



## Stettin Station

*David Downing*

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In the fall of 1941, Anglo-American journalist John Russell is still living in Berlin, tied to the increasingly alien city by his love for two Berliners: his fourteen-year-old son, Paul, and his longtime girlfriend, Effi. Forced to work for both German and American Intelligence, he's searching for a way out of Germany. Can he escape and take Effi with him?

## Stettin Station Details

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Author : David Downing

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## From Reader Review Stettin Station for online ebook

### Elaine Tomasso says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book - plot wise not a lot really happens but the atmosphere of suspicion and fear is pervasive and you live the adventure with John and Effi. It is also very informative on life in Berlin at the time. I would say, however, to new readers that it will be a more rewarding read if you have read the preceding novels in the series (Zoo Station & Silesian Station).

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### G.J. says

Another good one in the series ! This is the third, I found it very detailed and enjoyed the ongoing story of John Russell.

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### Speesh says

It must be hard to write any kind of book, fiction or non fiction, set in or around Germany during the Second World War and not at some point come up against the situation of whether 'they' knew about what was happening to the Jewish population. The 'hero' of David Downing's wonderful 'Station' series (you really don't have to read on any further now, do you? You can guess this is going to be (another) good review, eh?), John Russell has, as in the previous two books, both become aware of something of what is/was happening and has tried to help. That's not to set him up as an example of being better than ordinary Germans - mainly because he's English/American - he's just offering his help, such as it is, to people he knows, in a time of great need. As I'm sure anyone reading these books would hope that they would, were in them in his position. In 'Stettin Station', it looks like he is going to find out where all those trains full of Jews leaving Berlin railway stations in the dead of night are going and why. It seems fairly certain that a lot of people, ordinary people, knew something was happening, but the ordinary person didn't/couldn't see the whole picture/realise the whole horror of what was being done in their name. They knew people were being taken away and didn't come back. They perhaps didn't believe they were being killed as the reason for them not being seen again. Indeed a lot of Jewish people thought their friends were being resettled, happily in the east. They often had postcards from them saying how happy they were as evidence.

But how does John Russell report what he knows?

'Stettin Station' begins in November 1941 and John Russell is still clinging on to his journalism job, reporting to various American and English newspapers, on goings on - officially and unofficially - in the German capital. He can't abide or believe the official announcements he and his fellow reporters are fed by the German propaganda ministry, but he doesn't rock the boat too much or he'd risk being kicked out of Germany (if he's lucky) and thus losing contact with his girlfriend and his son Paul. German troops have blitzkrieged their way to the gates of Moscow (the 'Gates of Moscow' are mentioned so often in the books I read on WWII, I'm guessing there were actually once some gates at the start of Moscow city limits?) and look both imperious and unstoppable. As unstoppable as the United States' entry into the war looks too - Pearl Harbour happens during the book's timeline. This will mean Russell must leave, or stay as a 'guest' of the Reich. Either eventuality will take him away from those he loves most. Through his film star actress

girlfriend Effi, we see how the upper strata of German society functioned. Through his son Paul, a German youth being indoctrinated as all German youth were, we see how the regime worked from the bottom, up. Russell is in an unenviable position. Though as he realises more and more, the people who would envy his position are those Jews on the trains heading east. Those who actually arrive wherever it is they're going, anyway.

It is almost a waste of time trying to review these John Russell and Effi Koenen books, they're all uniformly excellent it would seem. 'Stettin Station' is absolutely no different. It is an amazingly rich and detailed glimpse back at life in Berlin in the Second World War. Lord only knows how David Downing has amassed such knowledge. History books will tell you what happened and when, but these books tell you what it felt like and how 'normal' life sounded, smelled, touched and tasted. It goes far beyond 'information', it is the knowledge of someone who was there at the time. Or has invented time travel. It is as if he himself has only recently returned from Berlin in 1941 and is writing the stories whilst the experiences are fresh in his memory. You feel you can almost reach out and touch Nazi riddled Berlin of 1941. But you are also perhaps very glad you can't.

It's quite extraordinary and no mistake. Brilliant book, incredibly good series. Buy them. Read them.

(The question of whether the ordinary German in the streets knew what was going on, is looked at here, partly through John Russell's late night meetings with his contact at the railways. The question has also cropped up in at least one of the previous 'Station' books. It is pretty clear - to me at least - that the books' position is 'yes', they knew more or less what was happening, but chose to look the other way, giving the Nazis prone to the worst excesses, carte blanche. For an idea of how much the Allies knew and when they knew it, you should head in the direction of Martin Gilbert's 'Auschwitz and The Allies' or the incredible 'The Holocaust' also by Martin Gilbert).

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### **Liviu says**

It's rare I get frustrated when a book ends and I want \*more\* now but this series became so good and this book (which is the best so far, though Zoo and Silesian were excellent too) is so compelling and the characters' arc so interesting that I got upset when it ended, re-read it twice and the next book (hopefully tbp in 2010) Postdamer Station is an asap...

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### **Andy says**

It's now 1941 in this series & set a few weeks before Pearl Harbour & America's belated entry (again) into another world war. A lot of the book is dedicated to the effect of the war on the Eastern Front on ordinary Germans in Berlin & the author paints a vivid picture of this. We also experience the start of the removal of the German Jews as part of the "resettlement program" in the east & it's quite harrowing as you experience this through a family close to the hero who can't believe the rumours of mass shootings upon their arrival. The holiday postcards are also featured..... We have Goebbels as a character as the hero's girlfriend is an actress of repute & has to mingle with said Nazis propaganda machine.

The mystery, later this time as it begins at about 1/2 way through the book, BUT it's not really solved in the traditional manner as the reader is treated to the machinations of the 3rd Reich through multiple personas be

it the elite, the downtrodden, Nazi party members, the communists network, the jews, intelligence services be it American, Abwehr or the SD, American journalists..... to name but a few.

I won't even mention the ending bit intrigued (very) as to how this will play out going forward!

Great insight for anyone interested in the period.

For me a 4 stars read & onto the next station

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### **Francis Hardy says**

A two star review seems somewhat mean, I quite liked many aspects of the book but, going by the goodreads rating system, overall I thought it was ok. I feel like I should clarify that I really enjoyed the two previous books (especially the first which is superb), however, I felt that the plot let this instalment down somewhat.

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### **Anna says**

This is the 3rd installment of John Russell's ongoing struggles. In this story he finds himself in an increasingly complicated situation. "In reality he had done nothing to help Nazi Germany and several things to impede it, but the number of people who could actually testify to that fact were decidedly thin on the ground. If all of them dropped dead before the war's end he would have some difficult explaining to do."

The story begins in the fall of 1941 when the Nazis are apparently about to take Moscow and presumably end the war. The unanswered question of the moment was how and when the US would enter the war. The situation in Berlin was in a holding pattern. The Brits were gone. The Soviets were gone. The Americans were still there represented by diplomats, businessmen, and of course, reporters. "And four more different Americans were hard to imagine: a cosmopolitan diplomat, an ex-actor turned Nazi, a would-be spymaster from California and an essentially German communist. Not to mention himself, the American who had only spent six weeks in his homeland. Yet they were all in Berlin waiting ..."

It's difficult for me to like John Russell and understand his judgment calls. He finds himself running missions for the German Abwehr, which in turn, is being monitored by the Gestapo; but is passing messages to the Americans. He is supposed to be gathering information for the Americans, but keeps putting off that obligation because he considers that too dangerous. In the meantime, he keeps turning for help to the Communists that have betrayed him in the past. As John keeps agonizing over his situation, his ex-brother-in-law Thomas is a Schindler-like character who employs Jews in his print enterprise. His girlfriend Effi is an actress who has to keep her opposition to the regime under wraps. The lure of these novels is the way Downing captures the atmosphere of ordinary life in Berlin.

There is a great commentary about news in the Reich: "... all the papers would be carrying the same stories. ... What one paper said, they all said, and were equally disbelieved ...

And yet, despite themselves, the German newspapers did offer their readers a mirror to the real situation. It was merely a matter of learning to read between the lines. Over recent weeks, for example, there had been many articles stressing the inherent difficulties of the war in the East: the inhuman strength of the primitive

Russian soldier, the extremes of climate and conditions. Prepare yourself for setbacks, the subtext read, we may have bitten off more than we can chew."

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### **David Highton says**

The third in the series of a journalist with an American passport living in Berlin during the war - this is now late 1941 and the deterioration of American-Japanese relationships increases the potential for US entry into the war. Anxiety about deportation or internment is increased when he asked to carry a message to Prague. Excellent book.

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### **Eric\_W says**

I must say I have enjoyed this series (which I recommend reading in order) so far. This is the third and continues an examination of Germany during World War II as seen through the eyes of Russell, an American journalist, who is tied to Germany by his girlfriend, Effie, and his German-born son.

You get a real sense of the claustrophobia people must felt as they became hemmed in by bombing and the repressiveness of the regime, constantly having to watch what you say, who you say it to, and who might overhear you.

Downing is very skillful in showing elements of the Third Reich's control. For example, Russell stops to purchase a copy of the Beobachter in which he reads that Ernst Udet, WW I ace and big Luftwaffe general had been killed testing a new fighter plane. Thinking that was a bit strange I utilized the wonderful feature of my Kindle and clicking on Udet's name read the piece on Udet in the Wikipedia only to learn that Udet had committed suicide. So I figured Downing had erred. Just a few pages later, however, at a press briefing, he uses a question from another reporter to point to the suicide ("Does the administration have any comment on the rumor that Udet had committed suicide?") The truth is out as well as the ministry's attempts to hide it.

Russell is a journalist, after all, and in his attempts to discover what's really happening on the eastern front, he cultivates a locomotive engineer. Some of the important detail that's revealed I had not learned by reading the standard discussions of the Nazi failure in the Russian winter. For example, Russian tenders carried a larger supply of water, so their water tanks were further apart; the steam pipes were built around the boiler rather than on the outside as with German engines, so they didn't freeze. These all provided clues for Russell as to why the war in the east had bogged down.

Some people have complained about the ending. It's a series. Get over it, people. I can't wait to start the 4th. As I noted above, read them in order.

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### **Jrwest says**

This is now the 3rd book that I have read in the John Russell series and I have enjoyed all of them. This book is set in 1941 in Germany just before the US become involved in the war. It is a spy/mystery novel and the protagonist John Russell seems to get himself involved with German, Soviet and American spy agencies.

Very suspenseful and a very compelling read. It maintains a very believability factor which is very good for a spy book. I really enjoyed how the book caught the flavor of what it was like to live in Berlin during the war under the control of the Nazi party. If the Gestapo catches a contact you will only have 24 hours before they talk.

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### **Diabolik77 says**

Another epic adventure of our dearest John Russell, with lots of coups de théâtre in the plot. I must say the suspense grows page after page, and the last third of the book displays plenty of thrilling scenes.

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### **Jaksen says**

Love this series.

But in many ways it's often hard to read - so many characters! So many Nazis! Even so many of the good guys. (I made a cue card-thing for the first book and still refer to it, though so some of those characters are long gone, and in so many ways.)

John Russell, an American with a German ex-wife and a German son, is a working reporter/journalist living in Germany circa 1941. He also has a German girlfriend who's a prominent actress, often forced to take strongly pro-Nazi roles in the movies being filmed. The book is replete with historical and political references as Russell lives, moves, and works in that world. He has to keep up-to-date; he has to be aware of everything going on all around him, from what Hitler and his minions are up to, to food shortages, the state of mind of the 'ordinary' German, and those trains which keep coming and going and coming and going - in this book, mainly coming and going East.

The way people think, the way they live and move, the affect of air raids, the blackout curtains, the outspoken, outrageous, cruel and inhumane treatment of the Jews, Communists or any 'outsider' - it's all there. And the food! Normally I get tired of a book which mentions food all the time, but in this case it's important, a reflection of how hardship affects people in both small and grand ways.

The story concerns the fact that in the past Russell has been a kind of 'courier' and spy, mostly helping out the Communists (Soviets) who are the thick of war with Nazi Germany. (America's not there yet.) His past activities become a huge threat as he's dragged before various Nazi leaders, bureaucrats, and members of the Gestapo, etc., to explain himself - or worse - in order to do their bidding. You just have to know that one of these events is going to get him in BIG trouble.

And it does. The end of the book is thriller-suspenseful and I raced through it. Thoroughly satisfied, I'm looking forward to reading book #4 in the series.

Five stars.

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## **Monica says**

“Stettin Station” continues the story of John Russell, a British/American journalist living in Berlin during WWII. While the last three books focused more on espionage and Russell’s involvement with the Nazi’s, the Americans, and the Russians, this book focuses more on the personal life of Russell and the events and decisions he has to make in order to survive. Once again David Downing’s writing is excellent and he is able to create such incredible tension and anxiety about this period in history with just a few words. You can’t help but read one of his books and be completely transported to a different time and place. When I read one of Downing’s books I find myself sitting on the edge, eager to rush ahead and make sure that everything is going to be okay. The ending of this book...well...it’s not what I expected or wanted...but it’s realistic and in keeping with what the characters have been going though. And it left me with much anticipation for the next book.

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## **Rob Kitchin says**

Stettin Station is the third book in the John Russell and Effi Koenen series. The strengths of the tale are the characterisation, sense of atmosphere and place, and the historicisation. Russell and Koenen are well realised and rounded characters and they are accompanied by a broad spectrum of nicely penned others, including journalists, administrators, various forms of police, family, friends and other citizens. Downing manages to nicely blend the everyday realities and complexities of living in Berlin during the war with the politics and machinations of a police state and his role as a foreign journalist. The result is a story that captures the everydayness of getting on with lives in a state of perpetual background fear, and the tactics of surviving and resisting. Moreover, by utilising real events and occasionally real historical characters, Downing provides a semblance of authenticity. Where the book suffers a little is with regards to the plot. Whilst it is an interesting story the tale seemed largely a transitory one, moving the characters into place for the next instalment rather than having its own self-contained arc and denouement. Moreover, the ending seemed somewhat contrived and didn’t ring true to me. Nonetheless, Stettin Station is a solid addition to a very good series and I look forward to reading the next instalment.

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## **Garry says**

For those looking for a detailed and evocative description of wartime Berlin, it would be hard to find a better way of getting insight into this time and period.

For those looking for a tight and taut plot that propells the narrative from beginning to end....not so much.

Given how carefully Downing catalogued every breakfast, lunch, dinner, break for tea, stop for cocktails, trip to a coffee shop and more it is not surprising that copious detail and attention are given the quality (poor) of the food in wartime Berlin.

Increased attention is given to Russell’s movie star girlfriend, Effi, in this entry in the series, and these are some of the more interesting and well-developed parts. Notably less attention is given to Russell’s son, Paul, who appears to be an increasinbly enthusiastic member of the Hitler Youth. This is a lost opportunity for gaining insight into how a nation and a people made the choices they did. Berlin seems oddly well populated by skeptics and resisters otherwise.

Again, with about thirty pages to go to the end, Downing pulls the loose narrative threads together and focuses on a suspenseful denouement. Until then, there are the usual odd assignments, excessive descriptions of plot points and characters from past books in the series, and all that wandering around.

I will probably come back, but for now I'm taking a break from this series.

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