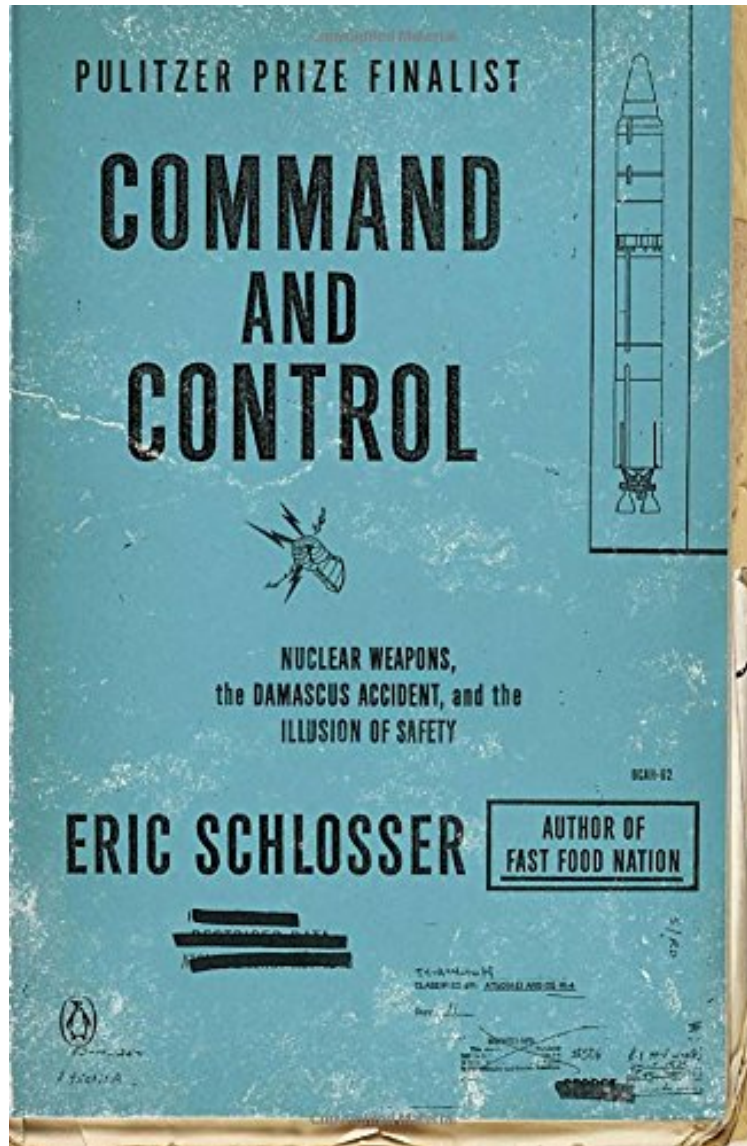


(Download) Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety

# Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety

*Eric Schlosser*

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**Eric Schlosser : Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety:

451 of 458 people found the following review helpful. Take it from one who was thereBy NightliteWhen Mr. Schlosser initially contacted me several years ago I was skeptical with respect to what his intentions were. Other stories and articles have been written about the incident at Damascus, AR. To many of us who experienced it on site that night it seemed there was no one who "got it right".To put to rest any concerns I had I contacted Al Childers after learning he had spoken to Mr. Schlosser. I have always had the highest regard for Al and his opinions; hence I participated in the project. After leaving Little Rock AFB we both were transferred to Vandenberg AFB and worked in the same building.I appreciate the integrity of Eric Schlosser who did what any good writer, or investigator, should do. He collected the facts and reported them, how refreshing is that in this era where so many run off and write, or report, half cocked. This entire book was researched in more detail than I ever imagined. Although I was there that night Mr. Schlosser reported things I didn't know simply because I didn't have the right or need.I have read several reviews in which the writers refer to the incident at Searcy, AR as being more serious. I would like to take this opportunity to simply say that while the loss of life is never to be taken lightly, the circumstances between these two accidents were as different as night and day. Sometimes it seems those writing the reviews forget that the Titan II at Searcy was not on alert meaning it had no warhead. The Titan II at Damascus was on full alert and armed. Mr. Schlosser got it right and was not swayed by the loss of life vs. the reason for his book!Several of my fellow airmen who went back on site that night have passed away. I hope we, as a nation, never forget what they did that night while the nation slept, unaware of the risks those men were taking. I hope their families will have an even greater appreciation for what they did to try and save a resource as well as each other's lives. Finally thank you Eric Schlosser for getting it right and Chuck Wilson for the countless hours he spent with me fact checking.D. Green78 of 82 people found the following review helpful. Accidents WILL happenBy EusebiusCommand and Control reads like a techno-thriller. Eric Schlosser takes the most destructive and scary nuclear accident in American history and uses it as a needle to thread a narrative about the sloppiness and inflexibility of America's nuclear weapons program that almost guaranteed that nuclear weapons accidents were fated to occur. That we haven't had a vast, deadly, nuclear weapons incident is due mainly to luck and God - and mostly to God according to some weapons analysts.The scariest incident occurred in 1980 when a Titan II missile exploded in its silo in Damascus, Arkansas (back when Bill Clinton was governor) and blew a live nuclear warhead over 200 yards into a ditch. He tells this story in detail through eyewitness accounts and good research and interrupts the story throughout the book with sections on nuclear weapons history, other incidents, and a superb explanation of American and Soviet nuclear strategies in the Cold War.Schlosser shows how ramshackle the atomic weapons program really was and how and why these weapons were eventually removed from civilian control under the Atomic Energy Commission and turned over to the military (and it's not because the military were more competent). He traces this history back from the 1940s right up to the Obama administration's lukewarm proposal to ban all nuclear weapons.He shows that we have come through some pretty tough stuff in atomic history and we are a little further from the brink - but we should be very afraid when we consider that India, Pakistan, China, and the other members of the nuclear club may have less ability or incentive to try and contain atomic weaponry as we finally learned to do.He doesn't preach or analyze. He is a brilliant reporter and has written a gripping and fascinating story. And it's all true.21 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Literally - a blast from the pastBy James KingAs a former Titan II Missile Facilities Technician, this was a page-turner for me. The author got it right in his descriptions of the attitudes and culture in the missile career field, the systems in use, even the music we listened to back then. It is rare for a military themed book written by a non-military writer to be so spot-on (IMO). The descriptions of some of the close calls we (we citizens) had with H-bombs are chilling, and the story about the Damascus Arkansas Titan II explosion was weaved in perfectly throughout the book. Time well spent.

\*\*The documentary *Command and Control*, directed by Robert Kenner, finds its origins in Eric Schlosser's book and continues to explore the little-known history of the management and safety concerns of America's nuclear arsenal.\*\* The documentary will air on PBS's *American Experience* on January 10th. A myth-shattering exposé of America's nuclear weaponsFamed investigative journalist Eric Schlosser digs deep to uncover secrets about the management of America's nuclear arsenal. A groundbreaking account of accidents, near misses, extraordinary heroism, and technological breakthroughs, *Command and Control* explores the dilemma that has existed since the dawn of the nuclear age: How do you deploy weapons of mass destruction without being destroyed by them? That question has never been resolved—and Schlosser reveals how the combination of human fallibility and technological complexity still poses a grave risk to mankind. While the harms of global warming increasingly dominate the news, the equally dangerous yet more immediate threat of nuclear weapons has been largely forgotten.Written with the vibrancy of a first-rate thriller, *Command and Control* interweaves the minute-by-minute story of an accident at a nuclear missile silo in rural Arkansas with a historical narrative that spans more than fifty years. It depicts the urgent effort by American scientists, policy makers, and military officers to ensure that nuclear weapons can't be stolen, sabotaged, used without permission, or detonated inadvertently. Schlosser also looks at the Cold War from a new perspective, offering history from the ground up, telling the stories of bomber pilots, missile commanders, maintenance crews, and other ordinary servicemen who risked their lives to avert a nuclear holocaust. At the heart of the book lies the struggle,

amid the rolling hills and small farms of Damascus, Arkansas, to prevent the explosion of a ballistic missile carrying the most powerful nuclear warhead ever built by the United States. Drawing on recently declassified documents and interviews with people who designed and routinely handled nuclear weapons, *Command and Control* takes readers into a terrifying but fascinating world that, until now, has been largely hidden from view. Through the details of a single accident, Schlosser illustrates how an unlikely event can become unavoidable, how small risks can have terrible consequences, and how the most brilliant minds in the nation can only provide us with an illusion of control. Audacious, gripping, and unforgettable, *Command and Control* is a tour de force of investigative journalism, an eye-opening look at the dangers of America's nuclear age.

From Booklist Nuclear bombs must be handled with the proper care, yet that is not always the case. Mentioning harrowing mishaps in the history of the American atomic arsenal, Schlosser singles out one for detailed dramatization, the explosion in 1980 of a Titan II missile. Some airmen were killed and injured, but since the warhead didn't detonate, the safety system appeared to have worked. Color Schlosser skeptical, for, as he recounts this accident, which began with a mundane incident—a dropped tool that punctured the missile—he delves into nuclear weapon designs. Those are influenced by the requirement that the bomb must always detonate when desired and never when not. Citing experts in the technology of nuclear weaponry who have pondered the “never” part of the requirement, Schlosser highlights their worry about an accidental nuclear explosion. Underscored by cases of dropped, burned, and lost bombs, the problem of designing a safe but reliable bomb persists (see also *The Bomb*, 2009, by weapons engineer Stephen Younger). Well researched, reported, and written, this contribution to the nuclear-weapons literature demonstrates the versatility of Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation* (2001). --Gilbert Taylor Los Angeles Times “Deeply reported, deeply frightening... a techno-thriller of the first order.” The New Yorker “An excellent journalistic investigation of the efforts made since the first atomic bomb was exploded, outside Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945, to put some kind of harness on nuclear weaponry. By a miracle of information management, Schlosser has synthesized a huge archive of material, including government reports, scientific papers, and a substantial historical and polemical literature on nukes, and transformed it into a crisp narrative covering more than fifty years of scientific and political change. And he has interwoven that narrative with a hair-raising, minute-by-minute account of an accident at a Titan II missile silo in Arkansas, in 1980, which he renders in the manner of a techno-thriller... *Command and Control* is how nonfiction should be written.” (Louis Menand) Time magazine “A devastatingly lucid and detailed new history of nuclear weapons in the U.S. ... fascinating.” (Lev Grossman) Financial Times “*Command and Control* ranks among the most nightmarish books written in recent years; and in that crowded company it bids fair to stand at the summit. It is the more horrific for being so incontrovertibly right and so damnably readable. Page after relentless page, it drives the vision of a world trembling on the edge of a fatal precipice deep into your reluctant mind... a work with the multilayered density of an ambitiously conceived novel... Schlosser has done what journalism does at its best when at full stretch: he has spent time – years – researching, interviewing, understanding and reflecting to give us a piece of work of the deepest import.” The Guardian “The strength of Schlosser's writing derives from his ability to carry a wealth of startling detail (did you know that security at Titan II missile bases was so lapse you could break into one with just a credit card?) on a confident narrative path.” San Francisco Chronicle “Perilous and gripping... Schlosser skillfully weaves together an engrossing account of both the science and the politics of nuclear weapons safety... The story of the missile silo accident unfolds with the pacing, thrill and techno details of an episode of 24.” New York Times Book : “Disquieting but riveting... fascinating... Schlosser's readers (and he deserves a great many) will be struck by how frequently the people he cites attribute the absence of accidental explosions and nuclear war to divine intervention or sheer luck rather than to human wisdom and skill. Whatever was responsible, we will clearly need many more of it in the years to come.” Mother Jones: “Easily the most unsettling work of nonfiction I've ever read, Schlosser's six-year investigation of America's ‘broken arrows’ (nuclear weapons mishaps) is by and large historical—this stuff is top secret, after all—but the book is beyond relevant. It's critical reading in a nation with thousands of nukes still on hair-trigger alert... *Command and Control* reads like a character-driven thriller as Schlosser draws on his deep reporting, extensive interviews, and documents obtained via the Freedom of Information Act to demonstrate how human error, computer glitches, dilution of authority, poor communications, occasional incompetence, and the routine hoarding of crucial information have nearly brought about our worst nightmare on numerous occasions.” Vanity Fair: “Eric Schlosser detonates a truth bomb in *Command and Control*, a powerful expose about America's nuclear weapons.” Publishers Weekly (starred): “Nail-biting... thrilling... Mixing expert commentary with hair-raising details of a variety of mishaps, [Eric Schlosser] makes the convincing case that our best control systems are no match for human error, bad luck, and ever-increasing technological complexity.” Kirkus s (starred): “Vivid and unsettling... An exhaustive, unnerving examination of the illusory safety of atomic arms.” Lee H. Hamilton, former U.S. Representative; Co-Chair, Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future; Director, the Center on Congress at Indiana University: “The lesson of this powerful and disturbing book is that the world's nuclear arsenals are not as safe as they should be. We should take no comfort in our skill and good fortune in preventing a nuclear catastrophe, but urgently extend our maximum effort to assure that a

nuclear weapon does not go off by accident, mistake, or miscalculation.” About the Author Eric Schlosser is the author of The New York Times bestsellers *Fast Food Nation* and *Reefer Madness*. His work has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Rolling Stone*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Nation*.