

## My way to Uncle Emil

Even as a child, I was fascinated by the stories my grandfather and parents told me about my great-uncle Emil Krebs. I devoured all the information I could find, especially from old newspaper articles, but without really being able to understand the uniqueness of this man. I searched in vain for his burial place (Südwestkirchhof) using the maps available to me. I was under the mistaken impression that this cemetery was in the city of Berlin. Unfortunately, my parents were unable to help me. For them the grave no longer existed anyway; for them it had simply "expired" and had certainly been leveled.

It wasn't until 2003 that a Berlin newspaper report about the Südwestkirchhof Stahnsdorf reminded me of my youthful memories during a visit to our son in Brieselang. "Research". It reported on this place, which I knew by name. I was fascinated by the references to personalities buried there and the history of this area, which had suffered badly as a result of the division of Germany. I was sure that I had found the cemetery I had searched for in vain as a child. This was confirmed very quickly through the book published by OASE Verlag "Südwestkirchhof Stahnsdorf, Lexikon - Lesebuch - Parkführer". It revealed my great-uncle's burial place to me after more than 50 years. I was even able to find out the exact location from the notes of the Berlin editor Peter Hahn. Peter Hahn will play a special role in connection with my research.

A conversation with the administrator of this second largest cemetery in Germany (206 ha) in Stahnsdorf near Berlin and chairman of the association of the same name, Mr. Olaf Ihlefeldt, resulted on the one hand in the justification of the still existing grave site and on the other hand in a lot of information about Emil Krebs, who was buried here. My wife and I joined the association and took over the sponsorship of my great-uncle's grave, thereby also acquiring the right to be buried there.

I was so fascinated by the documents already available to me that I began to look for further information and people to talk to in addition to this information. One "breakthrough" came during a long telephone conversation with brain researcher Prof. Dr. med. Katrin Amunts, Brain Research Institute Jülich (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf). I was able to provide her with further information that she had not previously been aware of and in return received records that were previously unknown to me. There were also references to publications by the China expert Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Matzat/Bonn (\* October 19, 1930 in Tsingtau; † October 21, 2016 in Bonn).

My research, which was now beginning in earnest, soon led me to the granddaughter of my great-aunt Mande Krebs, Mrs. Brigitte Mayr, in Pforzheim. She told me and my wife a lot about Emil Krebs, whom she of course, like me, never knew personally. We looked through the documents she had kept. Many letters from his wife written in old German/Sütterlin with extensive descriptions, personal pictures from that time in China, newspaper reports, a "diary in pictures" by the then envoy Alfons Freiherr Mumm von Schwarzenstein with around 600 excellent photos from the years 1900 to 1902, personal letters from Emil Krebs and Chinese letters to him paint a picture of the historical China that is certainly foreign to us today. The most important thing, however, is a typewritten summary of his extensive library of writings and books in 111 languages. This difficult task was undertaken after the

Dedicated to Emil Krebs in 1930/1931 by his wife Mande, their eldest daughter Lotteliese and her sister Toni Deneke. A real treasure, which was later also of interest to the language service of the Federal Foreign Office and has since been digitized by the political archive of the Federal Foreign Office.

In 2008, the German Embassy in Washington was able to clarify the whereabouts of Krebs' extensive private library through the German Foreign Office's Language Service. The closed transfer of books and writings in 111 languages to the National Library of the United States of America (Library of Congress, Washington DC) in 1932 was confirmed by Judy S. Lu (Head of Collection Services Asian Division). 236 Chinese titles with 1620 writings are in a separate collection in the Jefferson Building, Washington, because of their high value. According to family sources, the Vatican in Rome is also said to have expressed interest.

Existing connections to Swidnica/Schweidnitz led to the Polish historians Edmund Nawrocki and Sobieslaw Nowotny. Mr. Nawrocki gave me an insight into the church archives of the Church of Peace in Swidnica (UNESCO World Heritage Site).

There I found entries about my ancestors, the Krebs family, in the church records. Mr. Nowotny gave me copies of my great-uncle's personal letters from China to his parents in Esdorf/Opoczka.

On 18 November 2007, I reported on the occasion of a ceremony I organized to mark the 140th birthday of Emil Krebs in the funeral church at Stahnsdorf Südwestkirchhof in the presence of personalities from the Brandenburg State Parliament and the European Parliament as well as many relatives who had traveled from Germany and Austria. I also met Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Matzat (+ 21.10.2016) here for the first time. He had kindly accepted my invitation to this event. The actor from the Braunschweig State Theatre, Mr. Götz van Ooyen, and the harpsichordist Amelie Gruner (also from Braunschweig) delighted the audience with a reading of the story "To-lu-to-lo or How Emil became a Turk" by the writer Otto Julius Bierbaum about his fellow student Emil Krebs.

During this event, the first contact was made with the language service of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. Mr. Gunnar Hille, Lecturer Legation Councillor I. Class and Head of the Language Learning Center of the AA, had heard about this event through the local press. As he said, it was a matter of course and an honor for him to commemorate his former colleague Emil Krebs on the occasion of this meeting. Krebs is still a household name in the office. Bringing him back from oblivion to the attention of the general public was also important to him and therefore a further discussion with me at the Office would certainly be welcome. He cordially invites me to do so.

My wife and I accepted Mr. Gunnar Hille's invitation to the Federal Foreign Office in January 2008. This was a very important meeting, as it led to further activities that I had not considered feasible at the time. An internal working group was formed with representatives of the Language Service with the aim of collecting further information about Emil Krebs and publishing it in due course. The extensive personal file still available in the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office and other documents viewed there now make it possible to retrace his life and work as a diplomat, interpreter and translator and to compare it with the information already available in the

family-owned publications from that time and to complete them. It should be noted that the relevant documents are mainly written in Old German/Sütterlin and had to be transcribed by me. A very time-consuming task.

In June 2008, I met the former chief interpreter of Konrad Adenauer and later head of the language service, Mr. Hermann Kusterer (+27.11.2020), a personality of the German "interpreting community", through the mediation of the language service of the AA. History". He experienced first-hand, interpreted and translated this extremely important period for the Federal Republic of Germany and, in retrospect, for the whole of Germany and, above all, Europe, and thus perhaps also helped to shape it. He was very interested in Emil Krebs.

Further meetings at the office then led to an exhibition on Krebs' life and work in September 2008 as part of the annual "Open Day" of the Federal Government's ministries in the so-called "Weltsaal" of the Federal Foreign Office.

Krebs was the focus of public attention on these two days. Since November 2008, information about Emil Krebs has been published on the official homepage of the Federal Foreign Office, Language Service. This information is also distributed via various German embassies around the world.

The data compiled up to this point in time led to the Publication of the book "Emil Krebs - Kurier des Geistes", OASE Verlag Badenweiler (ISBN 978-3-88922-097-4). Dr. Harald Braun, then State Secretary of the Federal Foreign Office, presented this book, published by the Berlin publicist Peter Hahn on behalf of the Language Service of the Federal Foreign Office, in the presence of all the authors to the many very interested listeners. Prof. Katrin Amunts from the Brain Research Institute in Jülich was the keynote speaker. She was accompanied by Prof. Karl Zilles from a congress in Vienna. Mr. Hans-Ulrich Seidt, the German ambassador to the Republic of Korea at the time and co-author of the book, travelled from Seoul.

In May 2012, the historical archive of the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach Foundation in Essen gave me access to a 200-page documentation of correspondence between Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach and Emil Krebs. It contains additional information that the personal file does not contain.

The personal contacts to Swidnica and the interest shown there, together with decision-makers in the city, made it possible to create a Polish-German exhibition/documentation about Emil Krebs. The Berlin Foreign Office, the German Consulate General in Wroclaw and the Mayor of Swidnica are supporting and accompanying this event as patrons. Reports on these events can be found elsewhere on this website.

In 2016, a memorial plaque was placed at Krebs' former school in Freiburg/Silesia, now Swiebodzice. The town of Swidnica commemorated this on September 15, 2017 with a "Emil Krebs Conference" to commemorate his 150th birthday. He graduated from the Protestant grammar school here in 1887, by which time he had already studied 12 languages. Polish and German lectures commemorate this exceptional man and the times in which he lived.

To mark Krebs' 150th birthday, my publication "Emil Krebs - Ein Sprachgenie im Dienste der Diplomatie" (volume 18 of the series "Fremdsprachen in Geschichte und Gegenwart", edited by Professors Helmut Glück, Bamberg and Konrad Schröder, Erlangen; ISBN 978-3-447-10740-2) was published in 2017 by Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden. A Polish translation by Sobieslaw Nowotny "Emil Krebs Slaski poliglota" followed in the same year. A comic by Melinda Kovacs-Mosbacher, Kleinmachnow, also provides information about Emil Krebs in German and Polish for interested schoolchildren and young people from both countries.

In addition to many other Internet publications on the Deutschland.de portal, the information about Emil Krebs published in nine world languages deserves special mention. Wikipedia reports on him in 20 languages. It is also worth remembering the interview with the author of these lines broadcast by Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR2) at the beginning of September 2017. An interview by WDR followed on the occasion of Krebs' 155th birthday. More information about the life and work of Emil Krebs and activities carried out in recent years can be found elsewhere on this website.

Krebs' brain was removed shortly before his burial in the cellar of the funeral church of the Südwestkirchhof Stahnsdorf by the brain researcher Prof. Oskar Vogt (Brain Research Center Berlin-Buch) after consultation with his widow Amande Krebs. In 2004, Prof. Katrin Amunts (Brain Research Center Jülich (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf)) carried out a new examination of the very well prepared brain. Result: Cancer brain is more closely linked in the Broca area (language). It is not possible to say whether this is due to birth or language learning.

Krebs' extensive library with writings in 111 languages was given/sold to the National Library of the United States of America (Library of Congress, Washington D.C.) in 1932. According to family sources, the Vatican in Rome is also said to have expressed interest.

Lectures in Germany and Poland and a Polish-German exhibition on the life and work of the hyper-polyglot Emil Krebs in e.g. Polish universities Wroclaw, Krakow and Gorzow Wielkopolski and many other places or in Germany e.g. Silesian Museum Görlitz, Foreign Office Berlin and Brandenburg State Parliament Potsdam have rescued Emil Krebs from oblivion. From October 2023, the exhibition will be on display in Russian and Kyrgyz at the National Library and various universities in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (organized by the German Embassy). An English translation has also been produced for other German embassies.

The Polish Competence and Coordination Center (KoKoPol) in St. Marienthal/Saxony also has its origins in Emil Krebs. KoKoPol is financially supported by the Federal Foreign Office and the Free State of Saxony

It was agreed with the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office that my research documents would be handed over on permanent loan.

Emil Krebs has also returned to China. Ms. Jianan Yan from Beijing Foreign Languages University has successfully completed a master's thesis on Emil Krebs. She was

in Germany for several months, and I was able to answer many of her questions and help her with the translation from Old German.

My heartfelt thanks to all helpers and supporters for accompanying me on my way to Uncle Emil.

Eckhard Hoffmann  
(Emil Krebs' great-nephew)