



The Nazi and the Psychiatrist: Hermann Göring, Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, and a Fatal Meeting of Minds at the End of WWII

Jack El-Hai

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In 1945, after his capture at the end of the Second World War, Hermann Göring arrived at an American-run detention center in war-torn Luxembourg, accompanied by sixteen suitcases and a red hatbox. The suitcases contained all manner of paraphernalia: medals, gems, two cigar cutters, silk underwear, a hot water bottle, and the equivalent of 1 million in cash. Hidden in a coffee can, a set of brass vials housed glass capsules containing a clear liquid and a white precipitate: potassium cyanide. Joining Göring in the detention center were the elite of the captured Nazi regime—Grand Admiral Dönitz; armed forces commander Wilhelm Keitel and his deputy Alfred Jodl; the mentally unstable Robert Ley; the suicidal Hans Frank; the pornographic propagandist Julius Streicher—fifty-two senior Nazis in all, of whom the dominant figure was Göring.

To ensure that the villainous captives were fit for trial at Nuremberg, the US army sent an ambitious army psychiatrist, Captain Douglas M. Kelley, to supervise their mental well-being during their detention. Kelley realized he was being offered the professional opportunity of a lifetime: to discover a distinguishing trait among these arch-criminals that would mark them as psychologically different from the rest of humanity. So began a remarkable relationship between Kelley and his captors, told here for the first time with unique access to Kelley's long-hidden papers and medical records.

Kelley's was a hazardous quest, dangerous because against all his expectations he began to appreciate and understand some of the Nazi captives, none more so than the former Reichsmarshall, Hermann Göring. Evil had its charms.

The Nazi and the Psychiatrist: Hermann Göring, Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, and a Fatal Meeting of Minds at the End of WWII Details

Date : Published September 10th 2013 by PublicAffairs

ISBN : 9781610391566

Author : Jack El-Hai

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Psychology, War, World War II, Biography, Historical



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From Reader Review The Nazi and the Psychiatrist: Hermann Göring, Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, and a Fatal Meeting of Minds at the End of WWII for online ebook

Mary says

The topic was interesting, bu the book didn't meet my high expectations.

Maine Colonial says

For more than seven decades, we've been trying to understand the nature of the Nazi mind. Was there something uniquely psychopathic about them, or could their horrors be wreaked by any country's leaders and citizens?

One of the first people to get an opportunity to try to answer this question was Captain Douglas M. Kelley, a 32-year-old psychiatrist in the U.S. Army medical service, who was assigned to attend to the 22 top Nazi defendants being held in Nuremberg, Germany, in the months before their trial began for crimes against humanity. Kelley spent long hours talking to the defendants and administering what were then relatively new psychiatric tests, like Rorschach ink blot testing and Thematic Apperception Tests.

Among the Nazi bigwigs Kelley was responsible for, the top patient was Hermann Göring, former head of the Luftwaffe and Hitler's one-time designated successor. Göring's huge personality and appetites were like a tractor beam for Kelley. He was charming, intelligent and quick-witted, but it soon became clear that he had no regard for anyone outside his small circle of family and close friends.

As the book description tells us, Göring managed to kill himself with a cyanide capsule in his cell the night before he was scheduled to be hanged. Twelve years later, Kelley also killed himself with cyanide, after a long slide into emotional illness and alcoholism. The book description concludes that Kelley's suicide shows "the insidious impact of the Göring-Kelley relationship, providing a cautionary tale about the dangers of coming too close to evil."

I think the book description is misleading. Author Jack El-Hai does not try to make an argument that Kelley's exposure to Göring and the other Nazis somehow tainted him and led to his suicide. He does argue that there are some similarities between Göring's and Kelley's motivations for suicide and for choosing cyanide as a method, but that's the extent of it.

The value of this book is not in some sensationalistic link between Göring and Kelley. Instead, the real value is the inside look at the minds of these Nazi leaders and how they revealed themselves to Kelley, whom many of them came to trust. El-Hai writes a great deal about Göring, but there is also extensive and valuable discussion of Rudolf Hess, Alfred Rosenberg, Robert Ley, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Julius Streicher and others. This should be of interest to many history readers, especially those who enjoyed books like Anthony Read's *The Devil's Disciples: Hitler's Inner Circle*.

Secondarily, El-Hai gives us an insightful look at the early days of criminal psychology and psychiatric testing. Kelley was active in both fields, including in the years after Nuremberg, when he lectured and

consulted, was a professor of psychiatry at Wake Forest University and, in 1949, became the first head of the newly-established department of criminology at the University of California at Berkeley. Many of the concepts we take for granted today were in their infancy during this period, and El-Hai provides a clear and interesting view of what the field was like at that time.

Finally, El-Hai provides a fascinating description of various analysts' views of Kelley's records of the psychoanalytic tests of the Nazi defendants, and their debates about what they revealed about the Nazi psyche.

Rights to The Nazi and the Psychiatrist have been optioned to turn it into both a film and a stage play. I suspect in both cases, the hook will be the same sensationalistic one as in the book description. While that may make a good selling strategy, I hope people will read and appreciate the book for its actual content.

Zohar - ManOfLaBook.com says

The Nazi and the Psychiatrist: Hermann Göring, Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, and a Fatal Meeting of Minds at the End of WWII by Jack El-Hai is a non-fiction book about the doctor and his interaction with the war criminals.

This is a good book, but it is not the book I thought it would be. In my head I was imagining Göring on the proverbial couch, or sitting across from Dr. Kelley engaging in war of the minds. What I got was a study by Dr. Kelley of what is considered evil using the Nuremberg trials as a laboratory.

Dr. Kelley jumped on the opportunity to diagnose the Nazi mindset, to find out what made these people tick, how could they murder millions (including their own people), what was their defense mechanisms and justifications that allowed them to live without guilt or remorse.

Interesting questions indeed!

Göring, the highest ranking Nazi being tried, was convinced that he will be set free, arriving to his incarnation with 16 suitcases, one filled with valuables. As a former head of state he figured that the trial was just victors' propaganda. When confronted with evidence of concentration camps and Nazi murders he claimed that he didn't know what was happening.

Dr. Kelley admits that Göring is a charismatic personality and the two got along very well. Along with Göring, the book also talks a lot about Hess who is presented as an unstable person who might, or might not, be able to stand trial.

The book also talks a great deal about the Rorschach tests and Dr. Kelley's interpretation of the prisoners' answers and extrapolated their meanings. Since Dr. Kelley worked through an interpreter, the results of the tests were still being evaluated half a century later.

Upon his return to the US Dr. Kelley settled into a family life and became a noted psychiatrist specializing in forensics. Dr. Kelley taught at top schools, researched and worked with police all over the country. In an ironic twist, Dr. Kelley was caught in his own nightmarish existence (by his own making) and committed suicide the same way Göring did before him.

The conclusions Dr. Kelly made are frightening and still relevant to this day. In his writings, Dr. Kelley

stated that there was nothing “special” about these top Nazis and their personalities, what happened during Germany’s Third Reich could happen in any country.

While I found the premise of the book to be fascinating, I didn’t feel the narrative came together once the Nuremberg trials were over. This book could is actually more of a biography of Dr. Kelley than his interaction with his infamous clients.

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Argos says

Cök iyi bir kitap daha, bir gazeteci taraf?ndan yaz?lm??, edebi derinlik beklemeden okunmal?. Nürnberg Mahkemesi'nde yarg?lanan üst düzey Nazi yöneticilerini (Göring, Hess, Dönitz vd) yak?ndan izleme ve inceleme f?rsat? bulmu? Amerikal? psikiyatrist Dr Kelley'in bulgular ile vard??? sonuçlar uzun uzun anlat?lm???. Bu arada ayn? görevi yapan psikolog Gilbert'in vard??? sonuçlar çok farkl?.

Kitab? iki yönüyle okumak gerekl? . İki Dr Kelley'in ki?ili?ini ve hayat?n? ö?renme, ikincisi Kelly ve Gilbert aras?ndaki görü? farkl?l?ndaki do?ru taraf? bulmak için dü?ünmek. Yazar ise tamamen farkl? niyetle yazm?? kitab?, o Göring'in Dr Kelley'i etkiledi?ini hatta tamamıyla ele geçirmi? oldu?unu vurguluyor. Ayr?ca bu 22 üst düzey nazi yöneticisinin, insan kasaplar?n?n ki?ilikleri hakk?nda daha ayr?nt?l? bilgi edinmek de kitab?n bir ba?ka art? yönü.

Dr Kelley Nazi'lerin de bizler gibi normal insanlar oldu?unu ancak çok rahatça güç, otorite, hükmeme vb isteklere evet demelerini ve hedefe ula?mak için son derece egoist ve duyars?z olduklar?n? söyleyerek bu durumun her ülkedeki insanlar için de geçeli olabilece?ini, ABD'de f?rsat ç?kt?nd? ?rkç?l?k ve milliyetçi duygular?n? fa?ist yönetici profillerini kolayca yaratabilece?ini ileri sürmekte. Bugünkü Amerika ve Trump?dü?ünürsek hiç haks?z de?il.

Gilbert ise Nazi'lerin psikopat olduklar?n? ruhsal problemi oan insanlar olduklar?n? onlar? bizler gibi normal kabul etmenin yan? oldu?unu savunuyor. Yani LePen, Willers, Putin, Saddam, Kaddafi vb liderlerin normal olmad?klar?n? psikopat olduklar?n? ileri sürüyor. O da haks?z say?lmaz.

En iyisi kitab? okuyun kendi karar?n?z? kendiniz verin.

Ray says

Jack El-?Hai's book, "??*The Nazi and the Psychiatrist*"?, tells the story of an Army Psychiatrist, Dr. Douglas Kelley, who interviewed ?Hermann Goering and ?the ?other ?top surviving Nazi leaders after World War II as they were preparing to face charges in the N?uremberg Trials. ? His objective was to determine if there was a particular trait, characteristic, or psychiatric condition that caused or allowed those men to oversee so many atrocities to occur under their leadership. After numerous interviews and tests, Dr. Kelley came to conclude that there was nothing particularly abnormal about these men. The uncomfortable result of this conclusion is that the capability to perform similar atrocities was not unique to the Nazi Party or German people, but can exist anywhere. People can be incited to acts of cruelty by propaganda, scare tactics, repeated lies, and distrust of 'others', and when leaders exhibit these characteristics, it should be a red flag to all citizens capable of critical thinking and independent thought to beware.

After the Nuremberg Trials, Dr. Kelley returned to private life, and continued his practice and a lecturer, writer, psychiatrist, consultant, criminologist, teacher, and family man. Unfortunately for Dr. Ryan and his

family, the stresses of his life brought out his darker side, and led to an unfortunate and unhappy life.

Two points stuck with me upon completing Jack El-Hai's book:

- (1) that even highly regarded psychologists who spend their time helping others overcome their stresses and problems are not immune from suffering from similar afflictions; and
- (2) the capability to inflict injury or death on others is a trait of homo sapiens which can surface in any of us unless guarded against.

Maddie says

This was a well-written book on an interesting subject. I'd highly recommend it, as long as you are interested in the actual material. As mentioned in other reviews, this book is not solely focused on dissecting the experience and personalities of the Nazis at Nuremberg. It sounds like Nuremberg Diary by Gustave Gilbert would be a good source if that's what you're looking for.

Rather, this is a story about how interacting with Nazis at Nuremberg affected an American psychiatrist, Douglas Kelley. It has some lurid details that keep you interested, but also manages to get some history of psychiatry in there. It talks a lot about an argument between psychiatrists -- was there some psychological trait or disorder that marked high-ranking Nazis? Dr. Kelley found, and later researchers seem to agree, that while each man had some atypical behavior, only a few were truly disordered, and every other evil murderer was someone you might find holding down a job in America. One of the main traits all the Nazis (and Dr. Kelley) shared was being ambitious workaholics.

The author argues that Dr. Kelley obsessed over all evils he witnessed to the point that he copied Hermann Goering and committed suicide by ingesting potassium cyanide, though he outdid Goering, who died alone in prison, by doing so in front of his wife and children. (Side note: it was interesting to see that Goering, otherwise an obviously awful person, seemed to be a better family man than Dr. Kelley, who was physically abusive to his wife and traumatized his children.)

The main weakness was that the author did not convince me that Dr. Kelley's demons were entirely due to his psychiatry practice and experience at Nuremberg. I think he made a lot of assumptions about Kelley's inner life that he didn't fully justify. In addition, there was a lot of discussion of Rorschach tests and their application to diagnosing Nazi personality disorders. My non-industry impression is that the use of Rorschach tests is rather controversial in the field, and I think El-Hai could have either leaned on those less heavily in his analysis, or mentioned some of the questions that have been raised about their use.

Mara says

This book was quick and interesting, but lacked a certain *je ne sais quoi* for me and, at times, felt a bit "forced" in its attempt to give the relationship between its two titular characters a causal weight in the events that eventually befell the Kelley family.

Like **Dr. Douglas M. Kelley** (below), I am fascinated by the inner workings of the human mind. Likewise, the human capacity for evil revealed in criminology and the study of history (in particular the events of and surrounding WWII) capture my curiosity and desire to understand. Kelley and I are certainly not alone in

this, and in the decades since WWII scholars from a variety of fields have sought to unravel the sociological, psychological and historical underpinnings of what happened. All of this is to say, that I did not find Dr. Kelley to be as exceptional as the author may have intended.

That notable figures who work with notorious criminals are often somewhat egotistical is not surprising. John E. Douglas, the original "Mindhunter," is an example that stands out (see: *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit*). What author **Jack El-Hai** refers to as *tele-empathy*, "the ability to feel what others are feeling and thinking" after carefully examining them" (p.201), seems like it would be requisite for the job. From studies such as the Milgram experiment and the Stanford Prison Study (both of which El-Hai refers to toward the end of the book- including some dubious extrapolations), we have learned more about quotidian obedience to authority. Books such as Martha Stout's *The Sociopath Next Door* describe that individuals who completely lack conscience are by no means an anomaly.

The most interesting pieces of information in re. the over-the-top character of **Hermann Göring**, which are almost unfathomably bizarre (his extreme pill addiction, his letter writing campaign to President Truman regarding the inhumane conditions in which he was being kept, his obsession with wild animals etc.), were brushed over too quickly for my liking, in favor of Kelley's family history.

While I enjoyed this book, I feel like it could have done more. Perhaps that was not the author's intention, but somehow the parallels between Göring and Kelley failed to draw me in as stories unto themselves. Furthermore, these characteristics seemed to me less exceptional, less notable than one might believe based on this material alone. Kelley told journalists that:

"[Göring] is still the same swaggering, vain, conceited braggart he always was. He has made up his mind he's going to be killed anyway, so he's very anxious to be considered the number one Nazi, a curious kind of compensation" (p.116).

This desire to rise to the top (one that Kelley, apparently, shared with Göring) seemed, to me, unsurprising. It certainly didn't seem like a trait so noteworthy as to suggest that two men sharing it would somehow be distant reflections of one-another. I'll withhold the other "big" parallel as not to spoil anything, but I, again, thought it was a bit overstated...

Idees Livres Mandarine says

Livre très intéressant et instructif mais aussi destabilisant. Kelley jeune psychiatre tente pendant la préparation des procès de Nuremberg de sonder les âmes des dignitaires nazis et de trouver l'explication de leurs actes. Mais Kelley se brûle les ailes rapidement et serait totalement obsédé par cette affaire des années plus tard. Ce qui le détruira ... Cette histoire est complexe et demande réflexion. Quelle est la part de fragilité de Kelley ? Göring aurait-il manipulé Kelley ? Kelley a-t-il fait de bons diagnostics ? Petite remarque : le style journalistique de El-Hai me convient complètement.

Kelly ... says

So, first I will say that the title of this book is excellent. It provokes interest and questions immediately. And, luckily the text of the book lives up to the initial reaction.

I am a bit of a history nerd and love to read quality historical fiction which I usually follow with research on the related history to determine the accuracy of the book. I don't read as many nonfiction books as I often find them to be dull, dry books filled with recitation of dates and names but little story. The best nonfiction history books, for me, are those that read more like a novel. This one mostly succeeds at doing that. I would probably rate it at about 4.5 stars.

Many reviewers have complained that this book is too long. I disagree. If anything, I wanted more. I am sure there is so much more story to mine and I would have loved to know more about Dr Kelley's interactions with the Nazis -- particularly Hermann Goring.

It is an excellent story of the intersection of these two extraordinary men's lives for a brief moment of time -- and how one influenced the other for many years after. It is a glimpse into the things that occurred post-WWII with the Nazis who remained alive. We see the arrogance when learning about the expectations they had regarding their treatment by the Allies. We see the desire to learn what made a Nazi a Nazi. And we see something we might call PTSD today affecting the doctor for the remainder of his life.

This book is excellent -- informative, compelling and absorbing. It reads quickly. I read it in two sittings

Tony Taylor says

A very interesting book (I'd give it 5 stars, but being fairly technical, it may not appeal to a general audience.) If you enjoy reading about histories about WWII in Europe, you may find this a fascinating read. It is about a young US Army psychiatrist who was assigned to the supervise the mental health of key Nazi leaders during their incarceration leading up to their war crime trials in Nuremberg. Much of the story is based on the doctor's own notes as he interviewed such leaders as Hermann Goring, Admiral Donitz, Alfred Jodl among others. Although the book concentrates mostly on these post war interviews, it continues to follow the professional career of the psychiatrist after he left the Army and became a well known criminal psychiatrist working with many police departments and lecturing at universities around the US. However, the most interesting passages that appeared throughout the book related to the interviews with Goring, probably one of the more "colorful" and complicated prisoners who, for the most part, opened up about his wartime activities and his views as to why he felt "justified" in his role as a close follower of Hitler.

Don says

All I can say about this book is - wow! Overwhelming. After WW2 Dr. Douglas Kelley, a well respected psychiatrist who was serving in the military at that time was selected to interview and assess all of the captured Nazi leaders at Nuremberg at the war's end. All of the leaders were interviewed: Goering, Speer, Jodl, Hess, Keitel, Rosenberg, Streicher, Raeder, Donitz, Frank, etc. At that time the thought was that these leaders suffered from some type of abnormal behavior, perhaps even psycho or sociopaths. No one wanted to

hear that perhaps these leaders were narcissistic but otherwise normal people caught up in status, power struggles and needs not unlike many people we see today.

This story hasn't really been told and is focused on Dr. Kelley's personal struggle with his work with Herman Goering, his own past and what he discovered. Any students of psychology, philosophy or sociology should read this book - what are 'normal' humans really capable of??

This quote should intrigue you to read this book. It does not give anything away about the deeper story:

"Kelley knew that the Nazis had committed atrocities and crimes of war on an unprecedented scale. Even the German leaders were surprised to realize what they had done and where they had ended up. But men whose personalities fell within normal parameters had set in motion the Nazi outrages, making Kelley worry that they could happen again. "With the exception of Dr. Ley, there wasn't an insane Joe in the crowd," he told a reporter for the New Yorker. The leaders "were not special types," he wrote. "Their personality patterns indicate that, while they are not socially desirable individuals, their like could very easily be found in America" or elsewhere. Consequently, he feared that holocausts and crimes against humanity could be repeated by psychologically similar perpetrators."

Xanthi says

An interesting book about a young American psychiatrist and his interactions with Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg. Goering is his main focus of attention but there are others, including Hess, who he tests and interviews.

I thought the book would end with either the end of the psychiatrist's stint working there or perhaps the sentencing and execution of these Nazis but I was wrong. The story continues with what happened later in the psychiatrist's personal life which was quite shocking.

Marie-Paule says

Een pure non-fictie psychologische page-turner van formaat!

Het boek gaat o.a. over de contacten tussen Douglas Kelley, een Amerikaanse legerpsychiater en Hermann Göring, Hitlers rechterhand, voor en tijdens de Neurenbergprocessen.

Kelly werd aangesteld om de mentale gezondheid van de 22 nazi's te beoordelen; konden ze een proces aan? Zelf wou hij achterhalen wat hen onderscheidt van de rest van de mensheid. Kelley concludeerde in zijn boek '22 cells in Nuremberg' op basis van de rorschach-uitslagen en eigen interpretaties, dat geen enkele topnazi, behalve Ley die een hersenbeschadiging had, een mentale ziekte vertoonde. De mannen waren verantwoordelijk voor hun eigen daden en zeer goed in staat om goed en slecht van elkaar te onderscheiden. Hij vond geen 'nazitrek', een deviant persoonlijkheidstrekkje dat alle verdachten gemeenschappelijk zouden hebben.

"Hun karaktertrekken zijn zo gewoon dat, hoewel ze niet sociaal wenselijk gedrag vertonen, mannen die op hen lijken ook in Amerika te vinden zijn".

Hij ontdekte wel sporen van neurosen, vaker voorkomend, die hun wredeheden konden vergroten.

De rorschachtest zou de rorschachtest niet zijn, als ze niet tot een controverse zou leiden. Was de rorschachtest wel het middel om de nazi's van de gewone mens te onderscheiden?

Er ontstaan twee kampen, mensen die het met Kelley eens waren en zij die meenden dat er wel een gemeenschappelijk persoonlijkheidsprofiel was (psychopaat met een beperkt vermogen om schuld te voeren en om zich te hechten aan andere mensen. Hun kwaadaardig eigenbelang dreef hun gedrag) Een latere en omvangrijke evaluatie van de rorschachresultaten van de nazi's (1995, Zillmer et al) gaf aan dat het onmogelijk was om enkel op basis van deze resultaten de nazi's onder te brengen in een bepaalde psychologische groep.

Rafal says

Ciekawa historia pracy ameryka?skiego psychiatry i psychologa (-ów) z nazistami przed i w trakcie procesu w Norymberdze i ciekawe wnioski prowadzące do znanej tezy o banalno?ci z?a. Ciekawe (nie przesadnie) dzieje tytu?owego bohatera po powrocie do Stanów a szczególnie tego jak sko?czy?. Ale poza tym ksi??ka zawodzi. Przez ca?y czas budowane jest napi?cie sugeruj?ce jaki? szczególny zwi?zek mi?dzy psychiatr? a Göringiem, którego konsekwencj? b?dzie dramatyczna kulminacja. Jest rzeczywi?cie do?? dramatyczna kulminacja, jest akcesorium ??cz?ce t? kulminacj? z wydarzeniami w Norymberdze... Ale nie ma w tym wszystkim za grosz sensu. Nie ma ?adnego sznurka, który by wi?za? te lu?ne fakty w jak?? tez?. W najwi?kszym skrócie: dowiadujemy si?, ?e nazi?ci nie byli wariatami, ale nie mo?na tego z ca?? pewno?ci? wykluczy?; ?e badaj?cy ich psychiatra w pewnym momencie zwariowa? albo nie zwariowa?; ?e by? tyranem dla swojej rodziny albo tylko bardzo ambitnym ojcem i ?e wynika?o to z jego pracy z nazistami albo z czego? zupe?nie innego. Ca?o?? podlana j?zykiem sensacyjnego reporta?u, w którym ostatecznie nic sensacyjnego si? nie dzieje. Z du?ej chmury - ma?y deszcz.

Judie says

Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, who served as a psychiatrist for the U.S. Army in World War II, received an order to be the lead psychiatrist and work with the high level Nazis being detained for trial at Nuremberg after the war. He saw it as an opportunity to try to discern if there was there a common flaw among the Nazi leaders? "We must learn they why of the Nazi success so we can take steps to prevent the recurrence of such evil." "What made these men criminals?" "Were they born with evil tendencies?" "Did they share psychiatric disorders?" "The trial and its run-up served as fascinating laboratories for the study of group dynamics of aggression, criminal motivation, defense mechanisms of the guilty, depression, and the response of deviant personalities to the judicial process."

His conclusions are as relevant in the United States today, in 2013, as they were in 1947.

Hermann Göring, President of the Reichstag, Hitler's deputy, Prime Minister of Prussia, Reich Minister of Aviation and Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, Minister of Economics, member of the Secret Cabinet Council, director of the Hermann Göring Works manufacturing combine, field marshal, chairman of the Reich Council for National Defense, Reich Forestry and Hunting Master, and Reichsmarshall, was the highest ranking Nazi in detention. After seeing the films taken when the concentration camps were liberated, he stated he didn't know the extent of the atrocities committed against the victims and thought it was enemy propaganda. Until that point, he wanted all co-defendants to "defend themselves, be proud of their actions, and accept the punishment of the victors as a unified group." At first, he told his fellows, to expected exile, then a group execution which "would grant them an afterlife as national martyrs." Unlike the others, he didn't blame Hitler or the Nazi regime. He considered himself a moving force in the Nazi movement."

Kelley spent a lot of time with Göring, admiring his intelligence but aware of his dark side. In a letter to his wife, Göring suggested that if both of them did not survive the war, their daughter should be sent to live in

the US with Kelley and his wife.

The first two pages of THE NAZI AND THE PSYCHIATRIST tell about the suicide of Dr. Kelley on January 1, 1958. The book then moves back to May 6, 1945. Realizing the war was soon ending, Göring sent a letter offering to help the Allies form a new government for the Reich. The Americans captured him but he didn't get to meet with General Dwight Eisenhower or any other officials. Instead, he was taken into custody as a criminal for his crimes in World War II. At the time, he was addicted to paracodeine, taking forty pills a day. (Five tablets had the narcotic effect of 65 mg of morphine.) An army official found that "Göring's hoard of [paracodeine] amounted to nearly the world's entire supply."

During the war, Kelley recognized "combat neurosis" and "combat exhaustion," now referred to as PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder and worked to rehabilitate soldiers and determine who could return to the battlefield or noncombatant duty and who should be returned the US for further treatment. In the early years of the war, only 2% of the its victims in the North Africa campaign could return to duty. After Kelley trained physicians in ways to treat it, more than 95% of the service personnel were able to do so. He was able to use some of techniques when he worked with the Nazi prisoners to help keep them fit for trial. He combined psychiatry with criminology and also developed group therapy as psychiatric tool.

One of Kelley's co-workers, Captain John Dolibois a welfare official helping detainees with their problems and listening to them observed "they spoke quite freely believing they would never face trial. We sometimes had trouble getting them to shut up. They felt neglected if they hadn't been interrogated for a several days." The psychological staff was able to easily get information where traditional interrogation methods failed. Relying heavily on The Rorschach or Ink Blot Test, he concluded, "These people without Hitler are not abnormal, not pervert[s], not geniuses. They were like any other aggressive, smart, ambitious, ruthless businessman, and their business happened in the setting up of a world government." Others, working with him, particularly Lieutenant Gustave Mark Gilbert who held a PhD in psychology and wanted to gather information to write a book, came to a different conclusion.

THE NAZI AND THE PSYCHIATRIST presents a detailed picture of the detainees lives before and after Nuremberg, a description of the courtroom itself, the reaction of the Nazis to the testimony and the verdicts, It also tells what happened to each prisoner after the trial. While most of the book deals with Hermann Göring and the relationship between him and Kelley , the book presents information about each of the main defendants, the men at the higher leadership roles in the Nazi regime. For example, Julius Streicher, editor of the exceedingly anti-Jewish Der Stürmer, was considered loathsome, a pariah among the other prisoners. He had a reputation as a sadist, rapist, and collector of pornography. Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign minister, had only an elementary school education and had worked in the liquor business previously. Kelley questioned whether Hess's amnesia was real, faked, or somewhere in between (had been faked then turned real) but was able to show he was capable to stand trial.

The book also states that Hitler had gastrointestinal disorders for more than twenty years though no organic cause was ever found by doctors. Because of that, he feared death and acted impulsively. He believed he had stomach cancer and "turned his attention from successful assaults on Great Britain to a campaign in the east that resulted in defeat."

There were three suicides among the detainees, two by hanging before the trial and one, Göring's by swallowing a cyanide capsule the night before he was to be hung.

After Kelley returned to the United States, Kelley was urged to write, but he wanted to get away from the detentions and trial. Eventually, did write about his experiences and examination as well as taught and trained law enforcement personnel. His family life was extremely complex with him alternating between kindness and vicious enforcer. He and his wife had major arguments and his children never knew how he would react to anything. He refused to see a psychiatrist because he didn't want to appear weak before a peer since he was an expert in the field. He was excessively strict with his children, especially his oldest son, because he wanted to train him to not act like the Germans did. He was to be observant and analytical. His son began thinking of killing his father when he was seven years old.

Based on his interpretation of their psychological make-up and trying to answer his original questions about

why the Nazis acted as they did, Kelley said. “Unbridled ambition, weak ethics, and excessive patriotism that could justify nearly any action of questionable rightness.” They were “Not monsters, evildoing machines, or automata without soul and feelings.”

He wrote 22 Cells “to influence the thinking of the American people and hoped readers would understand the qualities that allowed a group of men to dominate a country and let them believe they had the right to do so....That America could become Germany.”

Some of the Nazi prisoners compared Germany to the United States and it’s racial bigots and ultranationalists, such as white supremacists Senator Theodore Bilbo, Congressman John E. Rankin, Governor Eugene Talmadge and Huey Long. To prevent people with personalities similar to the Nazis from gaining control of the US, “Kelley advocated:

removing all restrictions on the voting rights of US citizens, convincing as many Americans as possible to vote in elections, and rebuilding the educational system to cultivate students who could think critically and resist using ‘strong emotional reactions’ to make decisions. Finally, he urged his countrymen to refuse to vote for any candidate who made ‘political capital’ of any group’s race and religious beliefs or referred indirectly or directly to the blood, heritage, or morals of opponents. ‘The United States [would] never reach its full stature’ until it has undergone this transformation

Near the end of the book, we read more of Dr. Kelley’s suicide, by cyanide capsule.

At the beginning, NAZI AND THE PSYCHIATRIST presents a list of the principle characters including their job titles. The final book will include eight pages of photos and a full bibliography which includes writings by both Dr. Kelley and Lieutenant Gilbert.

I received an advance copy this book from Goodreads.com and am very glad I had the opportunity to read it. Kelley’s comments about preventing similar experiences in other countries, quoted above, echo strongly in the US political atmosphere today.

Tom says

(nb: I received an Advanced Review Copy of this title from the publisher via NetGalley)

Jack El-Hai’s latest book, “The Nazi and the Psychiatrist,” tells one of the lesser-known stories of post-World War 2: the psychological analysis of the infamous Nuremberg Trial defendants. It is a fascinating journey.

The book follows Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, a celebrated Army psychiatrist. As a Captain serving in the European theater, he developed techniques that greatly slashed the detrimental effects of combat fatigue, enabling soldiers to return to their units mentally healthy and able to resume fighting. Always an intellectually curious man, Dr. Kelley was overjoyed to be reassigned to work with the surviving Nazi leaders.

Kelley served as a regular physician as needed, but his specialty was analyzing the psychological fitness of these prisoners. Of particular interest to Kelley was Hermann Göring, Hitler’s Reichsmarschall and choice to take over Germany after his death.

Dr. Kelley performed the psychological evaluations as required, but he went one step further. Under the guise of administering routine tests, Kelley dug deeper into his Nazi “patients,” trying to discover if there was some trait, some gene, some sort of special indicator that facilitated these men becoming Nazis.

His findings may surprise you. So painstakingly thorough was his methodology, that much of Dr. Kelley's research is still being analyzed over 60 years later.

During his tenure at Nuremberg, Dr. Kelley developed close professional relationships with some of history's most-feared men. The sheer normalcy, even collegiality, with which Kelley and Göring interacted was especially unexpected: the guy who created the Luftwaffe could be charming, intelligent, and even funny.

Naturally, most of “The Nazi and the Psychiatrist” focuses on this period in Dr. Kelley’s life. However, he was definitely not an ordinary Army doctor. Kelley came from an intellectually driven background, where mental discipline and broad curiosity were taught from a young age. After he left the Army, Kelley took a while to find his bearings, eventually settling at his alma mater, UC Berkeley, where he was the star professor in the school’s new criminology program.

In addition to teaching, Kelley served as a consultant to numerous law enforcement agencies, TV shows, even Hollywood movies.

As his professional life became more hectic, life at home with his wife and three kids began to suffer. And we are left to wonder if there might be a touch of psychosis in the psychiatrist.

“The Nazi and the Psychiatrist” is a fascinating book—with a promising title like that, how could it not be? One risk with historical treatises is that the author sometimes over-reaches, padding what could be an interesting story with endless, dry recitation of facts.

Happily, “The Nazi and the Psychiatrist” avoids this pitfall beautifully. Author Jack El-Hai presents plenty of information; indeed, I came away with a new understanding of both behavioral psychology and psychiatry, as well as the Nuremberg Trials. What El-Hai does so well is keep the story moving. No single part of the story bogs down in minutiae. He presents all manner of salient facts and details, but he does a wonderful job editing.

As the title suggests, at the core is the relationship between a Nazi (Göring) and psychiatrist Kelley. The pre-War and post-War life of Dr. Douglas Kelley bookends his Nuremberg experiences, and this information is crucial. Also, we go inside the Nuremberg Trials, even after Dr. Kelley had returned stateside. This, too, is critical.

The resulting book is a gripping, informative, oddly bittersweet account of two men, and how their extraordinary lives came tangent to one another for a brief moment in time. It is most definitely a story worth reading. That it’s true makes it all the more compelling.

Highly Recommended

Megan says

In a word: dry. Not only was the writing repetitive and lacking momentum, some of the statements aroused doubt in the author's research. (The Rorschach still widely accepted and used? Please. A Google survey has better reliability and validity.) Nevertheless, the subject matter was interesting.

TR Peterson says

I found this book difficult to put down. It is well written and flows easily in addition to being highly intriguing subject matter. Central to the book is the vying interpretations of the psychology of the minds of Nazi leaders yet this does not overwhelm the excellent story-telling from El-Hai.

At times it is unclear whether this is a biography of Goring or Kelley or an academic contribution to the aforementioned debate. However, as one gets engrossed in the story, it hardly seems to matter that it doesn't necessarily have a defined goal beyond the storytelling itself.

I would certainly recommend this to anyone interested in the history of WW2 or psychiatry in the 20th century. Overall, it is an enjoyable and fascinating read.

*Disclosure - I received a free ARC copy of this book through Goodreads First Reads.

Bennie says

Good account of the Nuremberg Trials and the American psychiatrist who tried to get inside the minds of Hitler's top henchmen. Douglas Kelley served as chief psychiatrist and tried to determine their mental competency to stand trial. While the Germans claimed they were only doing their jobs, they were held accountable for their actions. While the first 2/3 of the book covered the trials, the last part covered the life of Kelley after the trials. He was a very interesting individual and it seems he was affected by the trials and the personalities of those he analyzed. It seems to me he wanted more fame for the part he played but he never really got it. Highly recommend this one.

Carlos Pedraza says

From a historical perspective, this is a hugely informative and compelling book. Unfortunately, it's greatest weakness is that it features very little of the actual conversations between Dr. Kelley and Hermann Goering. Their face-to-face should have been the most riveting delivery of the premise of the book. I suspect those possibilities are why this book was optioned for a movie adaptation before it was even published.
