tunnel through his trousers under plain sight of guards in the prison yard. He said that he had to be careful to pick a suitable place to release the soil, because the soil from the tunnel was a different colour from the soil on the surface of the yard. Mr Royle's passing leaves only one remaining member of the legendary prison break—94-year-old British man Dick Churchill.

Mr Royle was born in Perth on 17 January 1914 and educated at Hale School. As a flight lieutenant with the Royal Air Force, he was shot down on 17 May 1940. He spent nearly five years as a prisoner of war before he was liberated by British troops on 2 May 1945. After the war, he worked in the mining and engineering industries in Kalgoorlie and worldwide, before returning to Perth after retiring around 1980. Mr Royle was 101 years old when he died on 23 August at Hollywood Private Hospital in Nedlands. He is survived by his wife, Pamela, five children, eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Vale, Paul Royle.