MY OPPOSITION

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.

Robert Scott Kellner discovered his grandfather's diary in 1960 and has worked tirelessly to bring it to the attention of the world through exhibits at the Dwight D. Eisenhower and George H. W. Bush Presidential Libraries, a documentary film screened at the United Nations, and the publication of a complete edition of the diary in German and abridgments in Russian and Polish.

MY OPPOSITION

The Diary of Friedrich Kellner – A German against the Third Reich

Translated and Edited by
ROBERT SCOTT KELLNER

With a Foreword by
Alan E. Steinweis

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108406963

DOI: 10.1017/9781108289696

First published 2018

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
NAMES: Kellner, Friedrich, 1885–1970, author. | Kellner, Robert Scott, editor.
TITLE: My opposition : the diary of Friedrich Kellner – a German against the Third Reich / edited by Robert Scott Kellner ; with a foreword by Alan E. Steinweis.
OTHER TITLES: Vernebelt, verdunkelt sind alle Hirne. German
DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2017030752 | ISBN 9781108418294 (hardback : alkaline paper)
SUBJECTS: LCSH: Kellner, Friedrich, 1885–1970 – Diaries. | World War, 1939–1945 – Personal narratives, German. | Kellner, Friedrich, 1885–1970 – Political and social views. | Germany – Officials and employees – Diaries. | Germany – History – 1933–1945 – Biography. | Anti-Nazi movement – Germany – Laubach (Giessen) | Jews – Persecutions – Germany – Laubach (Giessen) – History – 20th century. | World War, 1939–1945 – Germany – Laubach (Giessen)
CLASSIFICATION: LCC D811.5 .K4513 2017 | DDC 943.086/4092 [B]–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017030752

ISBN 978-1-108-41829-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-108-40696-3 Paperback

Hitler has risen to be a glaring example of abomination for mankind.

For me he has always been what he was: a brigand, a beast!

Friedrich Kellner, December 17, 1942

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FOREWORD

In 1933, Friedrich Kellner relocated from his home city of Mainz to the small town of Laubach. Located on the river Wetter on the western edge of the Vogelsberg mountain region, Laubach had a population of slightly less than 2,000 in 1933. The town lies about 75 kilometers northeast of Frankfurt and about 25 kilometers directly east of Giessen, an important university town and administrative center in Upper Hesse, the northern section of the German province then known as the People's State of Hesse (*Volksstaat Hessen*).[1] Laubach dates from the eighth century and is known for its impressive medieval castle, winding alleys, and half-timbered houses. The town had been connected to the wider region by the Hungen-Mücke railroad line since 1890. The local courthouse, where Friedrich Kellner assumed his professional duties in 1933, had been established in 1822.[2]

A committed Social Democrat and steadfast opponent of Nazism, Kellner went to Laubach to escape retribution from Nazi activists in Mainz. Ironically, his destination was itself a stronghold of Nazism. In the Reichstag election of July 1932, the NSDAP had received 62.9 percent of the votes cast in Laubach, in contrast to the 37.3 percent of the vote attained by the Nazis nationally. The Social Democrats, who in the closing days of the Weimar Republic had constituted the only real opposition to Nazism in Laubach and the surrounding region, had received only 18.7 percent of Laubach's votes. The electoral success of the Nazis in July 1932 was even more dramatic in the county (*Kreis*) to which Laubach belonged, *Kreis Schotten*, where Hitler's party received 77.4 percent of the vote. In all of Germany, only one county had given the Nazis a higher percentage of the vote than Schotten. In the city of Mainz, where Kellner had lived almost his entire life before 1933, the Nazis received 31 percent of the vote in July 1932, lower than the national average and far less than the combined result for the Social Democrats and the Communists.[3] Kellner nevertheless considered the move from Mainz to Laubach to be to his advantage. In his new base in Laubach, he would benefit from the protections accorded by a promotion in his civil service rank. He was also, at first, not known for his anti-Nazi activism in Laubach, as he had been in Mainz, although the local Nazi officials in Laubach would eventually come to regard him as a troublemaker.

In 1938, Laubach was integrated into the county of Giessen. The area bore many of the hallmarks of rural Upper Hesse. The population was overwhelmingly Protestant and drew its livelihood from occupations related to agriculture. Of the 69,000 people in the county (not including the city of Giessen), 55,000 – about 80 percent – lived in towns of 2,000 inhabitants or fewer.[4] One of the most notable conclusions to have been posited by historians who have analyzed the elections of the Weimar Republic is that the Nazis achieved their greatest support in the Protestant countryside, so in this regard the area around Laubach corresponded to a broader pattern. Like in other Nazi strongholds, rural Upper Hesse lacked the two segments of the German population that had been least enthusiastic about Nazism before 1933: the industrial working class and Catholics, whose well-established party loyalties and political subcultures had made these two groups less susceptible to the attraction of Nazism than other segments of German society.[5] The fact that these groups were largely absent from the region accounts for a lower level of resistance to Nazism there after 1933. Had Kellner landed in Berlin or the Ruhr industrial region in 1933 rather than in Laubach, his assessment of his fellow Germans in his diary may well have been less severe.

Kellner's diary begins in late 1939 and therefore tells us relatively little about the actual events of the pre-war years of Nazi rule. But in several entries made during the war, Kellner did summarize in general terms his analysis of the death of German democracy and the rise of the Nazi dictatorship. On October 7, 1939, he described what he regarded as eighteen "cardinal errors" that "this Nazi tyranny" had made since coming to power. These included "the enforced greeting, 'Heil Hitler'"; "one-sided control of public opinion"; "suppressing free expression of opinion"; "protecting the Old Fighters and Party members, even if they are criminals"; "persecuting decent citizens only because they once had another opinion and perhaps referred to the Nazis as an abscess"; "persecution and extermination of the Jews"; "disrespect for people's religious convictions"; "unbelievable over-organization in the nation and, in particular, in the Party and its institutions"; "dreadfully unproductive offices (and a bloated bureaucracy)"; "easy sinecures and benefits for Nazi Party members (minor offices, utensils, uniforms, toys, circus, fanfares: Sieg-Heil, Sieg-Heil)"; "The Führer commands and we follow"; and "we owe everything to our Führer."

Despite these offensive attributes of the regime, the German people, in Kellner's estimation, had supported it enthusiastically. In the very same early entry in the diary, Kellner attempted to explain why: "Too many of my fellow men allowed themselves to be deluded by National Socialist propaganda,"

which, he believed, amounted to little more than "bluff and swindle; base public fraud." He gave vent to this same exasperation two days later: "What our ancestors had fought to achieve over centuries was forfeited in 1933 by inane carelessness, incomprehensible gullibility, and the damned blasé attitude of the German middle class." Kellner's contempt not only for the immorality of the Nazi leadership, but also for the stupidity (a term he used often) of so many of his countrymen runs as a leitmotif through the diary.

One unusual characteristic of rural Hesse that helps explain the high level of support for Nazism in the region was its significant population of Jews who resided in small towns. These Jewish communities had been there for centuries. Many of the Jews had been "Schutzjuden" who had enjoyed the protection of local rulers during periods when Jews had been expelled from other parts of Germany. By the beginning of the twentieth century, over 400 towns in all regions of Hesse were homes to officially recognized Jewish communities. These included Laubach, which had forty-one Jewish residents (as of 1925) and a seventy-eight-seat synagogue dating from 1780.[6] The level of Jewish integration was lower in such towns than in the major cities. Intermarriage, for example, was a good deal less common than in Berlin or Frankfurt. Many of the small-town Jews in Hesse ran small businesses specializing in household goods, clothing, or tools. Others engaged in "middleman" occupations, most notably cattle trade. The complex economic interdependencies between Jewish cattle dealers and their Christian customers had historically been a source of anti-Semitism in the region. In tough economic times, farmers were confronted with the threat of repossession when experiencing difficulty making payments on cattle they had bought on credit. When in the late 1920s, after a severe downturn in the German agricultural economy, the inhabitants of many Hesse towns mobilized to pressure local courts to block repossessions, Jewish cattle dealers were stigmatized as the greedy, unforgiving face of capitalism.[7]

Peasant anti-Semitism had, in fact, long played an important role in the politics of rural Hesse, eventually emerging as an important factor in the success of Nazism there. The region had been a bastion of the peasant movement led by the populist agitator Otto Böckel in the 1880s and 1890s. A librarian and folklorist by training, Böckel analyzed the difficulties faced by farmers as a result of the transformation of German agriculture from a manorial system to modern capitalism. He laid much of the blame for their suffering at the feet of Jewish money lenders, cattle dealers, and grain speculators. He published a virulently anti-Semitic newspaper, the

Reichsherold, and was elected to the Reichstag in 1887 on the platform of "Against Junkers and Jews." A little while later Böckel founded the Hesse-based Antisemitic People's Party (*Antisemitische Volkspartei*), which throughout its existence until 1919 advocated the disenfranchisement of Jews.[8]

One of the political spinoffs of Böckel's movement was the German Social Party, which before World War I enjoyed its highest level of support in the precise area where Laubach was located. During the Weimar period, this particular political tradition was carried forward first by the Hessian Peasant League (*Hessischer Bauernbund*) and then by the Christian National Peasant and Rural People's Party (*Christlich-Nationale Bauern- und Landvolkpartei*). In the Reichstag election of September 1930, the latter party received slightly fewer votes than the NSDAP in Schotten County, where Laubach was located, but by the July 1932 election its supporters had abandoned it for the NSDAP. One can, in other words, identify a direct historical continuity between the anti-Semitic Böckel movement of the late nineteenth century and the rise of the Nazi Party in rural Hesse.[9]

This continuity was underscored by the leader of the Nazi Party organization in southern Hesse – the so-called Gau Hesse-Nassau – Jakob Sprenger, a figure mentioned several times in the Kellner diary.[10] A self-styled champion of German peasants (and the German common man more generally), in 1933 Sprenger co-authored a book titled *The Development of the Völkisch Movement: The Antisemitic Peasant Movement in Hesse from the Time of Böckel until National Socialism*, the purpose of which was to depict Nazism as the logical culmination of the history of his region. Sprenger was without question the dominant political figure in the People's State of Hesse during the Nazi period. As Hitler and the members of the Führer's immediate circle had no personal connections or interests in Hesse, Sprenger was given a free hand in his Gau.[11]

Even by the standards of the Nazi Gauleiter, who were mainly "Old Fighters" from the early days of the party, Sprenger was an ideologically zealous anti-Semite and racist. This fanaticism exhibited itself during the war in ways that provide important background to several observations made by Friedrich Kellner in his diary. One illustration of Sprenger's fanaticism relates to the Hadamar sanatorium, one of the major facilities associated with the killing of disabled Germans, which was located about 80 kilometers west of Laubach. During the war, Hadamar was the site of the murder of about 15,000 disabled Germans.[12] On June 10, 1941, Kellner noted that "notifications about deaths in the mental care facility in Hadamar have

recently increased. Supposedly incurable patients are being brought to this institution. And they are soon to begin building a crematorium." Gauleiter Jakob Sprenger had an active interest in the operation at Hadamar, and there is strong evidence to suggest that he personally issued the order to have sick and injured patients killed at Hadamar in order to free up hospital beds in his region during the war.[13]

The deportation of German Jews to the ghettoes and death camps in the east was implemented faster and more thoroughly in Sprenger's Gau than almost anywhere else in the Third Reich. In other regions, some Jews were exempted from deportation in order to be deployed as workers in war-related industries. But Sprenger did his best to prevent this from happening in his own Gau, working hand-in-glove with the local Gestapo to thwart efforts by industrial managers to acquire Jewish workers. Once the deportation of the Jews from Sprenger's Gau had been completed in September 1942 – a measure noted by Kellner in his diary on September 16 – the only Jews who remained were those who had "Aryan" spouses. The Nazi leadership in Berlin had decided to delay the deportation of intermarried Jews, fearing negative effects on the morale of the non-Jewish relatives. But in the autumn of 1942, Sprenger defied Berlin by authorizing deportations of intermarried Jews from his Gau. Only after being admonished by the Reich Security Main Office in Berlin did Sprenger cease the deportations in June 1943. Notably, Sprenger's Gau was the only one in the entire Reich that deported intermarried Jews in a systematic manner.[14]

Friedrich Kellner may not have been aware of the unique character of the anti-Jewish measures in his region, but he did record quite a few entries about the persecution and murder. On three occasions, he referred retrospectively to the November 1938 pogrom (often referred to as Kristallnacht, although not by Kellner). Two of these observations were entered into the diary over three years after the actual event, underscoring the shock and disgust engendered by the pogrom in anti-Nazis such as Kellner. Only a few Jews remained in Laubach by November 1938, the majority having either emigrated abroad or moved to larger communities in Germany in the meantime. Nevertheless, on November 10, a substantial mob vandalized the synagogue, packed the interior furnishings onto the hearse owned by the local Jewish community, transported the hearse to a public square in front of the local sport hall, and set the hearse and furnishings ablaze.[15] Such violent public rituals of anti-Semitic purification were a common feature of the Kristallnacht and help to explain why Kellner's outrage was so enduring.[16] In other entries, Kellner describes the anti-Semitic propaganda efforts of the

Nazi regime, the anti-Semitic sentiments of some of his townspeople, the imposition of forced labor on German Jews, and the deportation of the local Jews.

The ultimate fate of the deported German Jews, and of Jews throughout Nazi-dominated Europe, was clear to Kellner. On October 28, 1941, he wrote the following in his diary:

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 the manual labor suffered nervous breakdowns. All soldiers who had knowledge of these bestial actions of those Nazi subhuman beings were of the same opinion that the German people should already be trembling in their shoes because of the coming retribution.

This entry is significant for two reasons. First, it shows how knowledge of the mass murder of the Jews, which took place mainly in German-occupied eastern Europe, filtered back into German society. Second, it exemplifies a not uncommon reaction among Germans who learned of the killings, namely a combination of disgust, guilt, and certainty that there would be a price to pay for this atrocity. Kellner's diary is not the only evidence we have of knowledge about the "Final Solution" among Germans who lived very far away from the Nazi killing fields in Poland and the Soviet Union.[17]

Kellner was also disturbed by the fate of other targeted groups. He bemoaned the imprisonment and mistreatment of Germans in concentration camps. A number of foreign workers who had been pressed into forced labor by the Third Reich were deployed to locations near Laubach, and Kellner noted the brutal way in which they were treated. He also took note of the so-called "labor and education camp" (*Arbeits- und Erziehungslager*) set up in 1944 in the village of Freienseen, just a couple of kilometers from Laubach. The camp in Freienseen housed mainly foreign laborers who produced fittings for V-1 and V-2 rockets.[18]

Laubach was spared from Allied bombardment on account of its small size and rural location. On August 6, 1940, Kellner wrote, "Hardly anything of war is to be felt locally. Above all, we have not seen or heard air attacks. Enemy fliers flew over Laubach once, but that was not an attack of

any sort. The war is not thought of unfavorably here because we have felt little or no effects of it." Kellner often reported on the optimism of his neighbors, who were confident that the British would fold. Even the expansion of the conflict to include the Soviet Union and the United States failed to disabuse them of their delusional confidence in a German victory. Over time, the once distant war was brought home to the residents of Laubach in a variety of ways. Kellner reported on the deaths of German soldiers who had come from Laubach. In August 1941, explosions from British air raids in the region could be heard, and a couple of bombs even fell in the town. On September 1, 1943, "endless columns of enemy airplanes flew over Laubach" on their way to drop bombs on Berlin. In 1944, the male population of Laubach (including Kellner) was drafted into the *Volkssturm*, a people's militia intended to defend the Fatherland against the impending invasion of its territory. After the nearby city of Giessen was bombarded in December 1944, the men of Laubach were ordered to help clean the rubble. In April 1945, homes in Laubach were commandeered by American soldiers. Kellner had no objections to this, but did complain that the homes of the local Nazi bosses had not been targeted for confiscation.

Friedrich Kellner's impassioned dissent translated into acts of actual resistance on a number of occasions, such as when he distributed Allied leaflets, told friends about what he had learned from BBC broadcasts, or discouraged co-workers from joining the Nazi Party.[19] As a low-level civil servant in a small town, he was limited in what he could do. There was little in the way of organized resistance in the vicinity of Laubach. As a former Social Democrat who was known as an anti-Nazi among local Nazi Party officials, Kellner had to exercise extreme caution. As the war progressed, and the country's military situation deteriorated, the regime intensified its crackdown on Germans who criticized the leadership or expressed doubts about the ultimate victory. Although Kellner wrote down his own criticisms and doubts almost every day, he only rarely attributed similar sentiments to others. In part this may have been to protect his friends and acquaintances from retribution were his diary to fall into the hands of the Gestapo, which he understood was a genuine possibility.

While there can be no doubt that the Nazi regime enjoyed overwhelming popularity among the German population, the support was not universal. Kellner, living as he did in a stronghold of Nazism, and understandably furious with the obtuseness of his countrymen, overlooked the limited, but real, dissatisfaction in the country. The Reich Security Service (SD) compiled

substantial documentation of popular discontent with the behavior of party bosses, the prosecution of the war, and the mendacity of official propaganda.[20] Such dissatisfaction rarely translated into active opposition, much less organized resistance, because people feared for their own safety and that of their loved ones in the face of a ruthless apparatus of repression, especially during the war years. A small percentage of Germans did, nonetheless, engage in organized opposition activity, which often took the form of printing and distributing leaflets, or providing assistance to victims of persecution. Opposition groups drew their members from the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the labor unions, all of which had been outlawed by the regime in 1933, and from church circles. The Rhine-Main area centered on Frankfurt was an important center of labor-oriented opposition on account of its highly developed industrial economy.[21] That region, in addition to other locations in Gau Hesse-Nassau, including the city of Giessen, were bases for Social Democratic cells loosely organized under the leadership of Wilhelm Leuschner, a former interior minister in Weimar-era Hesse who acted as a liaison between the Social Democratic opposition and the military-aristocratic conspiracy to kill Hitler. After the failed July 20, 1944 assassination attempt, Leuschner was arrested, tried before the People's Court, and executed. The members of the cells in his organization had focused their efforts on helping to form a new government in Germany after Hitler's removal.[22]

Critics and opponents of the Nazi regime in Hesse frequently paid a high price for their dissent or opposition. Between November 1938 and 1945, sixty-nine men and women from Hesse were sentenced to death by the People's Court for treason and other political offences. Some among the executed had been involved in organized opposition activity, while others had simply publicly expressed the kinds of criticism that Kellner had committed to his diary and shared with his friends.[23] It should be emphasized that prosecutions for such transgressions were not limited to the People's Court. Lower courts handled similar cases. A so-called Special Court in Darmstadt, which only adjudicated cases from Hesse, presided over the prosecutions for political crimes of 2,316 defendants between 1933 and 1944. Most of the trials did not result in executions, but time in a concentration camp or a Nazi-era prison certainly qualified as a harsh punishment.[24] The opponents of the regime also included those who were arrested and sent to concentration camps without prosecution or trial, as well as those who were never arrested, like Friedrich Kellner himself.

German citizens had good reason to fear the consequences of opposing the regime, but some did so anyway, despite the risks. While Friedrich Kellner's harsh blanket condemnations of his countrymen may have been unfair to the others who, like him, dissented and resisted, his righteous anger at his countrymen was most definitely well founded.

Alan E. Steinweis

PREFACE

The long effort to bring my grandfather's diary to the public was rewarded by the reception it received when published in Germany in 2011. "Eine grosse Entdeckung" was the general view: "A major discovery." The reviewer in *Der Spiegel* wrote, "Kellner fashioned an image of Nazi Germany that has never existed before in such a vivid, concise and challenging form," and added, "the diary belongs in every German library and on every bookshelf possible." The history magazine *Damals* named it Autobiography of the Year.[1] A major facet for German readers of this anti-Nazi diary was the conclusion it brought to many decades of controversy. If an ordinary person such as Friedrich Kellner, a mid-level official with a high school education, living in a small country town far from any major city, could know so much about what was happening in the supposedly secretive Third Reich, then people everywhere had to have known far more than they admitted of the brutality and genocide waged by their forces in every precinct of a ravaged Europe. The post-war meme that the general population knew little or nothing of what the Nazi Party was up to (suggested as late as 2005 by former German president Richard von Weizsäcker) could finally be laid to rest.[2]

Friedrich Kellner predicted the people would lie about it if they lost the war: "All of the small-minded people will say they always knew National Socialism would end in this manner and that none of them had ever been a National Socialist. In reality, only one percent of Germans at most were true opponents of Hitlerism."[3] His notes show that soldiers returning from the front were speaking openly about massacres they had witnessed of Jews and of Russian prisoners of war. From the beginning he knew Jews were facing genocide. Just one month after German forces invaded Poland, he alluded to the "Verfolgung und Ausrottung der Juden," persecution and extermination of Jews.[4]

He also documented atrocities within the homeland: the murder of patients in mental hospitals, and the executions of Germans who listened to foreign radio programs or read airplane leaflets. He described these dreadful events in the context of past and future, the mistakes made in the Weimar Republic that elevated a depraved Adolf Hitler to power, and the miscalculations of leaders in the democratic nations that abetted the dictator

in his drive for world mastery. Friedrich wrote for the entire period of war, filling ten notebooks, almost nine hundred pages, with his meticulous script, supplementing his observations with hundreds of newspaper clippings. Had he been discovered, he would have been branded a traitor and executed. His wife, Pauline, whose own moral integrity reinforced Friedrich's determination to give a true accounting of events, would have shared his fate.

I learned about the diary when I was nineteen years old, in 1960, the year I met Friedrich and Pauline. Their only child was my father. They had sent him to America in 1935, when he was nineteen, to clear his mind of Nazi doctrine, a move that unfortunately had no effect. My mother, who married Fred William Kellner two years after his arrival in New York, spoke of him only as "that Nazi bastard."[5] Although Freda Schulman, according to Nazi racial theories, was a "subhuman" on two counts – a Jew and of Slavic origin – such odious invective could not compete with the young woman's compelling good looks, and the troubled German immigrant fell in love. They had three children in four years, who, at his insistence, were baptized Lutheran. Disinclined to work, Fred hung out with his friends from the German-American Bund, distributing pro-Nazi pamphlets. In April 1943 the Federal Bureau of Investigation opened a case against him to determine if he was spying for Germany. Fred had gone to Norfolk, Virginia, where it was thought he was seeking information about ship movements.[6] The evidence, presented in November 1943 to the US Attorney's Office, was inconclusive and unlikely to lead to a trial, yet Fred prudently took the FBI's unofficial advice to join the US Army to prove his loyalty to his adopted country. One week after the army accepted him, the FBI case was shelved. For most of his enlistment, Fred was stateside, but in February 1945, after being busted in rank to private for some unspecified misconduct, he was shipped to France to serve as an MP, guarding captured Germans in an Allied prisoner-of-war camp. Honorably discharged in January 1946, Fred remained in Europe using the forged credentials of an officer in the Occupation Forces to support himself in the black market.

When the monthly allotment checks stopped arriving from the army in 1946, Freda rejected the prospect of moving in with her parents and working as a waitress or sales clerk to pay for expenses. It was an era of lavish MGM and RKO musicals, of beautiful leggy women filling the screens of movie theaters, and she had long-held notions of becoming another Ginger Rogers or Cyd Charisse. Opportunities for a twenty-seven-year-old mother of three,

however, with no dancing experience, were found mostly in tawdry venues. Applying to the World of Mirth Carnival, which followed a circuit from Maine to Georgia and was known for its hoochie-coochie "girlie shows," Freda took her three children to the Jewish Home for Children in New Haven, Connecticut, and left them there. I was four years old. My sister was seven, my brother six.

We were in the Home for seven years, a long stretch under a troubled superintendent. "For the least small infraction of the rules, a kid was usually severely beaten," recounted a former inhabitant in his memoirs.[7] We infrequently saw our mother. Our father came only once with a promise to bring us "home" to his parents in Germany, but we never saw him again. In time the Connecticut welfare department shut down such privately run homes, and we were back with our mother and her new husband, a carnival roustabout, in 1953, the year we learned of my father's death. The cold facts in the death certificate were numbing: in 1951 Fred had re-enlisted in the US Army in Germany; in 1952 he went AWOL and was declared a deserter; in 1953 he committed suicide in France.[8]

I was a wild youth with a juvenile record. I dropped out of high school at sixteen and ended up homeless on the streets of New York. At seventeen I was in the navy. Military service was salvation for boys like me, and I earned a high school equivalency degree and rose in the ranks to second-class petty officer. In 1960 orders came for special shore duty in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia. The travel plans included a two-day layover at Frankfurt Air Force base in Germany. My father's death had not affected me, yet I felt a need to know about him, to meet his parents – if they were still alive. I applied for leave but was refused, so upon arriving in Frankfurt I went AWOL. I knew from my mother that Friedrich and Pauline Kellner lived in a town named Laubach, where my grandfather worked in the courthouse, but there were six towns in Germany with that name. In a train station near the fourth Laubach, while worrying I had overlooked my grandparents in the previous three, I met a young woman and told her of my search. She was on her way to visit her parents in Laubach, she said, where an old couple named Kellner lived just around the corner.

I could not have imagined them any better – my tall grandfather and petite grandmother, both with gray hair, and with some lines of sadness engraved on their faces. He was seventy-five, and she seventy-two, and they held themselves with such dignified reserve it made me stand straighter. I braced for disappointment as I took from my wallet a photograph of my father holding his infant daughter, my sister, on his knee (one of the few pictures of

him my mother had not destroyed). The old woman sighed, and in moments I was looking in their album at an enlarged copy of that photograph. Then my grandparents excitedly turned the pages in the album, pointing from one photo to another. I could not understand their words, but I knew they were introducing me to my family.

I stayed with them for four days in their small retirement cottage on a wooded hill. My grandfather knew some English, and I began my German studies. The first evening, after dinner, he covered the dining table with a series of notebooks that held hundreds of pages handwritten in a cryptic Old German script with newspaper clippings pasted among his writing. He explained it was a diary he had written during the war when he was the court administrator. He pointed to the title, *Mein Widerstand* (My Opposition) and my relief was great; for months, since receiving my transfer orders, I had been preparing myself to forgive my grandfather, if I should find him, for a myriad of Nazi crimes I assumed he must have committed.

One of the first entries my grandparents helped me read described a letter-telegram from my mother, sent through the Red Cross, telling them of my birth. They asked me numerous questions and learned some of the truth of what happened with their son in America. They were grieved to hear about the children's home, having been told by my father that Freda had run off with another man and we children were happy. Another surprise was their son's deception about my mother's religion, that she was not a German-American Lutheran. Speaking more to my grandmother than to me, my grandfather said slowly, so I could understand, "At least in this he acted well, letting love rule over prejudice."

They each elicited a promise from me before I returned to Frankfurt. My grandfather wanted me to go to college and study history and German so I could return for the diary someday and use it to counter totalitarian ideologies – at that time Communism and neo-Nazism. My grandmother wanted me to devote some time to helping children because I had needed help as a child. "We must pay our debts to society," she insisted. I wanted to please them, and so I agreed, though I had no idea how it would be achieved.

I was placed under arrest at Frankfurt until I could be put on the next flight to the navy liaison office on Bahrain Island. I was so overdue in Arabia there was no time even for a captain's mast, and the Bahrain commander made do with a tongue-lashing and sent me on my way. My unauthorized sojourn went unpunished.

We wrote frequently to each other, my grandparents and I. My brother and sister also wrote but stopped after a few letters, preferring to keep the

past behind them. After the navy, I had ambitious college plans: four years of undergraduate study and six years in graduate school. They were delayed, however, by an early marriage that produced a bright and spirited little girl but did not succeed otherwise, ending in divorce. During this period my grandparents moved to Mainz to be closer to my grandmother's sisters. In July 1966 my grandfather shared with me a letter that held deep meaning for him: the German government acknowledged his open stance against the Nazis.[9] When I received the letter, I was enrolled at the University of Massachusetts. I planned to spend a summer in Germany when I graduated, to study the diary with my grandfather, and bring the notebooks home with me. But at the end of my junior year I received an urgent summons from him. Concerned that I would have difficulty deciphering the old-style script, he had given Notebook 1 and the pre-war writings to my grandmother's sister Katie to type into modern German. The papers disappeared from her apartment, where Katie lived with her common-law husband, Willi Weber, a former and unrepentant Nazi soldier. Though Weber denied taking them, my grandfather knew the rest of the diary was no longer safe.

Despite their stress over the missing papers, our reunion in the summer of 1968 was joyful. Friedrich, with his stately and yet good-natured manner, was unbowed even at eighty-three. Pauline looked frail but was charming and energetic. My college courses had enlarged my German vocabulary, and though my grammar was shaky it was fun to talk with them. Our readings in the diary during the five weeks of my stay gave rise to fascinating stories about the people and places that had shaped their perilous existence in the Third Reich. My grandfather described the contents of the missing notebook and dictated to me from memory the sentences that began the first entry, that of September 1, 1939.[10]

My grandmother's sisters, Katie and Lina, came often to visit, bringing pastries for our family breakfasts and dinners. Katie apologized for the notebook's loss. Lina apologized, too, because Willi Weber was related to her husband, Heinrich Fahrbach. I met Weber – a sullen block of a man. At my grandfather's caution I said nothing about the diary. Regarding Heinrich Fahrbach, my grandfather showed me an entry describing Heinrich and Lina's narrow escape during the bombing of Mainz in September 1941. He showed me a photograph he had taken of their bombed apartment building and told me how Heinrich had wanted to destroy all of London in retaliation.

My grandfather tapped me on the shoulder and in a somber tone added, "His nephew Willi would destroy London today."

Visitors arrived from Laubach for an afternoon: Ludwig and Elfrieda Heck and their two daughters. Ludwig had worked for my grandfather in the courthouse and was like a son to my grandparents. But like their real son, Heck had been inspired by the Nazi doctrine, an ardent believer from his membership in the Hitler Youth to his frontline service in a panzer corps. In a 1942 entry about Heck being home on leave for Christmas, my grandfather noted his protégé's "arrogant" insistence that the Nazis were invincible.

I learned much about the various branches of my family: the Kellners in Arnstadt, the Vaigles in Bissingen, and the Preusses in Mainz. I learned of my grandfather's political campaigns during the Weimar Republic and my father's susceptibility to the poisonous lure of National Socialism. I saw post-war photographs of Fred with his second wife, whom he had met in France in 1945, and my half-sister, Margrit, who was twenty-one and living near Versailles. Having embraced the counter-culture movement that marked the 1960s, Margrit was no longer in touch with her family, and my grandfather gave me her address and asked me to write to her when I was home.

One afternoon when my grandmother lay down for a nap, my grandfather – better able to handle his own emotions when he did not have to see my grandmother in distress – told me more about my father, mostly about happier moments from his childhood. He described his and my grandmother's deep depression in the years after my father's death and how he had thrown away his collection of Nazi documents and even considered destroying the diary. He added, almost nonchalantly, that my appearance in Laubach in October 1960 had saved more than the diary from destruction. Several months earlier he had resigned from political office, and he and my grandmother, thinking there was nothing and no one left to live for, had planned to end their own lives before Christmas.[11]

I took countless notes during our conversations, writing sometimes in German but mostly in English, always in an abbreviated form because everyone spoke rapidly. Although my vocabulary increased daily, I was not able to keep up with everything fully, so each evening in my room, I would spend an hour or more working on my notes, making a list of questions to ask everyone the next day. With list in hand, my entrance at breakfast always got a laugh.

We did not spend all our time studying the diary and talking about the past. We took a trip on the Rhine to see the Lorelei; had a picnic in the

Lenneberg Forest with my cousin Erwin Ganglberger and his family; went to Bad Münster for lunch with some friends; visited cousins in Frankfurt; and one evening we attended a musical at the Mainz Electoral Palace. I marveled at my grandparents' stamina. But they did need to rest. They sent me to spend a day and night in Laubach and gave me a list of people to meet. There I spoke with my grandfather's former employee, court bailiff Ludwig Brunner, and a number of others from that generation soon to take their memories with them to the grave. They praised my grandparents' courage during the war and my grandfather's political work afterward.

On July 31 my grandfather placed the nine remaining diary notebooks and other writings and documents inside a handbag for me to carry on the airplane. "This was my resistance to terror and lawlessness," he reminded me, "my way to give your generation – and generations to come – a weapon of truth against any repeat of such terror." I promised to find a way to get the diary to the public. I also renewed my promise to my grandmother to help children.

Back home I wrote to Margrit in France and was pleased when she quickly replied. But when I asked for information about our father, and any photographs she could provide – and I mentioned my hope she would write to our grandparents – she did not respond. I wrote several more times but never heard from her again.

Two months after I left Mainz, my grandmother fell and broke her hip. A long stay in the hospital was followed by a challenging period of recovery that required most of her strength – and my grandfather's strength, too. "She slowly has to learn to walk again," he wrote to me on December 15, 1968. "She links her arm with mine, and with a cane in hand she makes progress." To which he added, "We miss your young arms." She was not able to fully recover, and a year later my grandfather sent heartrending news. "Your gentle grandmother is dying," he wrote. "Despite every effort, her physical and mental condition has lately become mercilessly bad. Can you believe such a marvelous woman must meet such an undeserved end?"

My grandfather was at her bedside during the day and on an adjacent cot during the fitful nights when even morphine could not stifle the pain for long. In the last week of Pauline Kellner's life, Friedrich turned once more to pen and paper to record their final days together. On February 1, she had the presence of mind to wish him a happy birthday: he was eighty-five. Three days later the pain was so bad she begged him to release her. Later that day, when she was calmer, she reached out for his hand. Her eyes "shone again with the same brilliance as when I first fell in love with her. In this moment

she was saying farewell." On February 8, 1970, Friedrich wrote this melancholy sentence: "On Carnival-Sunday in 1910 we first met each other, and on Carnival-Sunday in 1970 death has parted us." Karolina Paulina Preuss Kellner, who had stood with her husband during those fearful days of Nazi rule and faced his every risk, had died at eighty-two. Her most fitting epithet would be something Friedrich wrote about her refusal to join the Nazi Women's League: "A monument should be erected to my brave wife."

A macabre irony exists in Germany's *Lebensraum* dilemma. They gained not an inch of territory in their murderous quest for it, but they caused their neighbors to use otherwise good farmland for tens of millions of new graves. Because of space limitations, Germans may not own the plot they are buried in; they pay annual rent on it, and only for a limited time. Unless their graves are considered special, their bones eventually are *abgeräumt* – dug up for reburial in a communal grave – and someone else picks up the lease on their old place. After paying the rent for over forty years on his parents' graves, and knowing their bones would be *abgeräumt* after he and Pauline died, Friedrich had the Mainz cemetery move the large natural stone that marked their graves to the plot he had rented for Pauline and himself. Beneath that stone he placed her ashes.

He returned then to Laubach where Pauline and he had faced down so many challenges, where he best could feel her presence.

On June 22, 1970, I introduced my wife, Bev, to my grandfather. She and I had met in college and graduated together. My grandfather was living in an apartment building close to the Laubach courthouse. He looked his years and, for the first time, vulnerable. He and I acutely felt my grandmother's absence, but he was charmed by Bev: petite, dark-haired, and lovely, like his memory of a young Pauline. I gave him a copy of a letter from the University of Massachusetts accepting me into their doctoral program. He insisted on a champagne toast, and we went to the restaurant at our hotel where he took a few drops of wine mixed in a glass of water. "*Wasserwein*," he laughingly called it, and raised his glass: "The first white-collar worker of our family salutes the first professional." And to Bev: "His Oma and I knew this would come to pass."

We took my grandfather for drives into the country. We visited my cousin Erwin Ganglberger and went to dinner at Ludwig Heck's house. I had many questions for my grandfather about people and places in diary entries, and he seemed happiest when speaking. He went from one subject to the next, not

bound by chronology. When he described his political activities in the Social Democratic Party and his campaigns against the Communists and Nazis, he took a book from the table and, as he used to do with Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, shook it angrily above his head and called out, "Gutenberg, your press has been violated by this evil book!" Bev worried about him becoming overly impassioned, as did I. But these were not an old man's ravings. My grandfather's travails in the midst of a destroyed Europe had shattered his religious beliefs. To him, death was final, with no comforting tomorrows in heaven. All that would be left of Friedrich Kellner were his ashes – and his grandson. Therefore, he was transferring into his grandson's mind as many of his memories as possible, and he fully expected me to pass them on with his diary.

He was not feeling well on our last day together but insisted on talking about the diary's purpose and its relevance to current events. He complained about the Soviet Union increasing its support for Palestinian militants, who that year had brought their terrorism to Germany, attacking Israeli passengers at the Munich airport. He called the connection between atheist Russia and jihadist Islam "an unholy alliance of totalitarian fanatics" that would seriously challenge the democracies in the future.

Our parting was agony. Despite the brave pretense of our *Auf Wiedersehen*, we knew we would never see each other again. Bev and I had traveled by ship to Europe, and during the five-day voyage home to New York, I had much to think about. My father had made the same voyage to the same destination in 1935. What if he had been wiser and not gone so far adrift into troubled waters and not caused such unending grief? And what if wiser men had ruled the democracies in his time and given no ground to evil? That question was the very essence of the diary.

I received a few more of my grandfather's beautifully penned letters, but in less than three months after our goodbyes he was gone. November 4, 1970, was the last day of life for Justice Inspector August Friedrich Kellner: soldier, administrator, poet, politician, and historian. In the darkest time of Germany's history, when madmen and murderers ruled, this man did not lose sight of all that was great in centuries of German culture. He carried that within him. He passed that on. He was one of Germany's truest patriots.

Ludwig Heck, the executor of my grandfather's will, arranged for the cremation, and for the ashes to be placed alongside Pauline's in the Mainz Hauptfriedhof. A small amount of money, ten thousand dollars, was divided equally among the four grandchildren. Most of the other possessions were for me: all his papers and the family documents, and his oil paintings. And

though I already had the diary notebooks in my possession, they were specifically listed for me in his will. Heck sent the money within the first year, but despite my repeated requests, he delayed for many years sending anything else. After six years a wooden crate of documents and belongings arrived with a note from Heck: "It is a comfort for me to know I have fulfilled your grandfather's wish and the family belongings are in good hands."[12] But Friedrich Kellner's wish had not been fulfilled, which I would discover thirty years later.

Further attempts to contact my half-sister in France were unsuccessful. I eventually would learn that on April 12, 1970 – between the deaths of our grandparents that year – Margrit gave birth to a son out of wedlock and named him Alexandre William Kellner. Giving her child over to foster care, she moved to the Montparnasse area on the left bank of the Seine, where, among its artist colonies and unrestrained nightlife, she would live but five more years. The specifics of her death in the certificate sent to me from Paris were few but profoundly sad: On the Sunday morning of December 21, 1975, Margrit's lifeless body was found on a street not far from her apartment. She had died six or seven hours earlier, around 2 a.m., evidently of exposure to the freezing night air. She was twenty-eight.

Promises to Keep

The diary project, which included supplemental essays, documents relating to Friedrich's resistance, and family histories, was daunting: thousands of pages of handwritten Sütterlin script had to be transcribed into modern German; research was needed for the people, places, and events in the diary; and the source of each news clipping had to be determined. Moreover, I would need to create a biographical narrative to provide the vital context, the tragedies and triumphs of Friedrich and Pauline Kellner's lives. Friedrich had deliberately left out personal matters from his diary in order to focus on the important issues.

Easier to fulfill was the promise I made to my grandmother. While teaching at Texas A&M University, I formed a student club to sponsor an entire village of children through the Christian Children's Fund. The actress Sally Struthers, spokesperson for the Fund, came to the campus to help get the "Village of Hope" campaign started.[13] Thousands of students participated in the fundraising and sponsored 125 children in a village near Amaga, Colombia, for a two-year period. News stories in the *Houston Chronicle*

and elsewhere about our efforts inspired other American universities to lead similar campaigns, and I could imagine Pauline Kellner's nod of approval.

Eventually I was able to persuade the editor of the *Chronicle* to take an interest in the diary. On February 21, 1993, the newspaper published a four-page feature article in its Sunday magazine, replete with photographs of diary pages and of my grandparents. The headline declared the diary "may have parallels for today's Germany." I sent copies to the newly built United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. With anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial on the rise, I felt certain these institutions would help me transcribe the diary and get it published. The museum archivists, keen to add the diary to their collections, responded quickly but offered no guarantee to publish it.

I sent the article to the movie actor and producer, Kirk Douglas, asking if he would produce a documentary about it. "I agree with you – the content of these diaries should be revealed to the world," he wrote in his positive response of April 2, 1993. But in concert with Michael Berenbaum, a director of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, Mr. Douglas pressured me to give the diary to the museum. On April 21 he wrote, "I would continue my interest in this diary when it goes to Washington." I was tempted. It seemed an honorable way to be relieved of a heavy responsibility: to give it into the care of an important institution and a legendary personality. But the museum had already turned down my request to publish the diary, and Hollywood producers often sat on scripts and projects for years, only to abandon them. As it happened, Mr. Douglas suffered a stroke and had to drastically reduce his workload. Had I agreed to his terms, Friedrich Kellner's writings, his warnings to the generations, might have been consigned to oblivion among the tens of thousands of other unpublished documents in the museum's archives.

In 2001, on September 11, America was brutally reminded of Pearl Harbor. I spurred my efforts to finish my transcriptions and collect the information I needed for the biography. My father's army records arrived with an explanation that numerous documents had been damaged or destroyed in a major fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis in 1973.[14] What remained of my father's file (with the burned edges visible in the photocopies) gave evidence to his duplicity and wrongdoing: being reduced in rank from sergeant to private, stealing from his comrades, deserting his post. The twenty-page FBI report was particularly helpful as it detailed his movements in America from 1935 until 1943. For oral histories, I located Ursula Cronberger, the young woman from the train station in 1960 who had led me