

The SS - A New History by Adrian Weale.
Little, Brown, 2010

Of all the elements in the Nazi machine none has a poorer reputation than the SS; originally founded to be a personal body guard for Hitler, it grew from its humble beginnings into a huge force that undertook military, policing and guarding duties.

In this new history of the SS, Adrian Weale, a former soldier, tells the story of the SS from its start in the 1920s until its demise in the 1940s when the Second World War ended. Weale brings in to his re-telling much new material that contradicts some of the myths that have arisen about the SS over the decades since the Nazi regime's destruction, as well as rehearsing its most infamous exploits during the invasion of Poland and Russia and in the concentration and death camps.

The book is divided into 25 chapters, dealing with events chronologically, taking in the origins of the Nazi party, the creation of the SS, the life story of its leader Heinrich Himmler and his wild fantasies about Teutonic knights and Aryan racial purity, the creation of the concentration camps, the death squads and their murderous rampage through Eastern Europe, the various programmes of murder culminating in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Sobibor, the SS units composed of other than German nationals, including some British soldiers, the Wannsee conference and the Final Solution programme, and the death of Himmler by suicide once he was captured by the British.

The SS – A New History is a chilling but engrossing read, peopled by fantasists and sadistic murderers; the reader is left, as is often the case with books about the Nazi regime, wondering how an entire nation could have been swept along by something so patently ridiculous, and not just in terms of national political leadership, but also in terms of an extraordinary military campaign that cost the lives of so many millions of people across the world. This book is also a reminder and a warning to all who read it about the greatest horror of the twentieth century, the mass murder of the weak and innocent, Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, Catholics and others, marginalised and demonised by a state propaganda machine.

This history of the SS is a worthy new entry into the Second World War canon, and sheds valuable light on one of the most twisted and wicked organisations created by the third Reich.

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