

Too Young to Die  
by Peter Fisher

Characters:

HANS SCHMIDT

A comedian before World War II, he now works as a recruiting Sergeant for the German military. Hans is a patriot, but he considers a country to be defined by its people, not its leaders, and secretly cares less about winning the war and more about stopping the deaths; he is afraid that the German government will destroy the world to achieve its aims.

ALEXANDER SCHNEIDER

A 19-year-old college freshman, Alexander is small and a budding author. He is attempting to major in literature, but he is afraid that Germany will begin to restrict what he can and cannot learn. Despite his country's closing of its border, he really wants to travel; he is especially interested in visiting China. Alexander is from a rich family, and was sheltered from the war up to the time of the play, and thus doesn't have any military experience at all; he's hardly even physically fit. Although he is subject to the same punishments as anyone else, his protection has caused him to think as he likes; this has allowed for some animosity towards his government.

KLAUS WRIGHT

Klaus was an exchange student from Florida, and became stuck in Germany when it declared war. Due to German heritage, his first name is German, and that allowed him to survive in Germany, on the condition that he would essentially be a citizen. Klaus was so relieved about his survival that he forgot to be distressed about his captivity until he realized that he hadn't heard from his family in a three months. It has now been five years. He is in Alexander's graduating class, but wants to major in theater with an emphasis in directing.

PLATOON LEADER (last scene only)

A battle-hardened soldier, the Lieutenant has been with the German army since the beginning of World War II. He rose to the rank of Lieutenant when his own leader was killed in 1941, and just a month before the play his former platoon was annihilated by the RAF.

Setting:

The play takes place at a liberal arts college in Northern Germany, 30 miles away from the front lines. The college is prestigious, and has not previously been visited by the military, but in 1944 it becomes necessary to recruit students. The first scene takes place in a classroom with a row of three desks on Stage Right and more apparently off-stage, with a cabinet, German flag, and Nazi flag on the back wall and a speaker's stand on Stage Left. The second takes place outside on the front lawn - no props are actually necessary for the scenery in this scene - and the third takes place inside the recruiting Sergeant's office, which is very similar to the classroom but with rearranged furniture. The third scene will require the use of an overhead projector. The

fourth scene takes place on a battlefield; there are no props necessary for this either, but sound effects and a musical score will be necessary.

*Scene 1:*

*At rise, ALEXANDER and KLAUS are sitting in the outside two of the three desks. The middle desk is empty save for a flower, a Nazi flag, and the date January 15, 1943, written on a card. ALEXANDER has his head down on the desk, and KLAUS is emphatically speaking to him, while ALEXANDER makes short, quiet answers. Enter HANS, from Stage Light.*

HANS

Alright, recruits, let's get started.

*KLAUS turns around and stops talking, startled. ALEXANDER picks his head up from the desk and looks at HANS tiredly, but with surprise.*

KLAUS

*(aside to ALEXANDER)*

What's the matter with you, Alex? Didn't get much sleep last night?

*ALEXANDER shakes his head and continues to stare straight ahead.*

HANS

Thank you. This may come as a shock to some - or most - of you, but our glorious country has decided that it would be most beneficial if you, along with the rest of the Freshman class, were to be enlisted.

*HANS pauses as the classroom erupts into conversation. KLAUS looks distressed, and ALEXANDER slowly puts his head down on the desk again.*

HANS

Alright, alright, settle down, settle down.

*The class slowly quiets down. ALEXANDER picks his head up from the desk again, but looks more tired this time.*

HANS (cont'd)

You should be glad. Our government says that we are winning, and that Europe is as good as ours, just as soon as we can get more manpower. That's where you will come in, fighting for the glory and honor that Germany represents!

HANS

*(looks at ALEXANDER with surprise)*

*What* do you think you are doing, Schneider? Are you tired? Your day has only just begun! Rule number one: whenever anyone ranked higher than you pansies enters a room, you stand at attention, click your heels together, and give a crisp salute. Salute now!

*KLAUS jumps up and gives an American salute. ALEXANDER stands and sticks out his arm.*

KLAUS

Yes, sir!

*HANS looks at KLAUS lividly.*

HANS

You, boy! Get up here!

*KLAUS looks confused but walks up in front of HANS, who immediately punches KLAUS in the face; this wakes ALEXANDER up. KLAUS falls to the ground.*

HANS

What are you doing lying down? Get up!

*KLAUS painstakingly gets to his feet.*

HANS (cont'd)

I don't want your insolence! You join the army, you could be shot, right here, right now. Get back to your seat.

*KLAUS complies.*

HANS (cont'd)

Now, the rest of you: hasn't your teacher ever taught you how to give a proper salute? When I give you an order, you say, "Yes, sir," then do exactly what I tell you! Salute now!

KLAUS, ALEXANDER, AND THE REST OF THE CLASS

Yes, sir!

*ALEXANDER performs a proper salute. KLAUS, after observing ALEXANDER, follows suit.*

HANS

Thank you. Hold that.

*HANS pauses. Eventually, ALEXANDER can barely hold his arm up anymore, which was what HANS was waiting for.*

HANS

At ease.

*(ALEXANDER and KLAUS put their arms down.)*

Your teacher is leaving on a trip. You won't see him for a while. *(beat)* Now, all of you will be joining the glorious German army in a few weeks, and the duty falls to me to see that all of you are ready. You will resume your normal classes - with a different teacher - until lunch, after which I will take over until you leave for the army. Now, when an officer walks out of a room, you stand at attention and give a crisp salute. Salute now!

*ALEXANDER and KLAUS perform crisp salutes. HANS walks out of the room, and they put their arms down.*

ALEXANDER

My God.

KLAUS

I'm American! They can't make me fight my own country! I'm American.

ALEXANDER

I think they just did.

*(looks at KLAUS sincerely)*

I'm sorry.

*KLAUS looks even more distressed.*

*End of Scene 1*

*Scene 2:*

*At rise, ALEXANDER and KLAUS are standing at attention on Stage Left, wearing shorts and t-shirts. Enter HANS from Stage Right.*

HANS

Is everyone well fed?

ALEXANDER AND KLAUS, TOGETHER

Mm-Hmm.

HANS

*(louder)*

I said, is everyone well fed?

ALEXANDER, KLAUS, AND THE REST OF THE CLASS

Yes, sir!

HANS

Good. Don't get used to it.

*ALEXANDER and KLAUS exchange a look.*

HANS (cont'd)

Today, you will eat normally. Tomorrow, you will be fed at noon on military rations. We wouldn't want you getting sick when you get to the army and find nothing but beans. *(beat)* Now, you are out here today to train! I didn't visit this school to send you off to fight the British as delicate as butterflies! Now, you are weak. In three weeks' time, I expect everyone here to be fit for army life! *(beat)* And it's in your best interest too, because I'm sending you regardless of readiness, and if you're not fit, you're kidding yourself if you expect to survive! *(beat)* Now, get on the ground, and start doing some push-ups. Every ten, I want you to jump up and do ten jumping jacks. Show me what you've got. Go!

*ALEXANDER raises his hand.*

HANS

Why are you raising your hand, Schneider?

ALEXANDER  
I have a question.

HANS  
*(sighs, adopts a sarcastic baby voice)*  
In the army, class, we don't raise our hands. In fact, we don't speak at all when at attention unless spoken to. If we really have something to say, we can ask for permission to speak freely, okay?

ALEXANDER  
Okay ... may I speak freely, please, sir?

HANS  
This is going to be a long three weeks. Yes, Schneider, you may speak.

ALEXANDER  
How high do we jump, sir?

*HANS is taken aback by this, but recovers quickly.*

HANS  
Oh ... ahem ...  
*(adopts a more commanding voice)*  
how high can you jump?

ALEXANDER  
Okay; that --

*ALEXANDER is silenced by a glare from HANS.*

HANS  
Ready? Go!

*KLAUS falls to the ground and begins doing push-ups and jumping jacks intermittently. ALEXANDER does his ten push-ups, and begins to tire during the jumping jacks. When he starts on his second set of push-ups, his arms are shaking, and he has to pause.*

HANS  
*What* do you think you are doing, Schneider? Don't stop yet; I'm not tired!

*HANS goes and stands in front of ALEXANDER.*

HANS (cont'd)

Cadence. Ready? One! Two! Three!

*HANS continues counting, and each time ALEXANDER tries to do a push-up. KLAUS continues at his own pace normally, not tiring.*

HANS

Nine ... Ten ... Jumping jacks! One ... Two ...

*ALEXANDER begins breathing heavily. HANS notices but does not stop. KLAUS looks over, concerned.*

KLAUS

Alexander, are you --

HANS

Wright! Keep going, I'm not tired yet!

*KLAUS resigns himself to more exercises, and keeps doing, but glances towards ALEXANDER intermittently. HANS continues to count, but ALEXANDER is exhausted, and falls at the beginning of his next set of push-ups.*

HANS

What are you doing, Schneider? Get up!

*The lights fade out as HANS is yelling.*

Keep going! Do you think the British will wait  
for a man lying on the ground to rest?

*End of Scene 2*

### *Scene 3*

*At rise, HANS is sitting at his desk, bent over a pile of paperwork. Someone wearing a black suit enters from Stage Right with a sign reading, "3 WEEKS LATER ...," and exits on Stage Left.*

*HANS sighs wearily, then gets up and walks over to the cabinet. He opens it and stands there for a minute, staring fondly at the pictures plastered all over the insides of the walls and doors. The overhead projector is used to project some of them onto a bare section of the back wall, accompanied by a musical score. Examples include coffeehouse advertisements loudly proclaiming, "Hans Schmidt, live tonight," and photographs of HANS standing on a brightly lit stage with a comical grin on his face and a microphone in his hand.*

*A knocking sound comes from Stage Left. HANS hurriedly closes the cabinet and runs back to his desk, where he sits down.*

HANS

Yes, yes, come in.

*ALEXANDER enters from Stage Left, wearing military attire.*

ALEXANDER

Permission to speak freely, sir.

HANS

No, no, that won't be necessary, Schneider.

ALEXANDER

*(raises his eyebrows in surprise, but doesn't say anything to the contrary)*

Yes, sir. You wanted to see me, sir?

HANS

Yes, yes; here, have a seat. (in response to quizzical look from Alexander) You didn't do anything wrong. Now, before I say anything, I want to hear from you that nothing I say will go outside of this room. (Alexander nods, curiosity piqued) Good, good. Now, son, I must confess: I'm frightened. (lowers voice) Hitler and all his government officials think that they can, I don't know, take over the world by making people like me beat up kids like you. (sighs) Look, son. All this rigorous physical training, all the times I've yelled at you and your friends and beat you and forced you to undergo arduous tortures, all in the grand name of Germany, of course ... I went through the same thing, when I began military life, and I've got the scars to prove it. I suppose ... (sighs again) (shouts suddenly) Blast it, I'm a comedian, boy! I'm meant to make people happy! (catches himself, lowers his voice again) I'm meant to make people happy, not send young boys like you off to get yourselves blown to pieces to fight a war you can't win. (looks

around, out of paranoia) Germany is losing. Oh, Hitler will tell you otherwise, but we wouldn't be on these vicious rations if we were winning. We wouldn't have bombing raids and destruction on this scale if we were winning. We wouldn't send young boys off to die if we were winning! I've been watching you, over the past few days, though, and don't take this the wrong way, but I've taken a liking to you, boy. I can't send you off to die. (to himself) No, I can't send you off to die. (out loud) So, here's what I'm going to do. When everyone else is pressed into service, I'm going to hide you. To the military, you won't exist. We can flush out the details later, but for now, I need to know: are you in?

*ALEXANDER is thoroughly taken aback by this.*

HANS  
Well?

ALEXANDER

Er ... um ... During these past three weeks, the only sure fact that I knew was that I was going to join the military; my assumption, in the face of this inevitability, was that I would die fighting the British.

*(realization slowly dawns on him)*

And now, you're telling me I don't need to do this. That I can avoid fighting and dying for a war I don't even want!

*ALEXANDER realizes that what he just said was treason, and gives HANS a terrified look. HANS nods reassuringly, and ALEXANDER looks relieved.*

ALEXANDER

Of course, I'm in ... I ... *thank* you, sir!

*ALEXANDER, overcome with emotion, starts as if to jump across the desk and hug HANS, then stops, and looks uncomfortable. HANS sticks out his hand, and ALEXANDER shakes it.*

ALEXANDER

Permission to speak freely, sir?

HANS

When I said that wasn't necessary, Schneider, I meant you can just say what you want.

ALEXANDER

I see. *(beat)* What's happened to my teacher, sir, if you don't mind me asking?

HANS

*(stoically)* I informed my superiors that he hadn't taught you proper saluting. He was shot last week.

*Both characters awkwardly pause for a moment.*

ALEXANDER

Oh ...

*ALEXANDER's eyes grow wide as realization strikes him.*

ALEXANDER

Sir, what about my friend, Klaus? I know that he's strong, and fit for army life, but he's American! He was an exchange student from Florida before the War, and now he's stuck here as a citizen, and he can't fight against his own armies. Sir ... I'll go, if you're willing to help Klaus.

HANS

*(sighs)*

Schneider, I've thought of that, and the fact of the matter is, I just can't. Since you're German, no one will be looking too closely; if the government's confident of any one thing, it's the patriotism of its citizens. He's American, though, so they'll be following him closely, and there's no way I can hide him. *(beat)* There's nothing I can do. I'm sorry. He is physically powerful; he'll be alright, I'm sure.

*A loud and insistent knocking comes from Stage Right. HANS looks, up, suddenly frightened.*

HANS

*(speaking quietly but insistently)*

Quickly, quickly, into the cabinet.

*HANS shoves ALEXANDER into his cabinet, perhaps a little more forcefully than he would have preferred, and shuts the doors.*

HANS

Now, don't come out until I return.

*As the knocking grows louder, HANS rushes to Stage Right, gives a crisp salute at the edge of the stage, and exits.*

*End of Scene 3*

*Scene 4*

*At rise, KLAUS and the PLATOON LEADER, along with a few other soldiers, are crouched behind a barricade on Stage Right. The PLATOON LEADER is peering over the top of the barricade. A soundtrack is playing with machine guns, ricochets, and explosions. The PLATOON LEADER turns toward the soldiers, including KLAUS, behind him.*

PLATOON LEADER

Alright, you maggots, listen up! You think you've known fear? You think you've been put in difficult situations before, and known pain? You're just delicate little butterflies, right now, and by the time today's out you're going to wish you were still in boot camp! We've got our trench right here, and on the other side of no man's land is the British trench, and just past that is their encampment, and guess what? It's all on German land. The British are encroaching on *our* land, but --

*Suddenly, loud explosions go off.*

PLATOON LEADER

Scheiße! Get down!

*All present drop to the ground and remain lying there until the explosions go back to "normal." The PLATOON LEADER slowly crouches, and cautiously peers over the edge of the barricade. He then turns to his men.*

PLATOON LEADER

Alright, I think we're safe -- for now. Those British Scheißerei think they can take Germany, do they? Well, we're going to prove them wrong, right here, right now!

*The PLATOON LEADER becomes impassioned.*

PLATOON LEADER

We are here to fight for the glory of communism and the glory of Germany!

*KLAUS becomes increasingly uncomfortable. No one notices.*

PLATOON LEADER (cont'd)

Today, we will drive the Brits all the way back to England!

*The PLATOON LEADER finishes his speech with a flourish, and the men give a yell of assent.*

PLATOON LEADER

We will attack now, when the Brits aren't expecting it. Drei ... zwei ... ein ... Go, go, go!

*All present, with the PLATOON LEADER in the lead, and KLAUS in the rear, run out onto the stage towards Stage Left. The men begin to drop to the ground, dead, in all manners as they are hit - some twirl around before falling, some simply drop, some are thrown backwards. As they fall, KLAUS looks about curiously, then turns towards the audience. The fighting sounds slowly die away, to be replaced with a soft musical score.*

KLAUS

Attack? There was no attack. There was only a horrible, unspeakable slaughter. Germany, near the end of its war, began to run out of citizens, and had to send us - mere boys of 19 and 20 - to fight and die for a cause none of us fully even understood! Us young men, who should have been studying to save the world someday, were instead murdered in cold blood, in droves, or became murderers ourselves. *(beat)* But we weren't the youngest. Eventually, near the war's end, Germany decided that it needed to send innocent boys and girls as young as 14 and, in some extreme cases, 12 years old to fight and die for politics they didn't know existed. We were just boys; we didn't want to die, and we didn't want to kill. Not the harsh reality that fighting is; we only wanted the glory that had been promised to all who would fight for Germany. *(beat)* We were all lied to. There is no glory in war, no crisp, clean uniforms and sparkling badges and rallying marches. Only dirt, and sweat, and the very air reeking of death. 30 of us ran out on the battlefield looking only for the glory that had been promised us. None of us ever saw our homes again. And I? I'm American; I couldn't fight my country's closest allies. There wasn't anything I could do, except ...

*KLAUS pauses here. He closes his eyes, and a peaceful expression falls across his face. He then turns to face Stage Left, and spreads his arms out wide, as though accepting death. A bullet hits him in the stomach, and he falls, dead before he hits the ground.*

*Finis*