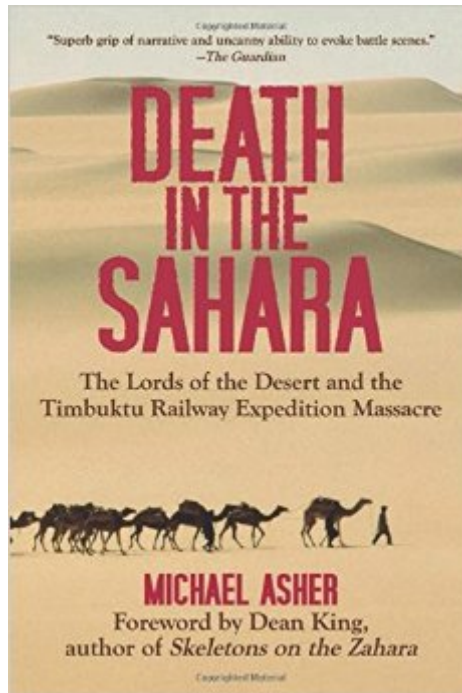


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# Death In The Sahara: The Lords Of The Desert And The Timbuktu Railway Expedition Massacre



## Synopsis

Under-armed in hostile territory, and foolishly employing the enemy as guides, the one hundred explorers were ambushed and stranded without camels or supplies in the deserts of southern Algeria. Many were killed outright, and for four months the survivors were menaced by the Tuareg, the lords of the desert, who robbed, starved, and tricked into eating poisoned fruit. To escape, the men hid in the wastelands of the Sahara with little hope of finding food or water. Finally forced to eat each other, only a dozen men lived to tell their tale. The story of their one-thousand-mile journey is one of the most astonishing narratives of survival ever recorded.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a great book and is quite engaging. Michael Asher tells the story of the French expedition in 1880's sent to Sahara to map the route from Algiers to Timbuktu. The objective is to pave the way for the building of the Trans-Saharan railway by the French. The expedition is lead by an experienced French commander Paul Flatters who is very familiar with the ways of the desert. However, his own personal ambitions and expectations get in the way of reason and he commits a series of grave mistakes that by and by seal his fate and that of his fellow travelers. His party of 100 men is well equipped and well armed, but they're traveling into the unknown where the help and benevolence of the local tribesmen would be crucial for survival. Yet they approach the unknown with arrogance of the conquerors and instead of making allies make enemies. The unforgiving climate of the Sahara desert, where water is scarce and very far between, does not help their situation. Needless to say the expedition meets a disastrous end and only a few of its participants

were lucky enough to live to tell the tale. The interesting thing is that Flatters had a pretty good gut feel for what should be done and for the direction the expedition should go exploring in order to cross Sahara from Algiers to Timbuktu -- which was around and not through the Tuareg territory. However, he's so preoccupied with his own personal fame and wants to be the one (and the first one) to cross Sahara. And this becomes fatal to him as his obsession drives him against his gut feel. So when his proposal gets turned down he willingly changes his heart and accepts the leadership of the mission straight through the Tuareg territory just so that he can preserve his chance for fame.

Author Asher has written an excellent book on an expedition by the French in 1880 to cross the Sahara from Algiers to Timbuctoo and determine the feasibility of building a railroad following their route to open up the sub-Sahara to French expansion. The book is very well written and even exciting. I would have given it five stars if it would have had even one map illustrating the route taken by the expedition (actually more than one was needed), since I was unable to divine the route using several currently available National Geographic maps of Algeria and the Sahara Desert. What frustration! -- and it could have been easily alleviated by the author. Other criticisms would include the necessity of a discussion of the French arms at the time and why they were so superior to what the Tuareg possessed, and a map showing the various tribal areas. At any rate, the fecklessness of the promoters of the expedition as well as the poor decisions by its leadership made for a daunting read. The wishful thinking of France's politicians and bureaucrats when putting other people's lives at risk showed democracy at its worst and should be noted by the modern reader and compared to similar actions in current times. The expedition was sent out with inadequate force to defend itself in order not to alarm a potentially hostile population -- when all along that population was dedicated to exterminating everyone on the expedition. The evildoers in this story were the Tuaregs, several desert tribes who hated Christians (they were Muslims) and did not want to allow unbelievers entry into their lands. They consistently lied, stole, misled, and murdered to achieve their aims, instilling fear in other Arab tribes in order to control them. In Paris, however, they were viewed as romantic.

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