



## Escape from Sobibor

*Richard Rashke*

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Poignant in its honesty and grim in its details, Escape from Sobibor offers stunning proof of resistance - in this case successful - by victims of the Holocaust. The smallest of the extermination camps operated by Nazi Germany during World War II, Sobibor also was the scene of the war's biggest prisoner escape. Richard Rashke's interviews with eighteen of those who survived provide the foundation for this volume. He also draws on books, articles, and diaries to make vivid the camp, the uprising, and the escape. In the afterword to this reprint, Rashke relates how the Polish government in October 1993 observed the fiftieth anniversary of the escape and how it has beautified the site since a film based on his book appeared on Polish television.

## Escape from Sobibor Details

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Author : Richard Rashke

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## From Reader Review Escape from Sobibor for online ebook

### **Alexandra says**

12/8/17 \$1.13 for Kindle.

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### **Lisa Vegan says**

Wrenching and yet inspirational book about Sobibor, a Nazi death camp. This was not one of the concentration camps but a death camp, (one of only 4 - along with Treblinka, Belzec and Chelmno.) Here, there were not large numbers of Jews kept alive to work but only a handful from each transport. Just enough prisoners were kept alive to keep the camp running; the vast majority were murdered immediately upon arrival. This is the story of the inmates' plan, escape, and what happened next. An important book as not much was known of Sobibor before this account. Author interviewed the survivors to get the facts. Shows how even in hellish circumstances, some people can be incredibly brave and resilient.

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### **Doreen Petersen says**

What a moving book! I still cry and honor those who were killed in all the death camps. One would think after learning of this history we would never let history repeat itself but alas we have not. Shame on us.

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### **Meaghan says**

This is a brilliant, heartbreakin book and put together very well. It's a non-fiction story about a real event, but the way it's written, it reads like a Frederick Forsyth novel. If you didn't know it was non-fiction you wouldn't guess from reading it. Yet the author also includes endnotes where he explains what sources he uses, and how he dealt with conflicting sources, and his opinions as to what was reliable and what wasn't -- just like in a regular history book.

I read this book feeling a lot of rage and frustration. At the Allies mostly, who knew perfectly well what was going on and were united in their indifference to it. At the Poles, for being so brutal and inhuman to their fellow countrymen, to the point where they were as dangerous to Jews as the Nazis themselves if not more so.

Even after their escape from Sobibor, things did not really improve for the survivors sometimes until years had passed. One group of three were hidden in a farmer's barn and he gradually milked them of all the money and gold they had, then ambushed and shot them in their hiding place. (Two of them survived the ambush by playing dead and then escaped, wounded; a third was killed outright.) A couple who had met and fell in love in Sobibor were hidden by a somewhat nicer farmer who also charged them a bundle for it but did not kill them. This couple married and had a baby right after the war...only to see it die a few months later, at sea, as they were on a ship home to Holland. One of the leaders of the uprising, Leon Feldhander, made it back to Lublin and settled in his own apartment...only to be murdered there by anti-Semitic Poles after

liberation.

Given all they went through, I'm amazed that the survivors Rashke interviewed for his book had come out as well as they did, psychologically speaking. The last part of the book, where he describes tracking down these people and interviewing them, kind of dragged a bit, but I still think it was a valuable addition to the book.

This is definitely one of the best Holocaust books I've read. And I think the story was told just in time. I'd be surprised if there were any Sobibor survivors left today, and even most Holocaust researchers know very little about the camp. But this is a story worth knowing.

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### **Nancy says**

How many Holocaust books can you read before you cease to be shocked at human behavior? I thought I had reached my threshold yet found myself arguing with a casual acquaintance that they were not "just following orders," as the story goes. This brand of cruelty and impromptu games of torture cannot be taught. It was a mindset rather than chain of command.

Regardless of the horrors described, I was able and willing to disconnect the mental images I could have conjured. Perhaps in a minute way, this is how the survivors were able to move ahead in life. Eventually I could not read so passively.

The first 200 pages set the stage. Characters are introduced and points of view are offered. They are generally consistent and I remembered why SCHINDLER'S LIST was so poignant, painful and exhausting. Yet the reader understands that the recollections are by those very few who survived. Be forewarned that it is gut wrenching.

The movie on the escape from Sobibor ends at the escape. Some survived and told any who would listen. I think what bothered me and sickened me so much was the statistics I did in my head. Six million Jews died during WWII. Three million came from a small country called Poland. A very underestimated death tally came in at 250,000 at Sobibor. The number is probably much higher. Yet the author raises interesting theories I can't discount. History is not only written by the victors but also by the Germans. Sobibor's story is told because of survivors. What other camps had revolts and escapes yet were killed in the act. Worse, betrayed by their countrymen and murdered for their clothes are a bit of gold.

Therein lies the great difference between this and other books. Another 100 pages details the following year until the Russian army liberates them. They are hidden, beaten, robbed and killed even after escaping a death camp. Anti-Semitism running far past prejudice and lingering on baseless hatred. If over half escaped, why are only 46 accounted for?

At last the author tugs deeply at my humanity as he recounts the interactions he has with the survivors. Long before the Internet, the author travels and follows leads, eventually culminating at Sobibor. Although the camp was destroyed and evidence partially buried, the survivors still live in Sobibor. It is their reference point decades later. That is when it became real to me. Today they carry the horrors and even hatred around with them. They left the camp but the camp never left them. They still live within its walls at night when they dream.

The story is sad and stirring yet I appreciated the follow up forty years later. I also found myself wondering

what baggage I allow to color my lenses and how can I allow my experiences to be my prison camp. I have no Sobibor as my frame of reference. Yet so much can be learned by the power of hope.

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### **Charlene Intriago says**

It took me a LONG time to finish this book. It is so intense. I had to step back from it for awhile, read some other stuff, and then go back. I almost abandoned it but I'm glad I didn't. The last few chapters were sobering. The author interviewed the survivors which involved him visiting several countries to do so. He also went to Sobibor with one of the survivors and walked through what remains of the camp. His description of that visit was what made the book well worth the read for me.

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### **Michael says**

I have read any books regarding the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis against Jews and other groups. This book described the brutality and hatred of many Poles also toward the Jews. It is difficult to attribute these crimes solely to the Nazis. There were hundreds of concentration camps that were used to kill, torture, and exploit the Jews and others deemed unworthy by the Nazis. To have such a vast network of horrors required more than just the Nazi criminals to run them. It is unbelievable that the general populations of Germany, Poland, and other countries were unaware of the fate of the Jews inside their own borders. This book captured the humanity of the Jewish captives surrounded by people who hated them. Descriptions of the torture and brutality as witnessed by the survivors was compelling. The survivors interviewed were forever changed and haunted by what they endure. Their escape and hardships suffered after their escape was also compelling. What makes this book so disturbing is that it is true and happened in the very recent past.

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### **Erin says**

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot....>

I owe my discovery of Richard Rashke's Escape from Sobibor to my father. He introduced me to the death camp in one of our notorious late night discussions and his account of operations within the compound and the subsequent uprising that took place there were so captivating that I took it upon myself to learn more about the remarkably obscure chapter of Operation Reinhard.

Rashke's was the first title Google turned up and thanks to Open Library, it was also freely available for download. I felt providence was on my side and I checked it out thinking myself well-prepared for the material it promised to address. A WWII junkie, I'd studied Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Theresienstadt and Ravensbrück in some detail and couldn't imagine the accounts of this camp being much different. It took only a few pages for me to realize how wrong that assumption had been.

Broken into three sections, the book is extraordinarily comprehensive. It covers the prisoners, their lives before transportation, life and death behind Sobibor's barbed wire, the soldiers, their duties, the planning phase of the uprising, the execution of the mass escape and the events that followed in the surrounding forests.

I spent almost a month wading through the accounts Rashke painstakingly recorded within these pages, but I don't regret a minute of it. I put the book aside several times to process and consider events as I discovered them, but the publication was never far from my mind. Fact is it dominated my imagination and challenged my perception in ways I hadn't expected when I first cracked it open. It put my brain into overdrive and I liked the depth and dimension it brought to the subject matter.

Exceedingly intense, the book itself is a brilliant blend of historic detail and raw human emotion. Poignant, powerful, unapologetic and oftentimes overwhelming, Escape From Sobibor is easily the best Holocaust book I've had fortune to pick up. A highly recommended and unique volume that deserves a place in every WWII library collection.

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### **Donna Brown says**

It's extremely difficult to look at a book like Escape from Sobibor with a critical eye. The usual concerns of characterisation, plot, setting etc don't come into play. These are facets that cannot be changed if the story is to be told accurately. Therefore, when I review a book like this I have two main considerations: 1) the quality of the writing, 2) the accuracy of the details.

Escape from Sobibor is related in a unique manner, almost as if it were a work of fiction. In this way we are introduced to the men and women whose stories form the basis of this incredible book. Richard Rashke has combined eye witness accounts with a wealth of research to provide a comprehensive account of life at Sobibor.

While I was impressed with Rashke's narrative, attention to detail and obvious thorough reading and research, I was equally impressed by his respect for the Sobibor survivors and the lengths he went to to try and avoid causing additional distress (above and beyond the clear distress recounting their experiences caused). It is clear he came to care very much about the book but – more importantly – about the people behind the story.

Escape from Sobibor is an incredible book. It tells some of the stories that must be told, that must never be buried or forgotten. There are millions of stories from the victims of the Holocaust that go unheard. We must make all the more effort to honour the voices that could share. Rashke does this beautifully.

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### **Cherry says**

As the survivors have said, if you were not a witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust, and in particular, in the death camps like Sobibor, it is impossible to understand. Even so, it is important that we are aware and that we try to understand.

This is a well-researched book offering the personal reports from survivors who managed to resist, escape and then either fight with partisans or hide until the Russians pushed the front lines past their hiding places. Then years later, these traumatized people were willing to relive their memories of these horrors in order to fight again to ensure that another generation would know the truth.

So many times, survivors of the Holocaust are asked if they believe it can happen again, and the response is

always a resounding YES. Humanity has shown that it can perform this type of atrocity and we have seen many mass murders, ethnic cleansings, genocides. Nothing on the same scale or industrialization, but the inhumanity and capacity for cruelty is still there.

These days, of course there is still anti-Semitism, and it seems to be on the rise again. The Jews are not the only people being systematically hated, though. With the influx of Muslims into Europe and the Americas over the past decades, there is now a new scapegoat and a new "other" for people to hate and fear. Continuing proxy wars and strife in the Middle East has of course increased the division and radicalized people on both sides. The supposedly rational, supposedly good and kind people of civilized nations are making the same suggestions of driving people out based on religion and ethnicity, are making the same sweeping accusations of criminality.

The same arguments that politicians made in the 40s in London and Washington, DC to excuse their rejection of Jewish refugees are being used to block Muslim refugees. The current situation cannot be compared in scope to the Holocaust, of course. There are no death camps, no gas chambers in Syria or Afghanistan. There is not an industry of death. But the arguments against helping people who are being killed by the thousands are the same. Fear of the other trumps any fellow feeling. As a populace, we still don't care about people who are dying somewhere else if we would have to share what we have with them to let them live.

I hate it when fantasy books or tv shows turn Nazis and especially Hitler into monsters, like in the tv series Grimm, where Hitler was a creature with super powers to manipulate the minds of hearers. This is an excuse, both for the people who imagined the horrors and for the people who participated or turned a blind eye to them. Humans did this. Regular people like you and me. Not monsters, just people. The Holocaust can happen again and it is our responsibility to inform ourselves and try to inform those around us, help people to understand that humanity has the capacity for great violence and evil. It happened once and it can happen again.

Books like this are important. I wish everyone would read this from start to finish -- even the epilogue is an important insight into the effects on the survivors and the next generation.

Just as a final note, I listened to the Audible audiobook version and the narrator was excellent and clearly made an effort to pronounce names and terms correctly whether they were German, Yiddish, Polish, Russian or Portuguese. The reader in an audiobook can ruin an excellent book if they do a poor job, but this reader enhanced the experience.

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### **Lori Spier says**

This is one of the hardest reviews I've ever written. The subject matter of the book (the extermination camp Sobibor in Eastern Poland) alone makes going "Yes! Wonderful!" just sound... off.

In all seriousness though, this is an excellent book. I'd heard of Sobibor before and read some books where the camp had been included in mini-chapter because, frankly, little is known about the camp. (Notably, Rashke's work also corrects many of the errors found in other books that cover Sobibor.) Extermination camps were where Jews were sent to die. Immediately. The fact that 300 Jews escaped from the camp is amazing. The fact that it was the largest escape from any camp - POW, work or extermination - makes the story astounding.

The story is told by survivors of the camp who were fortunate enough to be in on the escape and then to later successfully elude not only the Germans, but also the anti-Semitic Poles. It covers life prior to the ghettos and the camps, as well as life after the war ended.

The book is, by turns, compelling, horrifying, and saddening, but, over all of it, it is full of heroism, hope, courage and determination to live and to tell the world of what happened at Sobibor. You will come away from reading this book changed and shaken to your core.

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### **Veeral says**

Escape From Sobibor is my first Holocaust book in almost 5 years. After reading many books over the years on the topic, I decided to stop. I thought I had learned all the basic facts (and most of the history) about one of the most horrific atrocities ever committed.

Then why this book? To be honest, its title drew me in. The word escape in Escape from Sobibor gave me hope. The prospect of some prisoners escaping and actually surviving the Sobibor extermination camp made me think that the book would at least end on a good note.

Well, it did and it didn't. It did end on a good note as some did manage to escape the camp and survive the war and the Nazis, but on the other hand, even after escaping the camp, some survivors had to endure same amount of hardships at the hands of some Polish natives who gave them refuge, but with the calculation of profiting from their misfortune.

Over the years, I have thought many times what I would have done in a similar situation. Say, if I was a German and someone like Hitler came to power and started rounding up and ultimately mass murdering the Jews and other "unfit" people. I have thought long and hard about this. What if something like this happens in India, and someone starts murdering people of certain religion or ethnicity? Would I have the courage to oppose them? Or would I turn my face away and ignore what was happening around me? It's certain that I would never join or condone such acts. I would certainly speak out against them in the confines of my house. But that would not be enough. Not speaking out publicly and/or doing something about it is as good as silently supporting such acts. I am really ashamed to admit that I wouldn't actually risk the lives of my family members by publicly opposing such acts of tyranny. If they were safe somewhere else, then yes, I would join some Resistance group, but that really is a big "if".

These kind of thoughts have half-convinced me that acts like Holocaust could repeat themselves in the future. Yes, one could counter with the arguments about globalization and the way it has changed the world (at least the developed and most of the developing one). But I think, we as human beings have not changed much since we started murdering each other ages ago. One major shove could still hurl us into the abyss, and when that happens, majority of us would still think about "me and mine" while the rest of the world burns around us.

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### **A Serious Lover says**

In this updated version of Escape from Sobibor I am struck with how difficult it is for survivors of tragedy to

remember and bear witness and how difficult it is for those who record their testimony.

This was a wonderful blending of the first person accounts together with the personal histories of those giving testimony. As the Holocaust Survivors age it is of the greatest importance that their testimony be preserved.

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### **Bettie? says**

watch here.

Description: *Color The Sobibor Death Camp was the site of this heart-wrenching story set during World War II. The 600 Jewish laborers enslaved there longed to escape, but the camp commandant gave orders that for every prisoner that tried to escape, an equal number of those left behind would be executed. Knowing this, the prisoners will all have to escape together, or perish in Sobibor one by one.*

### **Sobibor archaeology**

No words, no rating. Keep marching lest we all end up in this dark, sick mirror.

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### **Chris says**

Disclaimer: I received a copy via Netgalley in exchange for a review.

Way back, in the 80s, television used to have movies, made for TV movies. Sometimes they were like the garbage that Lifetime puts on, but sometimes they were actually good. One of the good ones was about an escape from a Nazi Death Camp. I thought of it when I saw this title offered at Netgalley. It turns out this is the book the movie drew on.

Richard Rashke relates the determined revolt and escape of several prisoners of the Sobibor killing camp during the Holocaust. As a killing camp, Sobibor only had a small number of Jewish prisoners who were useful in a variety of ways, either to bury (dispose) of the dead, to sort the belongings of the dead, and to produce items of use to the camp or desired by the Nazis who ran it. Rashke starts the story with a brief introduction to Shlomo, a young man whose family was sent to the camp but who was pulled out of the gas chamber side because of his knowledge of working gold. He was able to save some of his family members, and only later found out what happened to the rest of his family, including his father, mother, and sister. The book is divided into three sections with a postscript/epilogue as well as afterword. The first section introduces the reader to the prisoners who were for the most part non-military and male. Women were in short supply and were not usually pulled out of those who sent to the gas chamber. The few expectations to the non military group are a bunch of Russians, including Russian Jews, who were in the Russian military and were sent to the camp (Russians were considered just a step above Jews). The prisoners, however, had been planning an escape long before the Russians were added to the camp. The first section doesn't over romanticize or heroize the prisoners, but instead makes them human flaws and all. Not all prisoners are detailed, but a core group including those who formed the central escape committee. Rashke not only details

their pre-war and wartime lives, but he also showcases what they did to survive as well as the hard choices and decisions that they had to make. Rashke also gives some description and information about the Nazis who ran the camp, the focus, however, is not the Nazi barbarity but the strength of the prisoners who keep their humanity, intelligence, and fight back. It is also on the struggle to get out information and to make the Allies publicized the information.

The second section of the book details the prisoner's escape into the surrounding forest. It includes a look at the relationships that develops between various prisoners such as Chaim and Selma as well as the escape itself. The third section details the time in the forest, who lives and who dies, what the others do once they escape. The afterword and epilogue includes an essay about Rashke and his interviewing of key members of the escape as well as his thoughts after the filming of the movie.

It should be noted that this is history told in novel like form, a format that I am not a huge fan of, and no doubt affects my rating of this book. It's more than a four but not quite a five simply due to the narrative choice. Rashke does tell a story and because of the holding back of the afterword, the reader is caught up in the fight for freedom and survives. The novel speaks to greater themes such as the idea of living free or dying. As well as the desire to live even as the world around you wishes you to die.

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