



My Opposition: The Diary of Friedrich Kellner - A German Against the Third Reich

Friedrich Kellner

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This is a truly unique account of Nazi Germany at war and of one man's struggle against totalitarianism. A mid-level official in a provincial town, Friedrich Kellner kept a secret diary from 1939 to 1945, risking his life to record Germany's path to dictatorship and genocide and to protest his countrymen's complicity in the regime's brutalities. Just one month into the war he is aware that Jews are marked for extermination and later records how soldiers on leave spoke openly about the mass murder of Jews and the murder of POWs; he also documents the Gestapo's merciless rule at home from euthanasia campaigns against the handicapped and mentally ill to the execution of anyone found listening to foreign broadcasts. This essential testimony of everyday life under the Third Reich is accompanied by a foreword by Alan Steinweis and the remarkable story of how the diary was brought to light by Robert Scott Kellner, Friedrich's grandson.

My Opposition: The Diary of Friedrich Kellner - A German Against the Third Reich Details

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From Reader Review My Opposition: The Diary of Friedrich Kellner - A German Against the Third Reich for online ebook

Henri says

Fascinating

Valerity (Val) says

Having first learned about the Holocaust as a young teen reading lots of non-fiction, I've read many books on the subject. This one, however, is different in that it's written by a German who kept a hidden diary all through the war years, at risk to his very life as he was decidedly anti-Nazi and was known to be so. Friedrich Kellner worked at the courthouse and was well respected. The diary includes with many propaganda-filled news clippings of the time and with Kellner's thoughts and feelings about events as they went along during the years of the war. He also shared the different comments expressed by fellow citizens during that time too, giving a view to how they felt about the war and Hitler, etc. An inside look how they really talked about the other countries involved, before and after the war.

The book was put together by Kellner's grandson who came to Germany and reignited his grandfather's passion for life at a very low time. He had nearly thrown away the diary in a depressed period after the end of the war. The grandson, Robert Scott Kellner, translated the diary into English and edited it and felt it needed to be brought to the people. A lengthy read but very worthwhile.

An advance digital copy was provided by NetGalley, Robert Scott Kellner Ed., and Cambridge University Press for my review. Publication date Jan. 25, 2018

Sam Dye says

This book is a priceless treasure. This man tried to convince his fellow Germans that the Nazi rhetoric was pure propaganda and would lead them to destruction if they followed Hitler. No one seemed to listen so he began a diary of newspaper clippings with his commentary that he kept from September 1, 1939 to May 31, 1945. He and his wife Pauline also listened to foreign radio broadcasts, the punishment for which was death had they been discovered. The lessons of this beautifully produced book printed by Cambridge are extremely applicable today, as we are drowning in propaganda. His grandson Professor Robert Scott Kellner who translated and edited the book has the remarkable story of his discovery of the diary in the Biographical Narrative.

June 11, 1943: "The German nation was consoled for the lost battle at Stalingrad with promises of a spring offensive. These consolers are never embarrassed to use a con man's technique of infinite promises to strengthen over-rated expectations in single-minded optimists."

Cheryl says

Phenomenal book. This is a unique and real account of an individual who opposed Hitler's Germany, during WWII. Just the thought of him keeping this diary, knowing if found by the Nazi Party would mean his death, is in itself amazing to me. His thoughts and documentation is thought provoking and is something I highly recommend reading.

stuart gifford says

A must read for anyone who has any interest in WW2 history.

Brendan Hodge says

In 1933 Friedrich Kellner seemed to be on the wrong side of history. A forty-eight year old civil servant living in the German city of Mainz and a veteran who had fought for Imperial Germany in the First World War, Kellner was a Social Democrat who had been loud in his opposition to the Nazis as the party rose to power in the 1920s and 1930s. When the Nazis won control of the government in 1933, it was clear they would take no time in settling scores with their opponents. Rather than waiting for retribution, Kellner, accepted a new job as the administrative manager of the courthouse in the small town of Laubach and took his wife Pauline and seventeen-year-old son Fritz to live there.

In Laubach Kellner kept a lower profile, and although he was known to dislike the party his position with the court gave him some protection from harassment by party enthusiasts, of which the town had many. Their son Fritz fell in with a Nazi supporting crowd in Laubach, and as Kellner feared that a war was coming, he succeeded in arranging Fritz's emigration to New York in 1935. There, Fritz would continue his Nazi sympathies but also eventually marry a Jewish immigrant woman with whom he had three children (including the editor of Friedrich Kellner's diaries, Robert Scott Kellner) and join the American army in 1943.

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Friedrich Kellner began to keep a secret diary, chronicling events and the opinions about the war expressed by coworkers, family, and neighbors. He also included clippings from many German newspapers and official statements. This diary is what has now been published as *My Opposition: The Diary of Friedrich Kellner, A German against the Third Reich*, out last month from Cambridge University Press. I was fortunate enough to receive a review copy, though due to time constraints I only finished the book this last week.

We often read in history books statements about what people knew and thought during historical events. What's particularly interesting reading an extensive diary account such as this is seeing precisely what a German man with his eyes open (ordinary in all senses other than being anti-Nazi) saw and thought as events unfolded. The following are some themed collections of bits that caught my attention.

On the actions of the Western powers in the lead up to the war:

"April 16, 1940: How much different it could have been in Europe if the cowardly North American people had shown themselves to be more heroic? How can a people be so shortsighted and tell themselves, 'I sit on

an island, and do not concern myself with the rest of the world'? Did it really not come to mind Hitler would not be content with a poor Europe but intended -- no matter what -- to go where there was still something to rob and steal? Do the Americans really not see that?"

"May 11, 1940: Mr. Chamberlain finally resigned from office. With that, an unbelievably pathetic nincompoop has finally disappeared. Now the crackpot Nazis will be shown what it is like to become an enemy of the entire world. It will cost many victims until reason slowly awakens our memories to what was better in the past. This will be a harsh lesson for a generation that has become so crazy. If only they can be cured, then these victims will not have died without meaning."

"May 29, 1940: The carnage will eventually come to an end, but the Western powers will carry the historical guilt for not promptly providing the most intensive preventative measures against Germany's incessant politics of aggression. Possibilities existed, but no actions were taken. Spineless policies do not change the mind of a tyrant. The sharpest means would still be too mild. Where is the English fleet?"

Reactions to the invasion of Russia:

"June 23, 1941: The people's opinion! Such opinion does not come from within the individual. This is formed "from on high" and implanted in a person's brain. From now on I will record more of what is being said around here so I can be in a position later to offer a picture of the German people's state of mind.

Frauline Helga Elbe, 18 years old: 'It is completely fine with me that we attacked Russia, otherwise they would have attacked us. Two years ago they took territory we had conquered.'

Court Judge Dr. Hornef is depressed about the war spreading.

Court Bailiff Brunner: 'We will not have an easy task with Russia, and the war will no longer be ended this year.' Brunner has become a skeptic."

"June 28, 1941: A woman said: 'On Sunday (when the war began against Russia) I had some hesitation, but today things appear favorable. Unlike the former war, we now have allies, and so far everything has worked out well.'

This war will end quickly when the Russians in the interior rebel.'

Thus spoke the lady with the Prussian accent. Always the same song. We have had good luck, so we can covet more. Without much ado, war will cover the entire world -- precisely because 'so far everything has worked out well.' Such is the German: not a single feeling for the fate of other people. The entire world can be demolished if only he -- the magnificent German -- can live on the debris.

Worthy contemporaries, how will it be if the page is turned and we stand against a singularly strong Russia, one that defends itself stubbornly? Then will I contemplate your stupid faces. Never in the entire history of mankind have a people been more deserving of punishment than the Germans -- for boundless arrogance."

Even in the fall 1941, almost a year before the building of the extermination centers such as Be??ec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, and while Auschwitz was still just a camp for Russian POWs, word of mass killings of Jews in the East was getting back to ordinary Germans.

In the following year, he also mentions the deportation and murder of local German Jews. People knew.

"October 28, 1941: A soldier on leave here said he personally witnessed a terrible atrocity in the occupied

part of Poland. He watched as naked Jewish men and women were placed in front of a long deep ditch and, upon the order of the SS, were shot by Ukrainians in the back of their heads, and they fell into the ditch. Then the ditch was filled in as screams kept coming from it!!

These inhuman atrocities are so terrible that even the Ukrainians who were used for manual labor suffered nervous breakdowns. All soldiers who had knowledge of these bestial actions of these Nazi subhuman beings were of the same opinion that the German people should already be trembling in their shoes because of the coming retribution.

There is no punishment that would be hard enough to be applied to these Nazi beasts. Of course, in the case of retribution the innocent will have to suffer along with them. Ninety-nine percent of the German people, directly or indirectly, carry the guilt of the present situation. Therefore we can only say this: Those who travel together, hang together."

"December 15, 1941: It is reported that in some areas Jews are being transported somewhere. They are permitted to take a little money and about 60 pounds of baggage. The Nazis are proud of their animal protection laws. But the suffering they cause the Jews proves they treat Jews worse than animals. This cruel, despicable, and sadistic treatment of the Jews that has lasted now several years -- with its final goal of extermination -- is the biggest stain on the honor of Germany. They will never be able to erase these crimes."

"September 16, 1942: In the last few days the Jews from this region have been removed. The families Strauss and Heynemann were taken from Laubach. I heard from a reliable source all the Jews were taken to Poland and murdered by SS brigades.

This cruelty is horrible. Such atrocities will never be able to be erased from the book of humanity. Our murderous regime has for all times besmirched the name "Germany." It is unfathomable for a decent German that no one can stop the activities of these Hitler bandits."

On the entrance of the US into the war:

"December 9, 1941: A lady from Dusseldorf, quartered in Laubach with the Frey family, expressed her feelings about the war the Japanese have instigated in the Far East: 'Is it not wonderful, this new war?'

There are many examples of this brutal Aryan to be found in the warmongering Germany. They believe the war in the Pacific will take a load of Germany."

"December 12, 1941: Hitler and Mussolini have declared war on the USA! With my attitude it is not necessary to add a commentary to this. Whom God wants to destroy, he first strikes with blindness.

Any objective or normal person, even one favorable toward Germany, would have to conclude these declarations will prolong the war. In face the war can only end in the total defeat of the Axis members (Germany, Italy, and Japan). However, if anyone supposes the majority of the German public agrees with me on this, he is in for a disappointment."

As the war progresses and things begin to turn against Germany, Kellner writes repeatedly about how the punishment of the guilty is necessary even at the expense of the innocent, and about how he hopes that Germany will be forced to utter and unconditional defeat in order to prevent people from inventing another "stab in the back" myth about how Germany could have won the war had they simply tried with all their vigor.

"August 13, 1942: English airplanes attacked Mainz in the night of August 11-12. ... We just received a

registered letter and a telegram from Mainz. 'Everyone is well. Katie' At least the worry about relatives is over. Katie described what occurred in broad strokes. According to her, it must have been a horrible night. It is really sad the nice ones also have to suffer. But those who were happy about the air raids on England cannot be punished brutally enough. The German people have to feel firsthand what war means. Until now they could wreak havoc and bring death and destruction to foreign countries with impunity."

"September 17, 1942: ... How and where will Hitler come to an end? I do not want to be a prophet on this point. Hopefully Hitler remains alive up to the final destruction. The storytellers must be denied their material because it is clear they would use an early death as an excuse for the bad ending: 'If only Hitler had not been killed, we never would have lost this war.' That would be the leitmotiv of all the history falsifiers. 'With Hitler into the abyss.' that is what I wish for the German nation."

[In response to the failure of the Stauffenberg plot to assassinate Hitler] "July 27, 1944: By the way, I welcome the rescue of the Führer because for tactical reasons he must remain alive to the bitter end. It must not be used as an excuse in the future. He must remain until there is no more way out, until Providence itself would not be able to come to his side to help him."

Sometimes, you can see the bitterness which eats at Kellner at what the Nazis have done turning his own reactions rather heartless. This helps show, I think, the ways in which evil can corrupt even those who oppose it.

"December 10, 1943: Sometimes a person is inclined to believe there is no prevailing heaven. But from time to time people see there is indeed revenge. The Party boss, Julius Weber, had to have a leg amputated in the First World War, but that was not enough of a warning for him -- he still could not be an enthusiastic lover of peace. So he dedicated himself to Adolf Hitler, although Weber knew the nation's seducer would do everything to start an even more tremendous world war. For his deeds, Weber has the single most fitting award: two sons killed in battle. But that is how the heaps of medals can be handed out at receptions. And there is the satisfaction of having provided actual sacrifices for the Führer. Heil Hitler!"

This is a fascinating primary source document for those who want to get a view into life on the home front of Nazi Germany. Kellner is an astute observer, and if you have a basic knowledge of the war's chronology, his is so meticulous on reporting the news that you will have no difficulty knowing where you are in events. The other people in his town (particularly his anti-Nazi friends, including his wife Pauline, herself an anti-Nazi who is occasionally threatened by party enthusiasts) do not pop out that much in the narrative. In the introduction, the editor suggests that Kellner may have avoided saying too much about his friends for fear of the consequences that would fall upon them if his secret diaries were discovered. He repeatedly includes snippets from newspapers reporting the conviction and execution of men and women found guilty of listening to enemy broadcasts and making disparaging remarks about the Nazi government. These might almost serve as warnings to himself of the fate he would clearly face if his notebooks were discovered.

Being a diary, and not a history book or novel, there's not a big sum-up finale. The diaries trail off as American troops near Laubach. Kellner himself was sick at times, and at others was forced to spend many days traveling for his courthouse work. His few entries after the liberation of the town are happy with hints of grimness: many of the town's Nazis have not been sufficiently hounded from public life. Now everyone claims to have opposed Hitler, and we know from the prior 400 pages that this simply was not true. Kellner was mostly isolated in his opposition to the regime.

Elka says

Fascinating - no so much for the writing but for the back story and for following along with an ordinary German horrified at the events of WWII. One thing that emerges from this diary is that ordinary Germans knew, early on, about the atrocities being committed.

Barbara Hugh says

This diary, hidden in secret wall, was published in Germany in 2011. A reviewer in Der Spiegel called it "a major discovery". Says the book "belongs in every German library an on every bookshelf possible". I found this book a testament to an individual bound to truth and reasonable thought. Is also a cautionary note about the dangers of propaganda in society which loses it's sense of justice.
