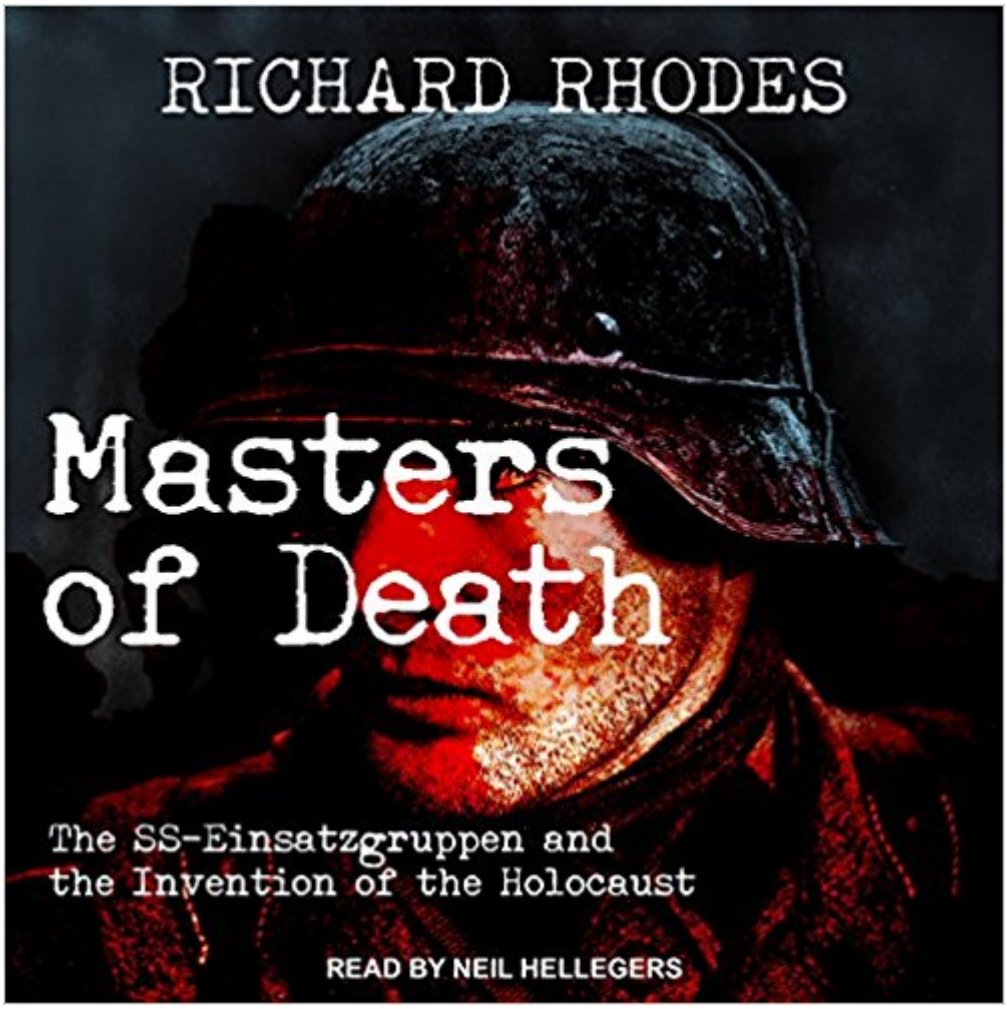
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Masters Of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen And The Invention Of The Holocaust



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Synopsis

In Masters of Death, Richard Rhodes gives full weight, for the first time, to the Einsatzgruppen’s role in the Holocaust. These "special task forces," organized by Heinrich Himmler to follow the German army as it advanced into eastern Poland and Russia, were the agents of the first phase of the Final Solution. They murdered more than 1.5 million men, women, and children between 1941 and 1943, often by shooting them into killing pits, as at Babi Yar. These massive crimes have been generally overlooked or underestimated by Holocaust historians, who have focused on the gas chambers. In this painstaking account, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Rhodes profiles the eastern campaign’s architects as well as its "ordinary" soldiers and policemen, and helps us understand how such men were conditioned to carry out mass murder. Marshaling a vast array of documents and the testimony of perpetrators and survivors, this book is an essential contribution to our understanding of the Holocaust and World War II.

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Customer Reviews

Masters of Death is Richard Rhodes’s chronological account of the Third Reich’s Einsatzgruppen (a hand-picked task force) and its death work--the executions of 1.5 million people, Jews and non-Jews--in Russia and Eastern Europe from 1941 through 1943. Rhodes sees these operations (the victims were, almost exclusively, shot) as a ghastly prelude to the subsequent (and much more written-about) horrors of the death camps. In chilling--and occasionally excessive--detail, Rhodes describes the killings and the reasons behind the Reich’s cautious, rather than precipitous, escalation of the same: the military’s "concern for German and world opinion

This is not for the squeamish. Rhodes, a Pulitzer winner for The Making of the Atomic Bomb, has pulled together a mountain of research on the mass murders of Jews perpetrated by the Einsatzgruppen special task forces organized by the SS commanders Himmler and Heydrich before the gruesome death camps industrialized the Final Solution. The catalogue of horrors, drawn not only from postwar memoirs and interrogations but also from the Nazi fanaticism for statistical detail, is profoundly appalling, even revolting: some of the malefic perpetrators were so sickened by the slaughter that Himmler set up mental hospitals and rest camps for the insufficiently sadistic. By January 1942, when the Wannsee Conference implicitly authorized the death camps, more than a million Jews crowded the killing pits, some of them later torched to conceal the massacres. Relatively few in the Nazi command structure would pay for their crimes. John J. McCloy, U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, Rhodes reminds us, reduced 10 of 14 death sentences in U.S. war-crimes trials, and by 1958 all surviving Einsatzgruppen defendants had been freed. German courts were also lenient. But he also suggests that genocide is new only as a word in the dictionary: "The Final Solution...was intended to be only the first phase of a vast, megalomaniacal project of privation, enslavement, mass murder and colonization modeled on the historic colonization of North and South America and on nineteenth-century imperialism but modernized with pseudoscientific theories of eugenic restoration." Thus Rhodes holds the mirror up. 16 pages of photos and six maps not seen by PW. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A good book on the atrocities committed by the SS-Einsatzgruppen. Most people are educated on the German Regular Army, the SS-Waffen, and the SS run concentraion camps during the Holocaust but most are not well educated on the dealers of death, the SS-Einsatzgruppen. The formation, the structural organization of the units, and the beginning of their ride of terror and death into Eastern Europe to include Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, and the Ukraine. A very well written and powerful book about the original Masters of Death.

This book is a rare find. It covers a piece of World War Two that most books gloss over at best. This book offers up a very detailed history of the infamous SS Einsatzgruppen troops. These were the special units the SS put together to go into occupied Eastern Europe to kill Jews. The book offers a great deal of information about these units. The book is full of horrific story after horrific story about the work of these units. The way the stories are told is very enlightening. They are told almost like a

news story, as they unfold. That makes the story come more alive, and thus more scary. The abundance of these stories is almost overwhelming. It is told through various first person accounts with graphic detail.This book doesn't stop there. The book describes how they came together. It dives into the details of the emotional aspect of the killing on the troops. What they did as a unit did impact them as individuals. I found that very interesting. The killing toll drove the men crazy. It created a blood lust of sorts. The guilt weighted heavy on them. They either became 24/7 drunks or individual homicidal manics. The lack of speed of killing in the eyes of their Berlin HQ led them to create "the final solution". That is the death camp system.The down side of the book is the lack of the big picture. The story gets lost of the blood filled stories. The ending epilogue chapter is very interesting too. The author gives a break down of what happened to the various key personnel of the groups. I think this book has to be the only one like it or definitely one of a few.

Tremendously well researched and reasoned analysis of the Einsatzgruppen during WW2. Warning this is an unpleasant subject that I could only read for about an hour at a time. Himmler and Heydrich were monsters of a sort that we might never see again. I especially liked the way Rhodes couches the development of the killers malefic behavior in a bona fide framework - Lonnie Athens stages of violent development. Great book.

Richard Rhodes has further solidified himself as one of my favorite authors with his work "Masters of Death." After reading is world-reknowned "The Making of the Atomic Bomb," I was eager to read more of his work. As a student of the Holocaust and World War II, I knew the book would be incredibly powerful and informative. The book looks not only at the historical aspects of the Nazi-created genocide and killing machine of the 1940's but looks at the "human element" involved in undertaking such a brutal, cruel and inhumane operation. He delves into how the Nazi's looked to lessen the impact of the mass killings on those who committed them and protect the sanity of German soldiers.A thorough, well-researched, often horrific book because it explains how the Holocaust, supposedly initiated by monsters, was entirely too human.Thank you, Richard Rhodes, for giving readers another masterpiece of history.

This exhaustive chronicle of the history of the Einsatzgruppen is the most detailed, gruesome account of the holocaust I've ever read, and I have read a lot of books on the subject of Nazi barbarity and cruelty. The book is packed with sickening details of exactly what the Einsatzgruppen did in specific areas, with accounts of the horrific things they did that even the well-versed reader

will find shocking, such as the execution of thousands of babies and children. Rhodes also writes interestingly about sociological research that attempts to explain the appalling brutality of the men who committed these atrocities. A short, two-chapter synopsis of Himmler's career provides some welcome relief from the relentless descriptions of blood, gore, and horrendous suffering. Rhode also briefly attempts to refute the thesis of "Ordinary Men." Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners" is similarly, if briefly challenged. For those who want to know the whole story of the murderous acts of the Nazi regime, including the fact that the execution of the Jews comprised only about 1/3 of the unarmed people the Nazis killed, and the fact that only 1/2 of the Jews murdered by the Nazis were killed in the gas chambers, this is the book to read.My greatest criticism of the book is the fact that it is a bit disjointed and confusing - the horrors that took place in Lithuania, for example, are related at the beginning of the book and then about halfway through more accounts of killings in Lithuania are examined. Anyone who believes that it was strictly Germans who perpetrated these horrible crimes is certainly in for a rude awakening. The brutality of life in Eastern Europe and Western Russia during this period is dreadful indeed to contemplate.

What is interesting about Rhodes' take on the Einsaztgruppen is his examination of violence from a criminology standpoint. He spends a few chapters examining a theory of developing violence in people, and then applies that theory to the actions of this horrible start to the Holocaust. Rhodes delivers a solid history, and I liked how he incorporated the criminology theory and background on both Hitler and Himmler. This, taken with other 'straight' histories on the Holocaust gives the reader a broader scope of what happened.

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