

4 Days in May



A film by Achim von Borries
based on a true story



Festival del film Locarno
Piazza Grande



*Boundary lines don't always run
between friend and foe,
sometimes they only run between good and evil.*



Synopsis

The world is holding its breath. Four days before the end of the Second World War in Germany. A Soviet captain and his patrol have occupied an orphanage by the sea; a German army unit is camped on the beach; a secret love affair blooms against all odds. Everyone is weary of fighting; except for the 13-year-old orphan Peter who wants to prove he's a hero and tries with all his cunning and power to instigate trouble between the opposing troops. Until he has to learn that the real opponent is lurking elsewhere and in this supposed enemy he has found a fatherly friend. This time the boundary lines don't run between friend and foe, this time they only run between good and evil.





In conversation with Achim von Borries, writer and film director

How did you get started in films?

I loved film, even as a kid. We didn't have TV at home; so going to the movies was a rarefied experience. After school I applied with various film schools, but I was considered too young by all of them – which indeed I was at nineteen.

Then I did a couple of internships that were actually quite off-putting, so I concentrated on my other fields of interest instead, history and politics. Just because I wanted to be in Berlin in 1989, entering university there made sense. Thank God, after a couple of semesters of that, I did get accepted into Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie there. Lucky: I wouldn't be making films today otherwise, I'm not a self-made kind of person.

So you learned your trade properly?

That's not quite it either, sometimes I wonder whether you're an artist or a craftsman when you make films. As I don't really feel I know my trade, I'm more of an artist I suppose. I do know my tools, but I only realised so while working for television, when I did commissioned work five, six years ago. That's when I became aware that I knew my trade. I think with film you learn best while actually doing it. It also reflected the motto of the school. When I did ENGLAND!, that was the first time I was physically present in the making of a movie.

I had no idea about what was involved in shooting for 30 days. I'd only done a short movie, that was it. Today I'd love some of that naiveté back.

Does that mean your trade is useful when making films you haven't scripted yourself?

Of course I'm constantly applying my tools instinctively, but it's when I first became conscious of it. It's also true when you're working with someone else's plot, and as to commissioned writing, I can do that just using what I was taught, no limitations, no inner censorship, just work. It doesn't mean my heart isn't in it or there's no passion, but it would be somewhat outside my creative universe. Completing a film from starting with the original concept, via doing the script, directing and editing is a real struggle, and only to a lesser extent about applying your tools, at least that's what I think.

Which do you prefer?

Frankly, I like switching. I couldn't do a film each year, and I didn't make one for seven years. Perhaps that break was a bit long. I need time in between, I'm unbearable for my family and my friends for so long when filming, I couldn't possibly do it more than every two, three years. They wouldn't have it...



The question rather concerned the filmmaking process.

There's three processes involved in making film, you give birth to it thrice over. First you plot everything. Writing is fantastic work, lonely, tranquil, contemplative. Directing makes the whole thing terribly concrete, but it's occasionally worthwhile. Transmitting magic, something momentary onto celluloid that you didn't expect. Evoking a human being, some sense, a mood. I love it when there's this huge team striving towards one second: the moment the camera begins to roll and something materialises that has so far only been paper and imagination. The third act of giving birth occurs in editing, when you check your imagination against the reality of what you've been filming. I usually find that quite brutal, at least as far as my own concepts are concerned. I tend to have such a concrete vision of my landscapes and locations while writing, and usually can't recognise them in reality. Even with 4 DAYS IN

MAY we were unable to find certain things the way we wanted, and it takes careful editing until I can accept the material as something new without comparing it to what I'd originally intended. That's when I need a break before continuing with the montage.

How did you get the story for 4 DAYS IN MAY?

Three years ago, Aleksei Guskov approached me during the Berlin Film Festival. He'd seen ENGLAND!, which also has a contemporary Russian-Ukrainian thread. I'd just got to know some Russian filmmakers like Bakhtyar Khudojnazarov, who directed LUNA; he had introduced me to Aleksei. With the opening of the Russian archives this story became public, about this Russian reconnaissance unit that had defied their own command saving the lives of some German women and children during the final days of the War. It caused a huge stir, for 50 years no one could have imagined



anything like it. A number of production companies were interested in the story, and Guskov had gone to commission a screen-play development. He approached

me, because really he was looking for someone to rewrite the story from a German perspective. I was thrilled, and we soon agreed I wouldn't just rewrite it, but also

direct it. For years I had been searching a story for a film, and I'd rejected lots of projects. At long last this was something I was really keen on doing. Something worth all the trouble and pain (laughs). When Stefan Arndt and X Films came into it, things progressed fast for a film. We were delayed for a year due to the Russian financial crisis. Eventually we started shooting in 2010 in spite of budgetary constraints. The producers took a real risk. Brilliant.



How did the script change from Guskov's original?

I shouldn't denigrate colleagues, but to me the original seemed a bit too much like military prank. The Russians' relationship to their military - and indeed to World War II - is quite different. There's this literary tradition and on film in how to recount that story. I didn't want to tell it from the commanding officer's point of view. There was this child that briefly occurred somewhere in the original script, and that led to the idea of taking the stance of a child or young person experiencing the last days of the war, something I'd been obsessed with for a while already. So I suggested a narrative from a boy's perspective. Much to my relief, Aleksei went for it straight away. He saw it could improve the way his protagonist came across, even though it developed from the enemy's perspective. I'm sure that taking a child's viewpoint is what has made the film so convincingly intimate and personal. The subject is so extensive and vast, the entire war between the Soviet Union and Germa-

ny, the Wehrmacht's campaign of destruction, both the liberation and occupation by the Allies, the whole trauma of the rapes - this is simply far too much subject matter to put into a single film. I'd already concentrated on the era while reading history. And then this true story of these eight real reconnaissance officers comes up, which I weaved into the fictitious story of the boy - that's how I was able to complete the movie.

It's a war movie where almost no fighting occurs...

Yes, the best war movies are the ones without warfare. Warfare is the most boring aspect of the genre. It was great that we had this remote location with an exemplary situation: eight Russians, stationed in a former children's home and waiting for the whole thing to be over and get home. When suddenly these Germans appear, who're fed up with fighting, too. Really what everyone is concerned with is how to get home safely.



Except for the boy.

The boy thinks he's got to fight. For his dad, and against him. He's a child who grew up without male role models, who's suddenly confronted with this massive male military presence. He does some really horrible things, but in my eyes he isn't an evil person. I hope you'd comprehend what he's going through. He's growing up, which is painful. I still shudder whenever I see the image of Pavel's face at the beginning or end of a sequence. He becomes completely different, so full of empathy! The character of the officer works so well because he finds his match in this little stubborn rascal. The senior guy recognises that one of them will have to give way during these final days. It'll be him, as he's older and wiser, and because his life is nearing its end. It is a parable, if you wish. Our fathers' (or grandfathers') sacrifice for our liberty.

The main character is played by a young German, the soldier by a Russian star. What was it like working with a German-Russian ensemble?

Hard. Because there wasn't a common language. We constantly had to deal with interpreters. I'd worked with Russians on ENGLAND!, but there we always had a language to communicate in, either English or German. Here you had to use an intermediary. You go mad on set, discussing stuff under time pressure with ten Russians – and with two interpreter ladies on each side. They were great, but it still wasn't easy. Nor was it easy with the child and Aleksei next to him. I'd be like an animal trainer, having the appropriate lump of sugar for everyone at hand at the right moment. Aleksei was really supportive, and he had to teach the little one some more Russian. In the end I drafted him to keep his seven Russian boys in check, he was their commanding officer, after all.





The production was German/Russian as well, was that hard?

When we started it wasn't easy at all. Mentalities are so different, and work attitudes diverge, as do ways of finding finance. Contrary to popular belief it's not as if the Russians come up with illicit money in cash by the suitcase load. There are investors who put in private money, or they borrow money hoping that the government will indeed cough up the promised subsidies at some stage. I was very keen on the co-production. Though there's loads of Russian or Soviet movies on the subject, and a couple of German ones, you don't get a single common one. For me the shared aspect was important, not least because it suited the plot. It wasn't always easy to unite both threads from the two countries under one umbrella. And there was some recurrent friction between myself and Aleksei – but in the end we always managed to the best of the film's advantage. Now everyone is very happy, which isn't that easy for any of the two places.

What made editing so complicated, and why did it take so long?

It was hard to edit because it's a small film with a huge subject. A small film of epic dimensions, which per se isn't easy. We only got rid of five, six scenes, not a lot, but including many a small detail. It simply took a while to take shape. Six months editing isn't all that bad either, but it seemed like eternity. With TV I take six weeks, max!

Now it's nearly ready and about to be released – are you looking forward more to the German or the Russian premiere?

Of course I'm anticipating the German one, as all my friends are here. The Russian premiere will be more challenging, I'm afraid, because I know how rigorous people can be there. Though some initial reactions from Russia are giving me hope that the film will be received well there, but you never know. The film with an audience is always the moment of revelation.

Will it provoke the Russian public?

Perhaps. Some for sure. But there are so many beautiful moments in this film, every soldier, each character has at least one moment when they appear human, tragic, comical, when you get to them on a personal level. I didn't strive for even-handedness, and I've never been interested in making a committed political statement in film. Nor am I interested in whether one of the German characters is or has been a Nazi. The boy isn't a Nazi or an obvious member of the Hitler Youth. He deliberately doesn't wear a Hitler youth costume, preferring to steal a proper uniform. He's a boy who wants to fight and who's fascinated by the cult of manliness, warfare, weaponry – goodness, I'm treading on thin ice here, after all I was only born in 1968 (laughs).

It'll be interesting to see how the film is received in Germany, after ANONYMA recently also tackled the relationship between Russians and Germans at the end of the War.

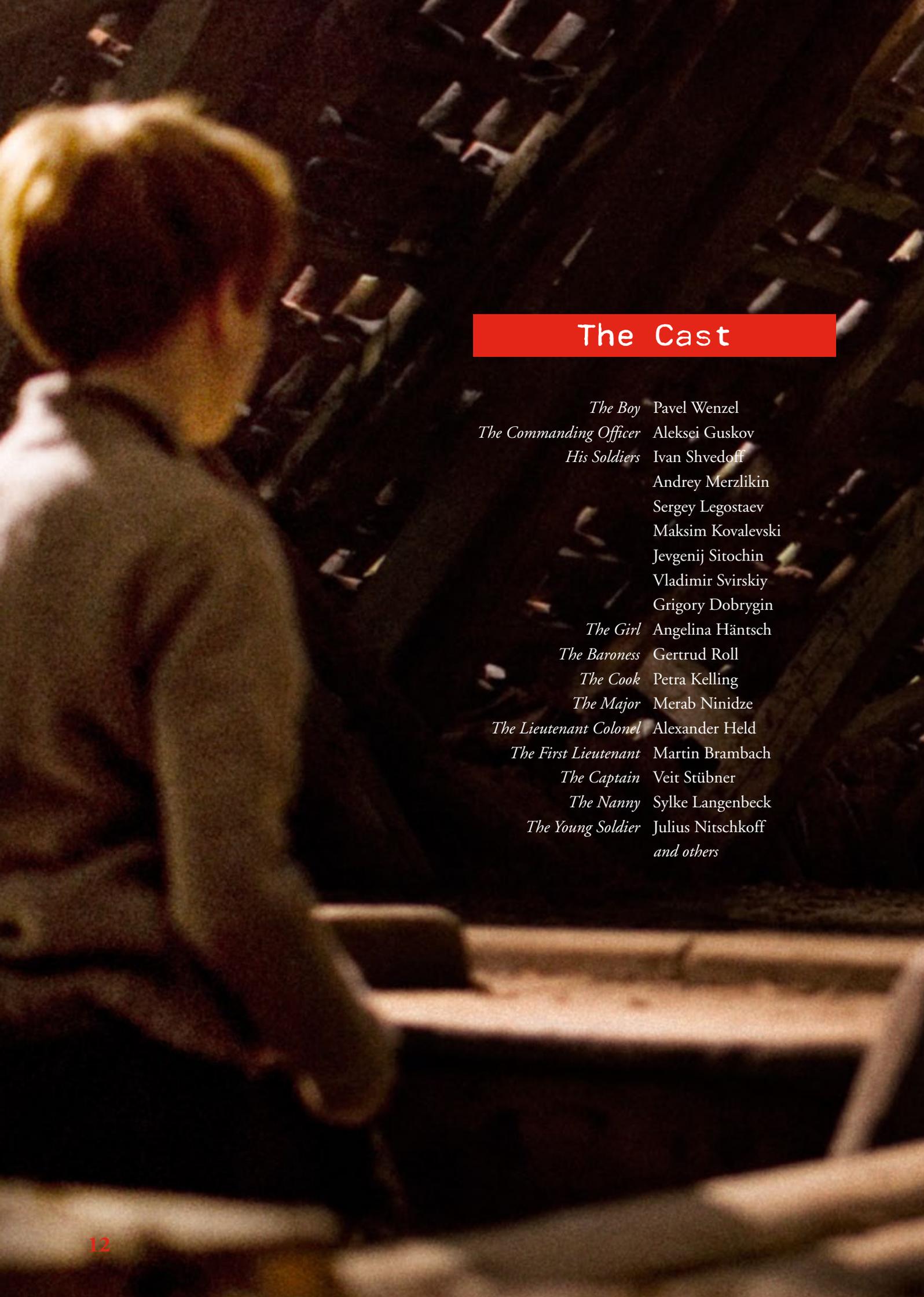
4 DAYS IN MAY is not about settling scores, and not about the historical fact of the mass rape of German women. I wouldn't ever be able or willing to approach such a story. Early in the film there is a scene where a woman is being taken away, and we can imagine what will happen to her. We were wondering whether this lady should re-appear at some stage. I'd written several scenarios for it, when my wife took me aside and said: "You have no idea how such a woman can re-surface. Just stay off it." And she was right. The audience's imagination is more gruesome, anyway.

What fascinated me from the beginning was: What's it like to be a soldier in a war? To have to submit to this hell, regardless of which side you're on. With death all around, your life under threat, and inevitably the loss of all hope of survival at some stage. Then, when the slaughter seemed to finally be nearing its end, Berlin had fallen or was about to, that moment when time stands

still and you realise you might just survive after all – that's a transition I've always found wildly fascinating, of warriors turning back into civilians. Having to learn how to get a life again; all our grandparents on both sides had to cast off their barbaric mantle and retake on performing your kind uncle, dad, or husband. That this was never openly discussed is really unbelievable. It only began in the 70's with the war in Vietnam – narratives about the trauma of transition – from civilian to beast and back again.

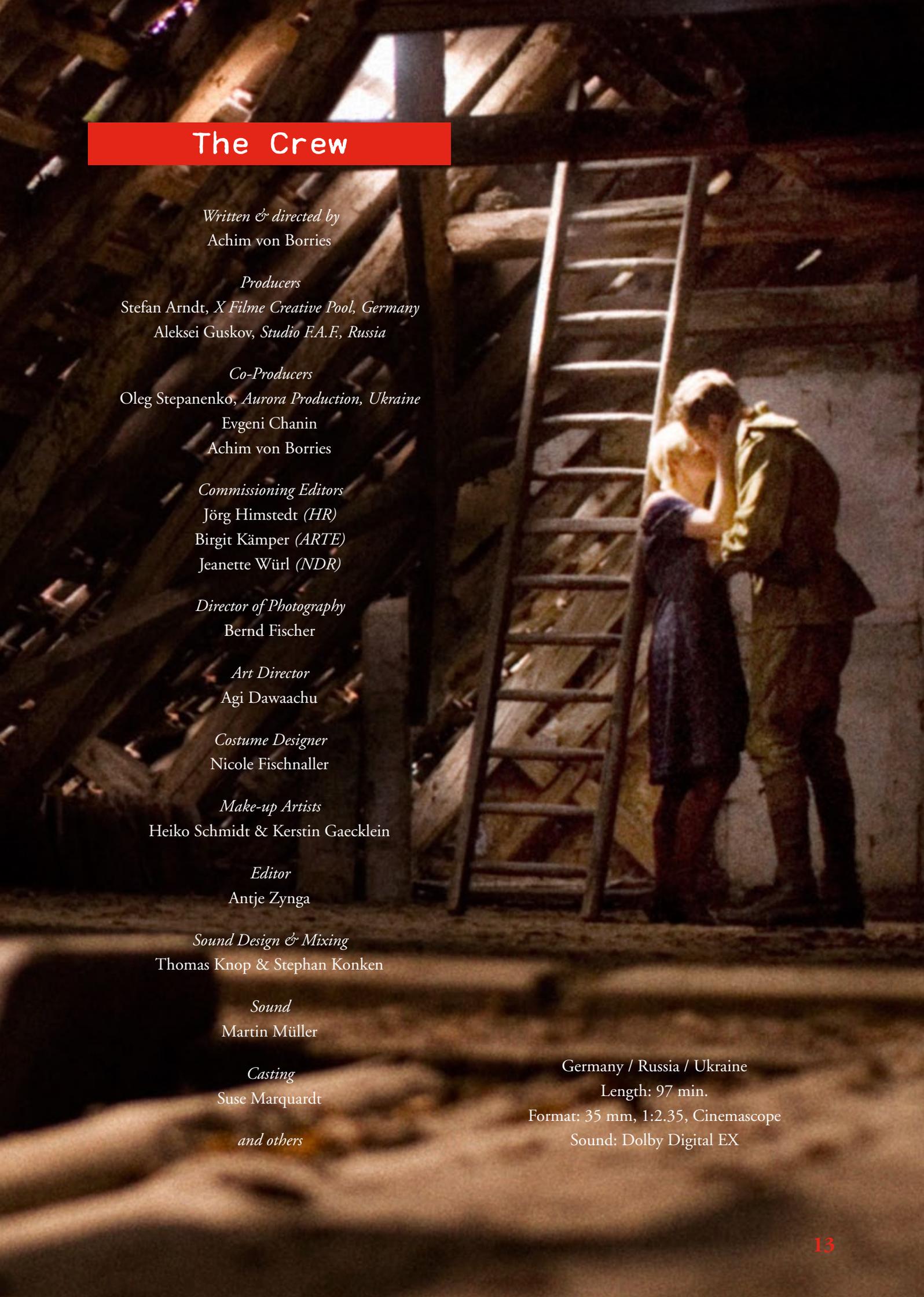
I love this scene from the first night in the movie, when one of the Russians says what he'd be doing getting home; how he describes going to a restaurant, looking forward to eating fish Solyanka and cucumber, steak and egg, and then taking a walk. It's what it must've been like. I got the scene from the original Russian script, it contained such truthfulness, there was nothing I had to do to it. The personal aspect, something private, are the most inspiring moments in cinema. It's why I make films.





The Cast

<i>The Boy</i>	Pavel Wenzel
<i>The Commanding Officer</i>	Aleksei Guskov
<i>His Soldiers</i>	Ivan Shvedoff
	Andrey Merzlikin
	Sergey Legostaev
	Maksim Kovalevski
	Jevgenij Sitochin
	Vladimir Svirskiy
	Grigory Dobrygin
<i>The Girl</i>	Angelina Häntsch
<i>The Baroness</i>	Gertrud Roll
<i>The Cook</i>	Petra Kelling
<i>The Major</i>	Merab Ninidze
<i>The Lieutenant Colonel</i>	Alexander Held
<i>The First Lieutenant</i>	Martin Brambach
<i>The Captain</i>	Veit Stübner
<i>The Nanny</i>	Sylke Langenbeck
<i>The Young Soldier</i>	Julius Nitschkoff
	<i>and others</i>



The Crew

Written & directed by
Achim von Borries

Producers
Stefan Arndt, *X Filme Creative Pool, Germany*
Alekssei Guskov, *Studio F.A.F., Russia*

Co-Producers
Oleg Stepanenko, *Aurora Production, Ukraine*
Evgeni Chanin
Achim von Borries

Commissioning Editors
Jörg Himstedt (*HR*)
Birgit Kämper (*ARTE*)
Jeanette Würl (*NDR*)

Director of Photography
Bernd Fischer

Art Director
Agi Dawaachu

Costume Designer
Nicole Fischnaller

Make-up Artists
Heiko Schmidt & Kerstin Gaecklein

Editor
Antje Zynga

Sound Design & Mixing
Thomas Knop & Stephan Konken

Sound
Martin Müller

Casting
Suse Marquardt

and others

Germany / Russia / Ukraine
Length: 97 min.
Format: 35 mm, 1:2.35, Cinemascope
Sound: Dolby Digital EX

Achim von Borries

WRITER AND DIRECTOR



Achim von Borries, born 1968 in Munich, studied History, Political Science and Philosophy from 1989 to 1993 at the Freie Universität Berlin. In 1992 he continued his studies at the German Film and Television Academy (dffb). Borries was highly praised for

his impressive screen debut ENGLAND! (2000), which was also his graduating film at the dffb. ENGLAND! ran successfully at several festivals and won 15 international awards including two from the German Film Critics Award in 2002 (Best Screenplay and Best Cinematography for Jutta Pohlmann). It was followed by his second directorial feature film LOVE IN THOUGHTS starring August Diehl, Daniel Brühl and Anna Maria Muehe in the main roles, which celebrated its premiere at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival in the USA in 2004. Together with his sister Bettine he wrote the screen adaptations of the classic children's books THE THREE ROBBERS, MULLEWAPP and LILLI THE WITCH. Achim von Borries directed episodes of well-known German television series such as „Unter Verdacht“ with Senta Berger. In 2010 for the 40th anniversary of the “Tatort” crime series, he directed the anniversary episode “Wie einst Lilly”, which also marked Ulrich Tukur's debut as a “Tatort” police inspector.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

- 2011 4 DAYS IN MAY Director & Writer
LILLI THE WITCH:
THE JOURNEY TO MANDOLAN Writer
(Director: Harald Sicheritz)
- 2010 Tatort: Wie einst Lilly (TV) Director
Unter Verdacht: Der Schmale Grat (TV)
Director
- 2009 MULLEWAPP Writer (Director: T. Loeser & J. Moller)

- 2008 Unter Verdacht: Das Geld anderer Leute (TV)
Director
- 2007 THE THREE ROBBERS Writer
(Director: Hayo Freitag)
- 2006 Blond: Eva Blond! - Epsteins Erbe (TV)
Director
Der Elefant - Mord verjährt nie: Hundsheim
(TV) Director
Der Elefant - Mord verjährt nie:
Der lange Weg zurück (TV) Director
- 2004 LOVE IN THOUGHTS Director & Writer
- 2001 ENGLAND! Director & Writer
- 1998 HALBERSTADT (short) Director & Writer

AWARDS (SELECTION) :

LOVE IN THOUGHTS

- New Faces Awards 2004
New Faces Award for Best Director
- Verona Love Screens Film Festival 2004
Award for Best Film
- Brussels European Film Festival 2004
Nominated for the Golden Iris
- Sao Paulo International Film Festival 2004
Nominated for the International Jury Award

ENGLAND!

- Filmfestival Cottbus 2000
Audience Award, Award of the Ecumencial Jury,
Don Quixote Award, Promotional Award
- Festróia – Tróia International Film Festival 2001
Tróia Award – First Works Section
- Trieste Film Festival 2001
Prize Trieste
- German Film Critics Association Awards 2002
German Film Critics Award for Best Screenplay
- Nominated for the Max Ophüls Award 2001

HALBERSTADT

- The Munich International Festival of Film Schools 1998
Camera Award

Pavel Wenzel

THE BOY

Pavel was born in Bonn in 1998. During his early childhood the family moved to Cottbus where he has grown up, via Berlin and Forst/Lausitz. Pavel is now studying at secondary school. He has taken drama classes, gaining his first practical stage experience at Cottbus's Piccolo Theater. Pavel grew up bilingually in German and Russian, with a Belorussian mother and a German father. With his ginger hair and green eyes, and his Russian fluency



he has been a God-sent for director Achim von Borries, the perfect match for the character as he had conceived it: "A boy, petite, green eyes, red hair." Aged twelve during filming, Pavel's professional ambitions are in football. He is playing in D-youth league for Energie Cottbus.

4 DAYS IN MAY is Pavel Wenzel's first film.

Aleksei Guskov

THE COMMANDING OFFICER / PRODUCER



Aleksei Guskov was born in 1958. He studied at the school of the renowned Chekhov Moscow Art Theatre, co-founded in 1887 by Constantin Stanislavski.

He has performed more than 30 grand roles on stage and taken part in over 40 films as well as doing speech dubs. He is a People's Artist of Russia laureate, and has produced film for cinema, TV and animation as well as being chief producer with STUDIO F.A.F..

In 2009/10 he co-starred in Radu Mihaileanu's furore-making THE CONCERT alongside Miou-Miou and Mélanie Laurent. In France alone this nationally and internationally acclaimed and award-winning film has had three million viewers.

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THE MATCH FACTORY PRESENTS AN X FILME CREATIVE POOL AND STUDIO F.A.F. PRODUCTION IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH AURORA PRODUCTION, HR, ARTE AND NDR
WITH PAVEL WENZEL, ALEKSEI GUSKOV, IVAN SHVEDOFF, ANDREY MERZLIKIN, SERGEY LEGOSTAEV, MAKSIM KOVALEVSKI, JEVGENIJ SITOCHIN, VLADIMIR SVIRSKIY, GRIGORIY DOBRYGIN, ANGELINA HANTSCH, GERTRUD ROLL, PETRA KELLING, MERAB NINOZE,
ALEXANDER HELD, MARTIN BRAMBACH, PRODUCERS STEFAN ARNDT AND ALEKSEI GUSKOV, CO-PRODUCERS OLEG STEPANENKO, EVGENIY CHANIN AND ACHIM VON BORRIES, DOP BERND FISCHER, PRODUCTION DESIGN AGI DAWAACHU, COSTUME DESIGN NICOLE FISCHNALLER,
MAKEUP ARTISTS HEIKO SCHMIDT, KERSTIN GAECKLEIN, EDITOR ANTJE ZYNGA, SOUNDDSIGN & MIX THOMAS KNOP, STEPHAN KONKEN, ORIGINAL SOUND MARTIN MÜLLER, MUSIC THOMAS FEINER, ARRANGEMENT & PRODUCER MUSIC INGO LUDWIG FRENZEL,
CASTING SUSE MARQUARDT/BC, TATIANA STATSMAN, CHILDREN'S CASTING JESSIKA EISENKOLB, COMMISSIONING EDITORS HR JÖRG HIMSTEDT, ARTE BIRGIT KÄMPER AND NDR JEANETTE WÜRL, PRODUCER ANDREA SCHÜTTE, PRODUCER RUSSIA ELENA DUFFORT,
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS UWE SCHÖTT, CHRISTOPH HAHNHEISER AND YAKOV DRABKIN, LINE PRODUCER ULLI NEUMANN, PRODUCTION MANAGER PATRICK BRANDT, SCRIPT BASED ON THE WORK OF VALENTIN CHERNYKH AND EDUARD REZNIK, WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY ACHIM VON BORRIES