

[Download] Soldiers of Evil: The Commandants of the Nazi Concentration Camps

Soldiers of Evil: The Commandants of the Nazi Concentration Camps

Tom Segev

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Tom Segev : Soldiers of Evil: The Commandants of the Nazi Concentration Camps before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Soldiers of Evil: The Commandants of the Nazi Concentration Camps:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The concentration camp commandants: Review of Soldiers of Evil by Thomas Segev By Claudia Moscovici Thomas Segev's dissertation, Soldiers of Evil (Jerusalem: Domino Press, 1987), goes a long way in explaining the psychology and social background of the Holocaust's most ruthless mass murderers: the concentration camp Commandants. The book relies upon eyewitness accounts, victim testimonials, court documents as well as interviews with some of the Commandants themselves, their acquaintances, colleagues and family members who were willing to talk about the past. Segev notes that during Oswald Pohl's trial (he was the SS Commander in charge of administering the entire Nazi concentration camp system) it was estimated that the Nazis imprisoned about 10 million people. (Soldiers of Evil, 15) By the end of the war, in January 1945, only 700,000 were found alive by the Allies. Of those, tens of thousands died shortly after liberation. Close to one million non-Jewish prisoners and 6 million Jewish prisoners were killed in the Nazi extermination camps. One might expect that those who directed the mass murder of millions of innocent people would be prone to sadism. In his study, Segev observes that this was true only in some cases, but not most. Certainly men like Amon Goth, the Commandant of Plaszow (so vividly described by Thomas Keneally in Schindler's List), qualifies as sadistic. Goth would notoriously go on random

shooting sprees of the defenseless inmates weakened by hard labor and hunger. Sometimes he would sick his dogs upon them to tear them apart limb by limb. He enjoyed the process of selecting his victims and witnessing their torment. His widow, Ruth Kalder, a woman with sadistic predispositions herself, became enchanted with Goth's cruelty. In her eyes, it gave Goth an aura of a God, as he wielded the power of life and death over Plascows helpless inmates. After the war, she described her life with Goth in the concentration camp with longing and in idyllic terms, comparing her husband and herself to the King and Queen of a fiefdom. Like Goth, she showed no empathy for the prisoners, particularly the Jews, whom she considered subhuman. In an interview she gave in 1975, Kalder stated, They were not human like us. They were so foul (Soldiers of Evil, 201). Likewise, Arthur Rodl, Deputy Commandant to Karl Koch at the Buchenwald concentration camp, enjoyed killing inmates with his own bare hands. Segev recounts that on January 1, 1939, Rodl forced several thousands prisoners to line up, selected five among them, ordered them to strip and then proceeded to whip them until the morning to the sound of the camp orchestra. (Soldiers of Evil, 133) The Commandant of Buchenwald, Karl Koch, and his wife, Isle, who herself was known as the monster of Buchenwald, were equally notorious for their cruelty to inmates. They lived at Buchenwald in a gorgeous mansion known as Villa Koch, like royalty in the midst of the squalor of the concentration camp. Both took great pleasure in abusing and killing prisoners. Segev recounts that Isle would dress up in a provocative manner and ride around the camp on horseback. If any of the inmates looked at her, she would sometimes beat them with her own hands or, more commonly, ask her husband or the SS men to savagely attack them while she watched. There were rumors that Isle Koch even had lampshades made out of tattooed prisoners skin. Eventually the Nazi government tried Karl Koch not for his cruelty to prisoners (which was extreme even by Nazi standards), but for stealing stolen goods the money, jewelry, clothes and extracted gold teeth that the Nazi regime took from the Jews. Despite such examples of sadistic behavior, Segev's research indicates that the Nazi Commandants of concentration camps had a diverse background. Most of them were not predisposed to sadism, he found. However, all of them had a strong ideological background, the propensity to dehumanize others and lacked basic human empathy. As Segev observes, There were among them men of different types: bureaucrats, opportunists, sadists, and criminals. The great majority of them were political soldiers (Soldiers of Evil, 124). He further notes that most of the Nazi concentration camp Commandants saw themselves first and foremost as soldiers: two thirds of them had served in the army before joining the Nazi party and the SS. Most of them had volunteered for the army before, during, and after the First World War (Soldiers of Evil, 60). For many, the experiences of the war served to desensitize them to human suffering and to habituate them to the act of killing. Some of them received special ideological training in Theodor Eicke's Deaths Head squads, an elite formation in which Eicke, described by Segev as a Nazi grand seigneur, recruited very young men with Aryan features whom he indoctrinated with a toxic combination of Romantic nationalism, Nazi ideology and rabid anti-Semitism. Perhaps the most revealing inside look into the concentration camps Commandants mentality are the testimonies of Rudolf Hoss, the Commandant of Auschwitz, and of Franz Stangl, the Commandant of Treblinka. Neither of them was particularly drawn to sadism yet both of them could kill hundreds of thousands of human beings as easily as one kills a gnat. In his 1971 interview with the British writer and historian Gitta Sereny, Stangl is asked how he could kill so many human beings. He nonchalantly compares the Jewish inmates to a herd of cattle trapped in their pens and headed for slaughter. Sereny asks him: So you didn't feel they were human beings? Stangl responds: Cargo. They were cargo (Soldiers of Evil, 201-2). Rudolf Hoss, responsible for the deaths of nearly 2 million Jews at Auschwitz, dehumanized his victims in a similar fashion. In a conversation with his brother-in-law, Fritz Hensel, during the latter's 4-week visit to Auschwitz, Hensel asks him how he could kill human beings. Hoss responds that the Jews were subhuman (Untermensch). Hensel asks for a clarification of the term subhuman. According to his account, Hoss sighs and replies: You always ask and ask Look, you can see for yourself. They are not like you and me. They are different. They look different. They do not behave like human beings. They have numbers on their arms. They are here in order to die (Soldiers of Evil, 211). Using circular reasoning, the concentration camp Commandants dehumanized human beings through extremely cruel and inhumane treatment, then saw the results of their dehumanization as proof that their victims weren't really human. Most of them were not prone to cruelty but could be exceptionally callous and cruel for ideological and political reasons. Segev's research indicates that sadistic Commandants like Goth and Koch did not in fact meet the SS ideal. Their evil could not be controlled and channeled in service to the Nazis. They killed for their own pleasure; stole for their own profit. The most successful concentration camp Commandants were those like Hoss and Stangl: political soldiers who killed millions of innocent human beings without conscience or remorse in order to fulfill the needs and ideals of the Nazi regime. Claudia Moscovici Holocaust Memory 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By David J Easton excellent 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. These are the men who shows how evil can grow ... By Kenneth Hemphill These are the men who shows how evil can grow through a nation and infect the people to where they simply don't care. This book is important in showing just how evil can spread through a society and infect an entire nation.

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From Publishers Weekly Segev attempts to bring into focus the men who in WW II "consented to making terror their profession," and show how they implemented the murder of Jews into their daily routine. The attempt does not succeed, partly because, as the author himself notes, his subjects are "mediocre, shallow people without imagination, courage or initiative." His interviews with three former concentration camp commandants are unmemorable except for the moment when one breaks into sobs in self-pity over his postwar years in an Allied prison. The author's interviews with widows and children of former commandants are even less revealing many tell him basically the same thing: there was no such thing as the Holocaust, and my husband (or father) was certainly not a party to it. The book, however, contains interesting material from the Berlin Documentary Center: details of recruitment, indoctrination and training of SS officers (the commandants were all members of Himmler's army-within-an-army) including official texts from a program designed to strengthen anti-Semitic consciousness. Segev is an Israeli journalist. Photos. Jewish Book Club selection. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. Language Notes Text: English, Hebrew (translation)