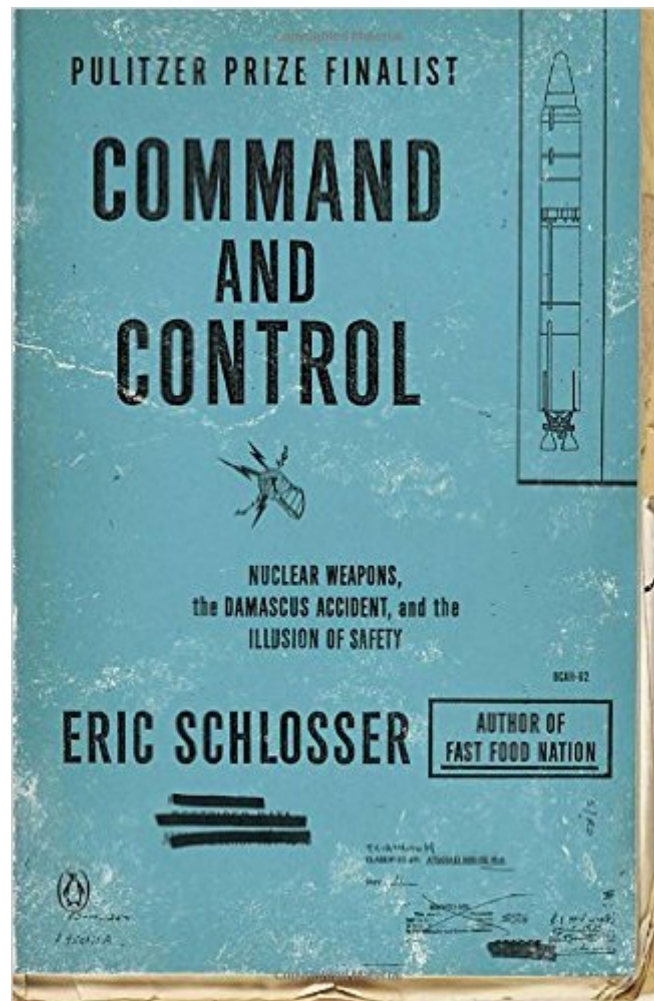


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# Command And Control: Nuclear Weapons, The Damascus Accident, And The Illusion Of Safety



## Synopsis

**\*\*The upcoming 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. **\*\*A myth-shattering exposé** of America's nuclear weapons. Famed 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When 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.

Think America's nuclear arsenal has always been pristinely safe? Think again. In this riveting and meticulously researched book Eric Schlosser gives us a report card on accidents with nuclear weapons that have been periodically taking place since the weapons were introduced into a warring world in 1945. The book centers its narrative around the Damascus accident of 1980 in which an

explosion in a Titan II ICBM housed in Damascus, Arkansas killed one and injured about twenty others. In Schlosser's capable hands, the event becomes a lens through which we can view the inherent frailty and risk in complex engineering endeavors masked by layers of bureaucracy. The volume is a real page turner which kept me awake late into the night. It is superbly researched and is packed with fascinating details about the workings of both nuclear weapons and the very human command and control infrastructure which oversees them. Some of the reviewers here are not too happy about the digressions, but in my opinion the digressions do a great job of recreating the history and the times leading up to the event. In addition all the facts are supported by an extensive bibliography running to more than a hundred pages. This book is really two books in one, and both parts are equally gripping. The first part describes the Damascus accident in gory technical and human detail, starting from the time that a dropped socket blew a hole in the skin of the Titan II missile, spraying fuel around the missile and creating a dangerous buildup of fuel and oxidizer. What is scary is that the accident resulted from an honest, relatively trivial mistake that anybody could have made; in the parlance of systems engineers it was only a "normal accident".

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