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Waffen SS: The Encyclopedia



Synopsis

World War II spawned some of the most famous - and infamous - fighting organizations the world has ever known. None was more feared by its battlefield foes or more hated by political enemies of the Nazi regime than the Waffen-SS. Six decades after the last SS unit capitulated or was annihilated, the facts about many aspects of this organization are still shrouded in legend and half-truth. Loathed by many as a criminal organization, yet admired by some for the esprit, resolve, and valor of its component units and individuals, the Waffen-SS was unarguably a highly-complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, unique among the military organizations of the world. Marc Rikmenspoel, author of *Soldiers of the Waffen-SS: Many Nations, One Motto*, has crafted the ultimate reference for those trying to understand the intensely controversial and complicated nature of the Waffen-SS. A comprehensive overview that will be useful to historians, buffs, wargamers, and re-enactors alike, no matter what your predisposition to the Waffen-SS, you will learn a great deal from this book. The book includes a concise history of every one of the major fighting formations of the Waffen-SS (those designated as "divisions"). Sections include: * Formations * Structure of Divisions * Germans * Germanics * Non-Germans and Non-Germanics * Leading Personalities * Weapons * Misconceptions and Controversies * Weapons Tables

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Customer Reviews

Marc J. Rikmenspoel's *Waffen-SS Encyclopedia* is a tour-de-force piece of military history. Certainly encyclopedic in content but written with a literary flair that makes it readable - this is not *Encyclopedia Britannica der Waffen-SS*! Rikmenspoel wastes few words in the 285 pages of *Waffen-SS Encyclopedia*. For example, right at the outset he states that his purpose is not to

"rehash, cut or paste material from previously published works to create a new volume on the subject", but rather to provide in one work a source of valuable and accurate information related to five basic topics: 1) the order of battle for various Waffen-SS formations; 2) the personnel makeup of these units - with added emphasis on "Germanic" formations; 3) summaries of some of the more notorious and decorated leaders of the Waffen-SS; 4) generalized and specialized weapons usage in various units; and 5) an introduction to some common misconceptions and controversial topics associated with the Waffen-SS. Rikmenspoel hits a home run on all counts! The most encyclopedic portion of the book is the first section dedicated to the order of battle for various units (pp. 1-58) and structure of Waffen-SS divisions (pp. 59-82). As is inherent in this type of information, the facts are the facts. Rikmenspoel doesn't clutter the facts with a lot of non-sense drivel. Yet, he provides enough text to make this section readable. In addition to the dry facts (unit makeup, history of command, etc.) the author provides a synopsis of combat history and organization-reorganization of these combat units. These histories are expanded and tied together textually in later sections, thus tying in the "dry" matter (basic facts) with the "meaty" matter (larger stories). The section on weapon usage (pp. 235-250) is also a bit dry textually but provides ample information. Each of these encyclopedic sections is further supplemented for the reader with great photographs and illustrations - again not a la Encyclopedia Britannica, but tastefully and not wastefully. The second and third sections of the book provide the most gripping prose. The second section is divided between discussion of Germanic (pp. 83-180) and non-German/non-Germanic units (pp. 181-194) of the Waffen-SS, with the first section clearly providing the most interesting fodder for both the author and reader. Rikmenspoel has more than competently melded an information-rich treatise on the subject with minimal use of space and words. This in no way should imply that the author cut corners or did minimal research. Quite the contrary, Rikmenspoel simply condenses material to its minimal components that are necessary and sufficient for reader understanding and education. Few authors can take such information-dense material from disparate sources, rework it, and put it to paper in a readable prose that maintains the content sufficiently. Rikmenspoel can and has! Another perfect example of Rikmenspoel's talent is the third section of the book that is dedicated to some of the leading personalities of the Waffen-SS. Rikmenspoel chooses to deal not with just the most well known personalities (in fact he doesn't give space to some that might be expected based on previously published works), but with men who "deserve" to be discussed in an encyclopedia of the Waffen-SS - armed combat units. In brief, Rikmenspoel presents short histories of the major military leaders of the Waffen-SS, generally those most competent as soldier-leaders and sculptors of the armed SS, not simply those with the most notoriety. Again, this is a unique talent. Certainly some

will feel that Rikmenspoel has "slighted" some personalities by not discussing them, but his narrative of lesser-known, but not lesser deserving leaders is worth more than "rehashing of previous works" (as the author himself states in his Introduction). The last section of the book is by far the "hot potato" of Waffen-SS Encyclopedia as it deals with issues Rikmenspoel labels "misconceptions" and "controversies." Anytime an author attempts to examine the crimes of the Nazi regime and the role of the Waffen-SS he/she rides a razor edge. Rikmenspoel does not attempt to condemn or apologize for war crimes or the roles of Waffen-SS men. Rather he attempts to point out how historians and students alike can and should approach the subject objectively and with the proper mindset to make logical and historically accurate assessments. This section of the book could certainly be expanded further in a second volume - one can only hope! If all of these things weren't enough, Rikmenspoel and Aberjona Press have provided the reader with an extra bonus in the form of an annotated bibliography. The author gives a short synopsis of positive/negative attributes of works used to research the book. Too few authors provide this kind of insight into their own thoughts. Although clearly a serious historian, Rikmenspoel also gives away what is obviously a wonderful sense of humor in the annotation to one of his previous works (Soldiers of the Waffen-SS: Many Nations, One Motto)...you'll just have to pick up Waffen-SS Encyclopedia to see for yourself! Waffen-SS Encyclopedia is a 5 star book from both the perspective of content and readability. Aberjona Press has yet another "classic" on its hands, and with Rikmenspoel, another talented historian in their stable. This book should be on the shelf of every serious student of WWII history with even a passing interest in the Waffen-SS.

Aberjona Press' "The Waffen-SS Encyclopedia" is a revised addition of "Waffen-SS The Encyclopedia" which was written and published for a military book club in 2002. With the "Waffen-SS Encyclopedia" author Marc J. Rikmenspoel tries to do what many authors before have tried- to write a thorough overview of the Waffen-SS. This is not an easy task, the Waffen-SS might be one of the most complex fighting force in modern history. Long before Rikmenspoel George Stein tried to write an overview of the Waffen-SS, he did a good job but his book contained a lot of mistakes and even some consistent myths that have surrounded this organization. In the Encyclopedia Rikmenspoel tries to have as accurate information as possible and his analysis are well-grounded. The strength of Rikmenspoel's book is the reliable and accurate information that is presented. Surely, many books have been written about the Waffen-SS but unfortunately old errors have been repeated without the authors doing the necessary checking of facts. With that in mind Rikmenspoel presents a whole chapter about the misconceptions and inaccuracies that have surrounded the Waffen-SS.

This he do a great work with. What I miss in Rikmenspoel's book is some tables with figures and statistics. This would have been very usable and if presented in the right way these can often alter an inaccurate view of something. For example it would have been interesting to see some statistics about awards and such recieved by members of the Waffen-SS. There's also a part about the weapons of the Waffen-SS which feels somewhat superfluous. There are plenty of books which goes into the depth of that subject and very little differed between the Waffen-SS and the regular German army when it came to weapons, vehicles, equipment and so on. A chapter about uniforms, ranks and insignia would have been more suitable as the Waffen-SS had to develop these from scratch rather than relying on old traditions like for example the German army did. At the end of the book there's an annotated bibliography where Rikmenspoel presents more or less all books connected to the Waffen-SS that have been written. Unit histories, bibliographies, photo books, all sorts of topics concerning the Waffen-SS. With a few sentences about each title Rikmenspoel gives a good presentation of the literature written about this field of research. The author stays objective throughout the book. He focus on accurate information and keeps the focus on the basic things. He has done a good work and I personally believe that this book has the potential to be the leading reference book on the Waffen-SS for many years to come. I would like to recommend "The Waffen-SS Encyclopedia" to anyone who has an interest in this organization. No matter if the reader has read many, few or no books on the subject before she will find this book very useful.

Ok, this is the last review until I finish a few more books.....anyone got any titles, LOLOK, I found this book really well done and to the point. I would say it is more along the research type of book, as it is NOT a memoir or not really a story. The chapters cover everything I would want to know about the SS. SS units, weapons used, Bio's on major characters (brief but with good information, and a good read). How the SS DIV were broken down and of course where the Divisions fought, and how they ended the war. One of the chapters covers all the countries that supplied volunteers to the German elite units and has a break down of wounded/killed and what happened to the soldiers at wars end. This is a really good read in my mind. Most of the photos have not been seen by me. I found myself going back to this book to re-read certain chapters to help explain other books. I know I will be using this book to compliment later books. Highly recommended as a research book.

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