

Text A: Peter Hagendorf, diary entry (1631)¹

Below is a translated excerpt from the diary of an anonymous soldier, likely one Peter Hagendorf, a mercenary in the Thirty Years War. The diary was unearthed in a Berlin archive by historian Jan Peters in 1993. It chronicles the years 1624-1649, in which Hagendorf travelled approximately fifteen thousand miles from Italy to the Baltic, from France to Pomerania, and back again, with his entire family in tow. Hagendorf describes the many challenges soldiers faced: bad weather, illness, food shortages, lack of pay, inconsistent leadership, bandits, angry civilians and keeping their families alive over long distances and in harsh conditions.

We set ourselves up in the local villages and blockaded the city [of Magdeburg] for the entire winter, staying encamped in villages until the spring of 1631. There we captured several entrenchments in the in the forest in front of Magdeburg. There our captain, along with many others, was shot dead in front of an entrenchment. One day we captured seven of their entrenchments. Then we moved in close and built up the whole area with our entrenchments and saps [trenches used by besieging forces to approach closer to an enemy fort], but it cost us a lot of men.

The 22nd of March Johann Galgart was brought in as our captain; the 28th of April he too was shot dead in the saps. The 6th of May Tilge Neuberg was then brought in. He had our company for ten days, after which he resigned.

The 20th of May we attacked and stormed in earnest and also conquered. There I entered the city by storm without incurring any injury. But once in the city, at the Neustadt Gate, I was shot twice through the body—that was my booty.

This happened the 20th of May 1631, in the early morning at nine o'clock.

Afterward I was taken to the camp and bound up, for I had been shot once through the stomach (shot right through from the front), and a second time through both shoulders, so that the bullet was caught in my shirt. The army doctor bound my hands behind my back so he could use the gouge on me. Thus I was brought back to my tent, half dead.

Nevertheless, I was deeply saddened that the city burned so horribly, both on account of the city's beauty and because it is my fatherland.

As I was now bandaged up, my wife went into the city, even though it was completely on fire, since she wished to fetch a cushion and cloth for me to lie on and for the dressings. I also had our sick child lying with me. But then there came a great outcry in the camp that the house of the city were all collapsing on top of each other so that many soldiers and their wives who had wanted to loot were trapped. But I was more concerned about my wife on account of the sick child than on account of my own injuries. Yet God protected her. She got out of the city after one and a half hours with an old woman from the city. This woman, who had been the wife of a sailor, had led her out and helped her carry bedding. My wife also brought me a large tankard of four measures [approximately four liters] of wine and had, in addition, also found two silver belts and clothes, which I later redeemed for twelve *thalers* at Halberstadt. That evening my companions came by, each honoring me by giving me something, a *thaler* or a half *thaler*. (283)

¹ Excerpted from "A Soldier's Life in the Thirty Years War," *The Thirty Years War: A Documentary History*, ed. Tryntje Helfferich (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009) 276-302.