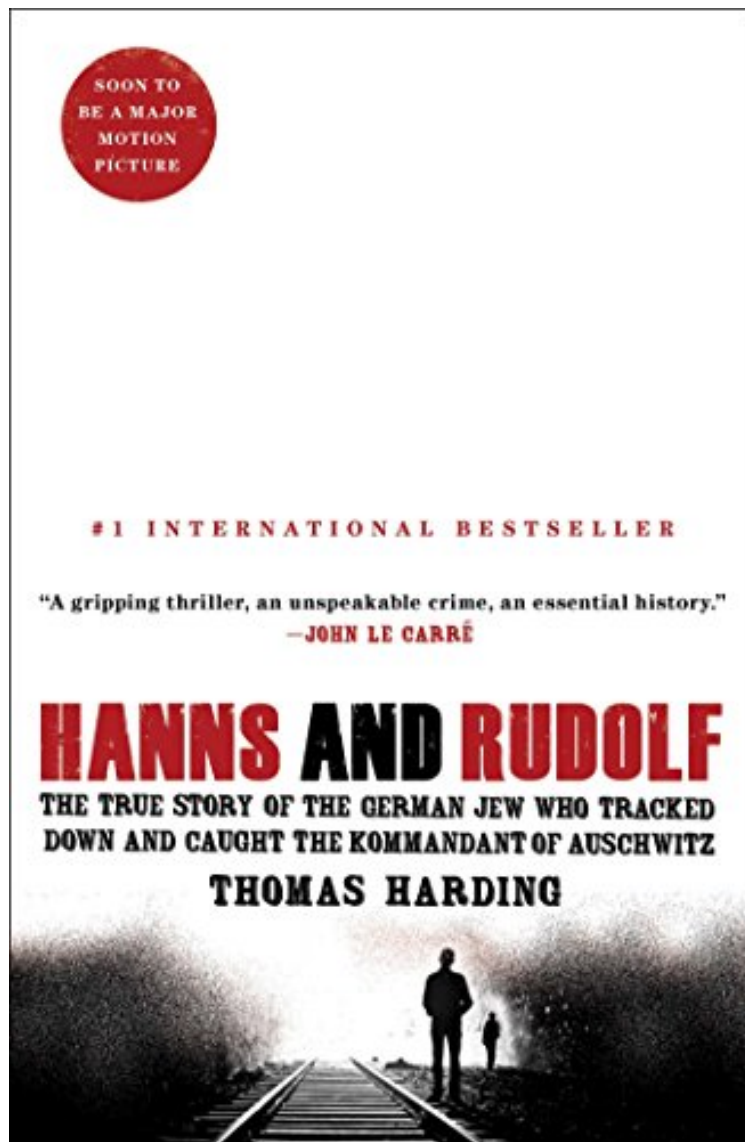


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Hanns and Rudolf: The True Story of the German Jew Who Tracked Down and Caught the Kommandant of Auschwitz

Thomas Harding

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#586449 in Books Thomas Harding 2014-09-23 2014-09-23 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.37 x .90 x 5.50l, .0 #File Name: 1476711852368 pages Hanns and Rudolf The True Story of the German Jew Who Tracked Down and Caught the Kommandant of Auschwitz | File size: 35.Mb

Thomas Harding : Hanns and Rudolf: The True Story of the German Jew Who Tracked Down and Caught the Kommandant of Auschwitz before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hanns and Rudolf: The True Story of the German Jew Who Tracked Down and Caught the Kommandant of Auschwitz:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Compelling, factual, detailed and utterly absorbing

By Allen Smalling
Two sons of Germany, born with the 20th Century. One, Hanns Alexander, was cosmopolitan, affluent, urbane, urban (Berlin) and liberal Jewish. Although he and his twin brother were the class cut-ups, they could look forward to stepping into the family's banking business as adults. The other, Rudolf Hoess, was small-town (Baden-Baden), Catholic, conservative, and destined to become a Priest. But then Rudolf's hated and feared father died, and after that Germany was plunged into the Great Depression. Then the Nazi Party came to power in 1933 and the whole country was upended, tossing these two young men into very different life courses than they could possibly have imagined as boys. In the course of a very few years the Alexander family had to give up its German holdings and escape as refugees to the U.K.; and while Rudolf at first was drawn to an agrarian reform movement, he later took up with the Nazis and advanced so well that he was made commandant of Auschwitz, the most hated and feared of all the Third Reich's death camps.

HANNS AND RUDOLF is the brilliantly told story of these two disparate men and how the hunted, Hanns, after World War II became the hunter who dedicated his life to bringing Rudolf Hoess to justice. Author Thomas Harding, a descendant of the Alexander family, narrates his story precisely and factually, without excessive background or stylistic glitz. The result is a relatively fast, and very absorbing nonfiction book that anyone who has an interest in this period should pick up and read. This is one of those "international best-sellers" truly worthy of the name, and I for one am very glad it came to my attention through an discussion thread.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. superb history, admirably told

By John E. Drury
With admirable objectivity strengthened with deep research, Thomas Hardings Hanns and Rudolf is the fascinating well told story of the 1946 capture of Rudolf Hss, the Kommandant of Auschwitz by Hanns Alexander, the authors great uncle, on a small farm near the German Danish border. Hardings book, while laudably personal, never preachy, hews to the facts and records by drawing not only on the life of Hss but on the life of Alexander, a twin, whose brother, Paul, fought in the war as well. In a book about the absence of, and the denial of humanity, of monstrous deeds by humans against humans, Harding cleverly and artfully makes the parallel of lives of both Hanns and Rudolf about the complexities and compassions in "our humanity."

The book has a superb map in the beginning, telling photos and a fine bibliography. This is the second book by Thomas Harding , read and reviewed; the first, being The House by the Lake.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Two lives and the banality of evil

By Errol Levine
This highly-readable and interesting book by Thomas Harding relates the interesting parallel stories of Hanns Alexander and Rudolf Hss. Hanns Alexander, who was a great uncle of the author, left Germany in 1936 as a teenager with his family to escape anti-Semitic persecution. Rudolf Hss was Kommandant of the Auschwitz Extermination camp. According to Hss's later testimony at the Nuremberg trial of the major Nazi War criminals, at least one million victims were exterminated at Auschwitz by gassing and burning, and at least another half-million succumbed to starvation and disease. The victims were mostly Jews from all over occupied Europe but they also included Russians, Poles and Roma. Mr. Harding presents the stories of Hanns and Rudolf in alternating chapters. This changes after the end of the war when these two individuals met under extraordinary circumstances. Then they are both included in the same chapters.

After reaching England, Hanns Alexander almost immediately enlisted in the British military becoming part of the Pioneer Corps which consisted mainly of foreign migrants such as himself. His service to his adopted country gradually got him promoted through the ranks. Towards the end of the war, he was sent to Europe and because of his fluency in both English and German, he was assigned the tasks of hunting down those who had been designated as war criminals by the Allies. His first major capture was that of Gustav Simon, the notorious Gauleiter of Luxembourg.

Rudolf Hss originated from a farming family. He had an abusive father and learned to obey authority figures absolutely and without question from a very early age. He joined the Nazi party at an early stage of its evolution and became a protégé of sorts of the notorious Heinrich Himmler. He received his training in the management of prisoners at the Dachau concentration camp near Munich. Hss prided himself on his efficiency in the management of detainees as a result of which Himmler tasked him with setting up the Auschwitz camp in Upper Silesia which was a part of Poland that was annexed by the Third Reich. Hss's efficiency was such that the camp rapidly enlarged and received its first assignment of Jews in 1942. Hss in his striving for efficiency realized that Hitler and Himmler's intention to annihilate European Jewry could not be achieved by murders of small groups of victims. He was therefore instrumental in promoting the use of the poison gas Zyklon B in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Hss was a hands-on Kommandant. He often witnessed the death agonies of victims through a small peephole in the door to the main gas chamber. He was recalled for a while in 1943 to serve at a desk job at the Concentration Camp Inspectorate adjacent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. However, after the German invasion of Hungary in 1944, Himmler perceived a need for greater efficiency at Auschwitz because of the imminent deportation there of the large and hitherto untouched Jewish population of Hungary. Therefore, Hss, as a known specialist in mass extermination, was transferred back to Auschwitz where he personally supervised the murder of at least four hundred thousand Hungarian Jews. He clearly enjoyed his work as shown from a smiling group photograph with other camp personnel including Dr. Mengele.

The paths of Hss and Alexander converged after the German surrender. Hss had fled to northern Germany where he lived on a farm close to the Danish border under an assumed name. There he was tracked down by Hanns Alexander and arrested. After his arrest, Hss gave testimony at the Nuremberg trials of the Nazi bigwigs including Goring, Ribbentrop and Hess. He provided the first real testimony

of the methods used to perpetrate the Nazi's Final Solution. Hss was subsequently handed over to the Polish government which tried him and sentenced him to death by hanging. Mr. Harding's book makes for very gripping reading. However, it has an almost surreal quality about it. We learn that Hoss and his wife Hedwig and their children lived in a luxuriously-appointed villa at Auschwitz. Hedwig loved camp life and wished that it would go on forever! The Hss family loved taking photographs and the photographs of them relaxing during Hss's leisure time are amazing considering what was happening nearby. Even though the main Auschwitz crematorium was just over the yard wall from the villa, Hoss claimed implausibly that his wife was unaware of what was happening until a visiting official spilled the beans during a conversation. This was despite the fact that the smell of burning flesh spread far and wide over the surrounding countryside. Hanns Alexander emerges from the book as a colorful character who was grateful for being given refuge by his adopted country and who quite rightfully detested the country of his birth for all that had been done and countenanced by his fellow Germans. The main value of the book lies in its depiction of Hss and his mentality based on the author's review of Hss's correspondence after his detention and his autobiography written while in a Polish prison and entitled "Commandant at Auschwitz Rudolf Hoess." Hannah Arendt had used the famous phrase the "banality of evil" to describe Adolph Eichmann during his trial in Jerusalem. However, as Deborah Lipstadt and others have made clear Eichmann was not a simple clerk in mass murder but was an enthusiastic participant and innovator in the mass murder of European Jewry. The phrase "banality of evil," seems more fitting as a description for Hss. He was very proud of his efficiency in running Auschwitz and seems to have regarded it as being like any ordinary factory except that its end product was millions of dead bodies. All this information has been conveyed previously in statistical and historical terms in such magisterial works as Saul Friedlander's "The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945." However, Mr. Harding's contribution is important and possibly unique because it shows us the mind of a Nazi mass murderer, such as it was, and therefore puts a human face on the Holocaust. This excellent book makes a major part of the Holocaust, namely the actual process of extermination, accessible to the average person in a very readable form. Mr. Harding has succeeded in providing a gripping nonfiction psychological thriller. It is not pleasant reading but I think it is a valuable resource for those wishing to know more about this dreadful period in world history.

WINNER OF THE WINGATE PRIZE The compelling, untold story of the man who brought one of Nazi Germany's most notorious war criminals to justice fascinates and shocks (The Washington Post). May 1945. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the first British War Crimes Investigation Team is assembled to hunt down the senior Nazi officials responsible for the greatest atrocities the world has ever seen. One of the lead investigators is Lieutenant Hanns Alexander, a German Jew who is now serving in the British Army. Rudolf Hss is his most elusive target. As Kommandant of Auschwitz, Hss not only oversaw the murder of more than one million men, women, and children; he was the man who perfected Hitler's program of mass extermination. Hss is on the run across a continent in ruins, the one man whose testimony can ensure justice at Nuremberg. Hanns and Rudolf reveals for the very first time the full, exhilarating account of Hss's capture, an encounter with repercussions that echo to this day. Moving from the Middle Eastern campaigns of World War I to bohemian Berlin in the 1920s to the horror of the concentration camps and the trials in Belsen and Nuremberg, it tells the story of two German men, one Jewish, one Catholic whose lives diverged, and intersected, in an astonishing way. This is one of those true stories that illuminates a small justice in the aftermath of the Holocaust, an event so huge and heinous that there can be no ultimate justice (New York Daily News).

Thomas Harding has written a book of two intersecting lives: His uncle, a German Jew and potential Nazi victim, and Rudolf Hss, Kommandant of Auschwitz. In a neat historical irony, his uncle became a British officer who tracked down war criminals, including one of the worst mass murderers. A fascinating account, with chunks of new information, about one of history's darkest chapters. (Richard Breitman, Author of *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and The Final Solution* and Editor-in-chief of the U.S. Holocaust Museum's *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*.) This important and moving book describes the unlikely intersection of two very different lives that of Hanns Alexander, the son of a prosperous German family in Berlin who became a refugee in London in the 1930s and Rudolf Hss, the Kommandant of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. Well-researched and grippingly written it provides a unique insight into the fate of Germany under National Socialism. (Antony Polonsky, Albert Abramson Professor of Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Brandeis University) "Thomas Harding's Hanns and Rudolf not only declines to forget, but challenges and defies the empty sententiousness characteristic of those who privately admit to being tired of hearing about the Holocaust. In this electrifying account of how a morally driven British Jewish soldier pursues and captures and brings to trial the turntail Kommandant of Auschwitz, Thomas Harding commemorates (and, for the tired, revivifies) a ringing Biblical injunction: Justice, justice, shalt thou pursue". (Cynthia Ozick) "Outstanding, outstanding, outstanding! I was riveted to the text. Thomas Harding writes superbly, the storyline is better than any contrived mystery, and a compelling part of history. I see a movie here....because while there is almost a saturation of Holocaust books and movies, this is most compelling because it is about PEOPLE, the deranged Nazi who didn't give any thought to what he was doing and murdered in cold blood and the German Jewish

refugee, a charming but rather regular fella, who got caught up in a history-making capture that turned the course of the Nuremberg trials." (Rabbi Dr. Stuart Altshuler, Belsize Square Synagogue)A remarkable book: thoughtful, compelling and quite devastating in its humanity. Thomas Hardings account of these two extraordinary men goes straight to the dark heart of Nazi Germany. (Keith Lowe, author of Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II)"A fascinating, well-crafted book, entwining two biographies for an unusual and illuminating approach to the history of the Third Reich, its most heinous crime and its aftermath." (Roger Moorhouse, author of Killing Hitler and Berlin at War)"This fascinating book, based on the gripping story of one mans unrelenting pursuit of Rudolf Hss in his search for justice, confirms my belief that much of the most important knowledge of the Holocaust, comes from the personal accounts of those involved. Hanns and Rudolf vividly brings to life, not only the impact of Hitlers anti-Semitic policies on the authors German Jewish family, forced to flee Berlin in the 1930s; but shows how an ordinary German farmer became one of the most feared and notorious war criminals in history, implementing with chilling efficiency the extermination of over a million Jews in Auschwitz. As awareness of the full horror of these dark years continues to advance, this book fills a unique and vital role." (Lyn Smith, author of Forgotten Voices and lecturer in International Politics at the Open University)"Its climax as thrilling as any wartime adventure story, Hanns and Rudolf is also a moral inquiry into an eternal question: what makes a man turn to evil? Closely researched and tautly written, this book sheds light on a remarkable and previously unknown aspect of the Holocaust - the moment when a Jew and one of the highest-ranking Nazis came face to face and history held its breath." (Jonathan Freedland)"This is a stunning book. Rudolf Hss' descent into the horror of mass murder is both chilling and deeply disturbing. It is also an utterly compelling and exhilarating account of one man's extraordinary hunt for the Kommandant of the most notorious death camp of all, Auschwitz-Birkenau." (James Holland, author of The Battle of Britain: Five Months That Changed History; MayOctober 1940)"Only at his great uncles funeral in 2006 did Thomas Harding discover that Hanns Alexander, whose Jewish family fled to Britain from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, hunted down and captured Rudolf Hss, the ruthless commandant of Auschwitz, at the end of WW2. By tracing the lives of these two men in parallel until their dramatic convergence in 1946, Harding puts the monstrous evil of the Final Solution in two specific but very different human contexts. The result is a compelling book full of unexpected revelations and insights, an authentic addition to our knowledge and understanding of this dark chapter in European history. No-one who starts reading it can fail to go on to the end." (David Lodge)"Written with the verve of a writer and the sure touch of an historian, Thomas Harding's Hanns and Rudolf is a fascinating, fresh, and compelling work of history." (Jay Winik, author of April 1865 and The Great Upheaval)Hanns Rudolf packs an extraordinary punch about the nature of evil, told in a cool, dispassionate voice. As these two lives wrap around each other, the quality of evil becomes ever clearer, and more shocking. (Rabbi Julia Neuberger, Baroness Neuberger, West London Synagogue of British Jew)"The protagonists' individual choices and family backgrounds give this biographical history a unique, intimate quality" (Kirkus)"A gripping thriller, an unspeakable crime, an essential history." (John Le Carr)"Thomas Harding has shed intriguing new light on the strange poison of Nazism, and one of its most lethal practitioners... Meticulously researched and deeply felt." (Ben Macintyre The Times, Book of the Week)"Fascinating and moving...This is a remarkable book, which deserves a wide readership." (Max Hastings The Sunday Times)"Written with admirable restraint... [Hanns and Rudolf] fascinates and shocks." (Evan Thomas Washington Post)About the AuthorThomas Harding is a former documentary filmmaker and journalist who has written for the Financial Times and The Guardian, among other publications. He founded a television station in Oxford, England, and for many years was an award-winning publisher of a newspaper in West Virginia. Hanns and Rudolf is his first book. He lives in Hampshire, England.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Hanns and Rudolf PROLOGUE ALEXANDER. Howard Harvey, lovingly known as Hanns, passed away quickly and peacefully on Friday, 23rd December. Cremation on Thursday, 28th December, 2.30 p.m. at Hoop Lane, Golders Green Crematorium, West Chapel. No flowers please. Donations, if desired, to North London Hospice. Daily Telegraph, December 28, 2006 Hanns Alexanders funeral was held on a cold and rainy afternoon three days after Christmas. Considering the weather, and the timing, the turnout was impressive. More than three hundred people packed into the chapel. The congregation arrived early, and in full force, grabbing all the seats. Fifteen people from Hannss old bank, Warburgs, were in attendance, including the former and current CEO. His close friends were there, as was the extended family. Hannss wife of sixty years, Ann, sat in the front row, along with the couples two daughters, Jackie and Annette. The synagogues cantor recited the Kaddish, the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead. He then paused. Looking down upon Ann and her two daughters, he delivered a short sermon, saying how sorry he was for their loss and how Hanns would be missed by the entire community. When he had finished, two of Hannss nephews stood to give a joint eulogy. Much was familiar: Hanns growing up in Berlin. The Alexanders fleeing the Nazis and moving to England. Hanns fighting with the British Army. His career as a low-level banker. His commitment to the family and his half-century of schlepping for the synagogue. But there was one detail that caught nearly everyone off guard: that at the wars end Hanns had tracked down the Kommandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Hss. This piqued my interest. For Hanns Alexander was my grandmothers brother, my great-uncle. Growing up, we had been cautioned not to ask questions about the war. Now I learned that Hanns may have been a Nazi hunter. The idea that this nice but unremarkable man had been a

Second World War hero seemed unlikely. Presumably, this was just another of Hanns tales. For he was a bit of a rogue and a prankster, much respected for sure, but also a man who liked to play tricks on his elders and tell dirty jokes to us youngsters, and who, if truth be told, was prone to exaggeration. After all, if he had really been a Nazi hunter, wouldn't it have been mentioned in his obituary? I decided to find out if it was true. * We live in an age when the waters are closing over the history of the Second World War, when we are about to lose the last remaining witnesses, when all that is left are accounts retold so many times that they have lost their original veracity. And so we are left with caricatures: Hitler and Himmler as monsters, Churchill and Roosevelt as conquering warriors, and millions of Jews as victims. Yet Hanns Alexander and Rudolf Hss were men with many sides to their characters. As such, this story challenges the traditional portrayal of the hero and the villain. Both men were adored by their families and respected by their colleagues. Both grew up in Germany in the early decades of the twentieth century and, in their way, loved their country. At times, Rudolf Hss, the brutal Kommandant, displayed a capacity for compassion. And the behavior of his pursuer, Hanns Alexander, was not always above suspicion. This book is therefore a reminder of a more complex world, told through the lives of two men who grew up in parallel and yet opposing German cultures. It is also an attempt to follow the courses of the two men's lives, and to understand how they came to meet. And the attempt raises difficult questions. How does a man become a mass murderer? Why does a person choose to confront his persecutors? What happens to the families of such men? Is revenge ever justified? Even more, this story is an argument that when the worlds of these two men collided, modern history was changed. The testimony that emerged proved particularly significant in the war crimes trials at the end of the Second World War: Hss was the first senior Nazi to admit to executing Himmler and Hitler's Final Solution. And he did so in great and shocking detail. This testimony, unprecedented in its description of human evil, drove the world to swear that such unspeakable atrocities would never again be repeated. From this point forward, those suffering from extreme injustice could dare to hope for intervention. It is also the story of surprise. In my comfortable north London upbringing, Jews and I am one were cast as the victims of the Holocaust, not its avengers. I had never really questioned that stereo-type until I fell into this story. Or, to be more accurate, it fell to me. This is a Jew-fighting-back story. And while there are some well-known examples of resistance uprisings in the ghettos, revolts in the camps, attacks from the woods such examples are few. Each should be celebrated, as an inspiration to others. Even when faced with profound brutality, hope for survival and perhaps revenge is still possible. This is a story pieced together from histories, biographies, archives, family letters, old tape recordings and interviews with survivors. And it is a story that was, for reasons that I think will become clear, never fully told by the men at its heart: Hanns and Rudolf.