
'The Unimaginable Journey of Peter Ertel' at the GI Film Festival

By Jeri Jacquin | September 16, 2016

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In its West Coast premiere at the GI Film Festival in Coronado is a documentary directed by Joseph Cahn telling us the story of "The Unimaginable Journey of Peter Ertel."

The documentary begins with Peter Ertel in the 96th year of his life. An author, poet and pianist that is only a small part of this man who has a stunning story to tell. Born in Germany, Peter found a world inside books and in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. It was the only way he could separate himself from a father who was disappointed in his son.

As a young man he would find the love of his life in a young woman named Johanna but married life would be almost immediately put on hold. Adolf Hitler rose to power quickly and Peter had to become a soldier in the war he wanted nothing to do with. Quickly other soldiers and his superiors would take notice that Peter wasn't a team player.

As a soldier Peter would be ordered from Germany to Russia and back again. The story told is about a man who continually finds favor with the universe as bullets fly and the brutal cold doesn't take him. Becoming a platoon leader became Peter's opportunity to save as many of his fellow soldiers as possible.

The story he tells of 'cheating' on reports to superiors is another way he could save not only his men, but innocent civilians. Trying to stay in contact with his wife Johanna, he received a letter from her stating that if he had the chance to turn himself over to Americans – that he should do just that.

That's exactly what he did. Taken to prisoner camp in England, Peter would eventually find himself on a ship to the United States pulling into New York. Transferred to a prison camp in Alabama, he would learn to speak English and treated well. At that time he and fellow prisoners also learned of the Holocaust and Peter felt guilt by association that.

During his stay there would be a test that helped him become part of the German war solution for his people. In 1953, Ertel would come back to the United States with wife Johanna to begin the next chapter in his life. Living in Cleveland, Ohio, what happened in his life next gives us all hope that humanity was and is alive and well.

This is such a jaw dropping documentary because this man's life had to be guided by a higher power. Being told by Peter Ertel own voice, I was extremely captivated from beginning to end. As each event in his life happened, I found myself struck by how the emotions still ran so deep.

Joseph Cahn is a 30-year filmmaker and responsible for Victory Films which began in 2003. Putting together rare archival film, photographs and reenactments lends to a story that cried out to be told. There isn't a moment that isn't so beautifully done and Cahn should be exceedingly proud of what he has put together in this documentary.

Every event, every emotion, every realization is on this man's face. At the same time Peter Ertel is the definition of what a miracle walking looks like!