Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abd el-Kader (1808-1883) by John W. Kiser

Great Historical Narrative

... One of those dazzling biographies that informs our modern life. —Susan Eisenhower, Chairman of the Eisenhower Group, author of Mrs. Ike

“Today more than ever, Muslims and non-Muslims alike need to be reminded of the courage, compassion and intellect of Emir Abd el-Kader… Abd el-Kader’s jihad provides Muslims with a much-needed antidote to the toxic false jihads of today, dominated by anger, violence and politics.” -- His Royal Highness, Prince Hassan bin Talal (Prince of Jordan)

Abd el-Kader teaches the French and the world that to achieve success, moral authority is necessary, not simply military might... This fascinating revival of a 19th century world hero’s story holds valuable lessons for today’s Middle East Warrior. It would be a worthwhile addition to any reading list.”—Col. Jon Smythe, USMC (ret.)

“Abd el-Kader lived by a chivalric code steeped in the Arab concept of honor. When, in our own day al-Qaeda terrorists claim the title of knight, it’s worth recalling a time when Arab warriors embodied the noblest attributes of knighthood: courage compassion and restraint.”—Steve Simon, research fellow, Council on Foreign Relations

“John Kiser has not just given us an absorbing and beautifully written story of a great hero, he has written an important book. The reader is bound to be moved by the life of this remarkable man who was the very opposite of a fanatical jihadist.”—Jane Geniesse, former New York Times reporter and author of Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark
“Kiser weaves the intricate tale of Abd el-Kader’s heroic life and spirit as deftly as the emir maneuvered his armies on the battlefield . . . the perfect elixir for the contemporary West’s chronic difficulties understanding the East.”—Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, author of What’s Right with Islam

When Abd el-Kader died in 1883, The New York Times hailed him as “one of the few great men of the century.” The warrior/saint had won the heart of the French nation, his sworn enemy and the invader of his Algerian homeland. He reached the summit of his fame after he saved the lives of thousands of Christians during a Turkish rampage in Damascus. Elkader, Iowa, is named after the emir.

www.truejihad.com


New York Times Review:

Reviving a Novel-Worthy Tale of War and Religion

PETER STEINFELS

Published: November 21, 2008  For more than 40 years he was a world figure, his renown stretching from the American Midwest to Moscow to the Middle East. As he neared death in 1883, The New York Times wrote that he “deserves to be ranked among the foremost of the few great men of the century.”

Earlier, he had received accolades and awards from France, Britain, Russia, the Ottoman sultan, the papacy and President Abraham Lincoln, who sent him not a medal but, in quintessentially American fashion, a matched pair of fancy Colt pistols.

The man being honored was Abd el-Kader, a learned and fervent Muslim, who for 15 years had organized and led a jihad against a Western power.

After he ceased hostilities, his four-year detention, in violation of a promise of safe passage into exile, became an international cause célèbre. Released and feted, even by his captors, he came to live in Damascus.

There, in July 1860, el-Kader braved mobs and saved thousands of Christians from a murderous rampage through the city’s Christian quarter.
In this, the bicentennial of his birth, el-Kader’s name is known to only a tiny fraction of Americans. That fraction includes those knowledgeable about modern Algeria, where his resistance to French colonization places him among the founding figures of an independent nation.

And then there are the 1,500 residents of Elkader, a town in northeastern Iowa, founded and named in 1846 by a frontier lawyer who admired the freedom-fighting exploits of this “daring Arab chieftain.”

Anyone interested in learning more should turn to “Commander of the Faithful” (Monkfish Book Publishing Company), a new book by John W. Kiser.

Mr. Kiser had previously written “The Monks of Tibhirine” (St. Martin’s Press), about Trappist monks in Algeria whose quiet lives of prayer had bonded them with their Muslim neighbors but who were nonetheless taken hostage by Islamic extremists in 1996 and killed.

Mr. Kiser learned about el-Kader (the name is sometimes transliterated from the Arabic in different ways, like al-Qadir or al-Kadir) because the Tibhirine monastery stood on the slope of a mountain where el-Kader had led one of his battles and where a steep cliff face was named after him.

A book about a leader of jihad may seem like a strange sequel to a book about peaceful monks, but the more Mr. Kiser learned about el-Kader, the more he felt a spiritual kinship between the devout, ascetic Trappists and the pious, ascetic guerrilla leader. Both had found in their own religious codes and daily rituals the basis for a fraternity that defied religious boundaries.

As the son of a celebrated holy man, tribal leader and head of a Sufi brotherhood, el-Kader was taught to read and memorize the Koran, tutored in all the details of the tradition but also in philosophy, history and other fields.

At home and away, the young boy was also trained in horseback riding, public speaking and fighting skills. All would prove crucial. In 1832, with France increasingly encroaching on Algerian territory that was only nominally under Ottoman rule, the 25-year-old el-Kader emerged as the commander, the emir, of Muslim Arab resistance.

Because el-Kader was just over five feet tall, Alexis de Tocqueville, the French political thinker, who took a great interest in Algerian affairs, called him a “puny Arab”; but Tocqueville also called him “a Muslim Cromwell.” Like Oliver Cromwell, he wielded strict religious beliefs to form a disciplined fighting force.

Mr. Kiser insists on the religious dimension of what might otherwise be read as a story of military and political maneuvering. But “Commander of th
My Personal Review:
This is an Editorial in our local newspaper that I wrote after meeting John.
A chance meeting with the Emir of Sperryville.
Camelot is a place to study tolerance.
A chance meeting at best. My daughter had given me a gift certificate for
Borders and I was determined not to let it burn a hole in my pocket. My
shelves are always looking for a new addition to add to my library of half
read books. So on Saturday January 3rd I stopped by the store in
Warrenton to relieve myself of this heavy burden. I was looking for
Southern Storm to study the real William Tecumseh Sherman and his
devastating and deadly "march to the sea" in autumn of 1864. I have
always been taught that he was a butcher and people just don't talk of him
in polite company. Recently I have read stories about his respect for
southerners, sparing various towns and cities and his empathy for the
plight of the freed slaves that trailed his troop movements. So in the name
of tolerance and understanding I set out to get a better education on
General Sherman. I quickly found the book and headed for the cash
register to relinquish my red plastic gift card. Then the adventure began.
In the corner of my eye I caught stacks of books laid out on a table and the
setting of a classroom. No one was in the area except a professorial
character that I took to be the author of the book. I made a couple of
nonchalant passes trying not to engage in conversation but at the same
time investigate the title and subject. He looked like the kind of guy who
would write children's books and love talking about them. I had to avoid
capture. Evidently from the conversation I overheard his discussion of the
book was that morning and went very well. Now's the chance, he was
distracted in conversation. I moved in and scooped up a book, and quickly
thumbed through it. If it was deadwood I could just as quickly replaced it
and flee without saying a word.
The book was called Commander of the Faithful and had a strange, yet
handsome color portrait of Arab chieftain and the subtitle The Life and
Times of Emir Abd el-Kadar. My interest had now attracted the attention of
the professor who was dress in a V-neck sweater like the one we all wore
in the 60's but this one had seen better days. I quickly flashed to the back
of the book....yep, this was the author, John W. Kiser, and he was headed
my way. I consider myself a historian, so I squared to meet him head on
with a question.
"Why would you write such a book", I asked, not knowing anymore than
the subject?
"I thought the story needed to be told of a good and honorable Arab," he
responded.
Wait a minute...these are our sworn enemies. They have been demonized
in the media and folk tales for generations. According to Mr. Kiser, the
Emir was more than a good field general. He was a leader that drew the
praise and respect of the French with whom he fought a bitter 15 year war
and Christian Holy men who he rescued. But the highest praise came from
his prisoners. If Mr. Kiser can write half as well as he can spin a yarn,
maybe this is a book that will teach me tolerance and respect of the Arab
people. I know I need to listen. (My only head to head experience was in the Navy in the Mideast standing on the deck of Frigate shouting down at the bum boats alongside trying to trade with our crew.) He said that he was looking at doing a signing at the Culpeper Library. That would be great.

Convinced that I need to attend the next book signing to hear this story from the author's own lips and after the obligatory book signing I quickly returned the book on Sherman's march to the shelf for later study and headed to my car to retrieve my business card. When I returned I asked if he made a living doing this and he chuckled and said "I'm a pig farmer. I live in Sperryville." Out came his card with Meadow Green Farm, Pastured Pork, Pig Manure. "If you need any Pig Manure I'm your man."

You've got to love Camelot. There are the most incredible people teaching tolerances around every corner. Thank you, John Kiser. Your book is a good read too.

Gordon Meriwether
Fairfax, VA
01.06.09

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abd el-Kader (1808-1883) by John W. Kiser - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!