

War stories and movies of World War II are 9 out of 10 stories of the allies in the west. How the heroes of WW II defeated Adolf Hitler in Europe and the Japanese in the pacific. However, there are always two sides to every story. Seldom do we hear the stories of what the very young soldiers of Germany's army went through and how they too suffered. Young boys are drafted and trained to kill.

Here is the diary of my uncle that he wrote after he was drafted into the German army. He came from a very musical family. Growing up, he was an excellent cello player and wanted nothing more than to play in a classical orchestra. His mother; my grandmother; was a music teacher, and his sister Dorothea was studying to become an opera singer when the war broke out. This is their story in their own words.

# Part 1

This is the translation of the diary that he wrote.



In his own words



Fritz Fischer

Died April 20 1944 in Ostrov Russia

This is his diary starting the middle of December

1941

Now we are finally full-fledged soldiers i.e. (that means) we came with 35 men from all training ranks in Neumünster to the 2.X. 21 in the marching battalion in Hamburg-Bergdorf. Oblt. (lieutenant) Streker, the company Leader, an elderly gentleman affectionately looks after our equipment, accommodation, food, etc. Wonderful days with a lot of free time follow. Only the most necessary service is performed (clothing roll call, cleaning of weapons.) There is already a lot of snow and it is bitterly cold. Christmas is stirring and we are making preparations to at least be able to celebrate the festival. With Rudi Böhern and Kurt Schweiker we are in Bergdorf or Hamburg almost every afternoon.

Dec. 20 I'll get in touch with Ulli Kaut and will be invited there on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

Dec. 24 I celebrate a very peculiar Christmas, the first between the soldiers. The thought of an early departure for Russia hover over everyone, nobody knows where we are to go; and the time of departure is unknown. Will it continue in the old year?

Dec. 25 I read on a bulletin board: Edwin Fischer is playing Symphony (?). Although the concert begins earlier at 11a.m., I have made up my mind not to let this unique and perhaps last opportunity to hear the greatest of German pianists pass me by. After a long journey and many detours, I managed to find the (Schloss) castle garden at 12 o'clock. A nice looking person approached me and kindly assured me that the tickets were already sold out 14 days ago. After some deliberation and with the help of (Christmas) he lets me sneak in. Edwin Fischer is just beginning his last number of the program: "Sonate Apassionata". This has been a great experience for me for a long time. In the early afternoon I meet Ulli Kaut. He is able to get two tickets for the Christmas festival performance of the national Opera. We can listen to Mozart's "Magic Flute" (Die zauber Flöte) conducted by Eugen Jochum, we can sit in the free seats of a box. It was the second great experience of this Christmas season. Afterwards we drove to Blankenese to visit Ulli Kaut's grandparents, who treated me with such worthiness and warm cordiality, as I was no longer used to as a soldier. The evening began with ... (some kind of food)...roast goose and I still had to eat a lot of Christmas pastries before I said

goodbye at a late hour. Ulli's brothers Edgar and ...?...were there and the evening became a third great experience of this strange Christmas festival.

Dec. 28 The final preparations for the departure have been made.

Dec. 30 Dad and mom came to experience the beginning of the year with me. These were wonderful days that are relived in memory of the times that have passed. As in the old days, we sit together with wonderful food and the best wine.

Dec. 31 The three of us go to the Hans Theater performance and afterwards to the hotel, happy and healthy into the new year.

*Transcriber could not make a sentence out of the first two lines of the paragraph ..... imagine and go healthy and happy in the hotel into the New Year.*

1942

Jan. 1 It's time to say good-bye. Dad and mom don't know yet that we must move out tomorrow. I arrive at the barracks at 9 p.m.

At 11 p.m. we leave for the train station. We imagined this farewell a little differently; with music, and during the day it should go to Hamburg. Now we move during the foggy night to load the convoy and the vehicles. This takes all night. We are stowed in old passenger cars. We are eight men in a train compartment.



Jan. 2 At around 4 a.m. the train starts moving. It's a strange feeling knowing that we won't leave the cars until we're in Russia. Over the course of the day, we sort of checked in (adjusted?) to the

new status. Luckily, Rudi Böhern Kurt Schaniker, myself and Schandt, the Pole, came over in our compartment. Everyone is still very quiet. Only a few pray or occupy themselves with their things. For the rest, they look out the window in pursuit of their thoughts. Time flies by, only rarely does the train stop at a signal. On our route we drive through all nations. It is night when we leave Berlin behind and it is early afternoon when we pass Breslau. We experience the crossing over the Reich border sleeping in a dark, dreamless night. When we wake up we drive through Polish country. Almost all of us are beyond the Reich border for the first time. Everyone believes that everyone sees something special about the country flying by because it is foreign, and really the villages are becoming rarer, the wooden houses smaller and more village-like. The days run in a regular rhythm. At night one sleeps on the benches, the floor or the luggage compartment. There are restless nights because the machine doesn't deliver enough steam to accelerate the cars enough. So the days go by. During the day if the train stops by .... Rivers or at lonely train stations, everyone breaks out of the wagons and looks for an





opportunity to refresh and wash. Over time, everyone tries to rub their faces and hands with snow. It wakes you up and refreshes you. So, the days go by in quick succession, and we have long since left the Russian border. The picture of the surroundings changes continuously. During train stopovers, more and more people gather, mostly women, children or old people begging for bread or cigarettes. The people must be utterly starved and neglected, for they pounce like chickens on discarded crusts of bread. Others try to exchange anything for a piece of our bad egg dish. And we're amazed by the fact that even little boys as young as 5 years old smoke like the men they imitate.

Jan. 15 We have arrived at our first goal. The name is Odessa. With bag and baggage, we move

through the city, through the train station to our quarters, which is 1 ½ hours away. The streets are busy with German and Romanian soldiers and a lot of military vehicles. In between, the local population mingles, giving the hustle and bustle a quite colorful character. Some parts of the city are pretty shot up; one ruined house follows the other. We march past large, oriental-looking churches that make us realize quite clearly that we are far from home. Finally, we have reached our quarters. We are housed in an old school where classes even have beds set up. First we get our meals which are big round Romanian corn breads that look as if they were baked from wheat flour and make a welcome change for us.

Jan. 16 Departure is early in the morning. The first destination is Nikolajain (could now be Mikolaiv on the Black Sea in Ukraine), which can be reached in four days' march. Lieutenant Strecker (or Necker)? has hired a large number of trucks on which to stow our backpacks. The march turned out to be more arduous and difficult, more than we had imagined, because the deep snow and the ice impedes the march enormously. Above all, our duel harnesses. Some of the horses that are

harnessed to the kitchen and combat vehicles are very worn out. After a long, almost non-stop march, we reach the day's destination at around 6 p.m. This is a small, shrunken Russian village, which consists of some dilapidated tar slabs. We move in groups into the houses. An entire dwelling consists of a stable, a small kitchen and a dark living room, most of which is occupied by a huge stove on which the whole family lives. All the walls and the floor are made of brown tar that has been turned into a gooey mush from the snowy weather and our hard work. The family, the wife and a lot of children all live on top of the huge stove. Nevertheless, the marching performance of today was very low. It was about 30 km's and we are pretty exhausted from the march through the deep snow. The horses are also exhausted, so a day of rest is inserted.

Jan. 17 The resting day is very welcome. We try to put our things in order and above all, get a good night's sleep. The snowy air and the cold make you so tired. The woman is lying on the big stove, the youngest one at her breast, and the other children, who are chewing sunflower seeds all day and spitting the leftovers into the living room. The

woman only leaves her place for the most necessary work and tasks; she fetches some wood for the fire or in the evening she cooks a broth similar to grits, which we taste with reluctance. Otherwise, we take notice of the ovens in the houses.

Jan. 18 Departure is early in the morning. The daily goal is reached without a longer break. The horses are already very tired after the first few hours of walking, because there is a lot of snow to overcome, which is up to 1.5 meters high and stretches over several kilometers. In the evening we reach the village. In no time the quarters are occupied. We are assigned a house that looks less gloomy than the day before. Also, the residents are not as dismissive and help us to dry our boots and clothes and even give us a cup of milk which we slurp slowly like a precious drink. That night we sleep on the big stove, because the woman, with the many children, all sleep in two beds.

Jan. 19 The third day of the march begins. The weather has become even more unfriendly. The cold has increased, and a heavy snowfall has begun. After a short time, we are completely covered with snow and the snow that has melted on our faces is slowly freezing over our faces. You

won't be able to imagine how the entire...?...from the field cap (hood) to the coat collar forms a single layer of snow and ice. From time to time, we need to use the mirror to illuminate the eyelids in order to melt the layer of ice because it blocks our view. Daily 10 to 15 men walk behind each vehicle because the horses have become so weak from the cold that the vehicles get stuck when there is a little bit of heavy snow. With the constant marching, the body does not notice the cold too much: only the face and hands hurt. This was the hardest day for us so far. It's also a day's march to Nikolajain. A serious day of rest would be a good thing, but we received the order without delay to reach the ordered destinations as quickly as possible.

Jan. 20 We marched all day today too. The weather has improved; the cold and the blowing snow have abated. In the afternoon we came to the big bridge over the Dnieper. On the opposite bank lies Nikolajain. Here too is a similar impression as from Odessa. Unfortunately, we can't see too much of the city since it is dusk and it's going to be dark soon. We move into quarters in an empty factory. In the large hall there is only a single small oven, which one tries to get going with hard coal. The