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Greetings From Camp Callan

Noelle Alkhawaja
University of Iowa

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The Peace of a Play at Wartime

On the first page of this letter from Richard to Evelyn, the author writes to his old friend about guns, combat convoys, and various military equipment. It seems as though this young soldier's mind is concerned only with training, his battalion, and the impending dangers of World War II. Richard recounts the various physical challenges he must face while training as a wartime soldier. The "field pack (60 lbs)" and miscellaneous weaponry he describes illustrate a moving account of the strength required to be a well-built and effective soldier. Much of Richard's success as a man, and as an American, is now tied to his usefulness in the military. He speaks proudly and assuredly of his ability to Evelyn. By using words such as "march," "drill," and "assemble," Richard vividly depicts life far from his sleepy hometown in Iowa. The responsibilities and daily hardships he describes are perhaps momentarily relieved by the romantic catharsis of letter writing.



On the second page of the letter, Richard writes of several plays he wants to see as well as Les Brown's Orchestra. Richard's tone and subject choice change drastically as he begins a new page to Evelyn. While Richard focuses primarily on his duties as a soldier, he switches to a more optimistic tone when discussing entertainment and pop culture of the era. Perhaps writing to his



beloved friend reminds him that there is a world outside of uniforms and ammunition. After relaying wishful plans to attend these comedic performances, Richard laments Evelyn's absence from his entertaining night out, telling her, "Sure wish you were here with me in St. Louis." Fond thoughts of Evelyn have this soldier missing those he had to leave behind and dreaming of

simpler times ahead. At the conclusion of his letter, Richard keeps a playful tone about him, signing his letter home with a comical cartoon drawing of a man (perhaps a humorous depiction himself). He signs "GETTING FAT- GOOD FOOD HERE" along with his name. The last lines of the letter are both positive and reassuring, perhaps in attempt to ease Evelyn's worries as well as his own. By adding this last phrase, Evelyn's concern for Richard's health and safety is most likely minimized. Although a good appetite does not guarantee a soldier's safety during war time, the illusion of good health is presented by Richard's laughable demeanor.

Historical Analysis

On the first page of Richard's letter to Evelyn, he writes of his position as a Sergeant of the Guard at Jefferson BKS. Jefferson Barracks Military Post on the Mississippi River just south of St. Louis in Missouri. During World War II, Jefferson Barracks was a major site of receiving newly drafted United States soldiers. After World War II, Jefferson Barracks was decommissioned and parts of the 1,518 acres were sold for private ownership. It was regarded as an important basic training site for the U.S Army during both World

Wars ("Parks and Recreation"). As one of the largest barracks for newly recruited soldiers, it is possible to imagine Richard surrounded by young men much like himself throughout one of the most trying times of his life. I can remember how uncomfortable and anxious I was starting college and living in a different state, with customs and a culture unlike my own. I can only attempt to feel similarly to Richard as he embarked on a new career, in a new location, and starting a new life away from his friends and family.

On the second page of Richard's letter to Evelyn, he mentions several plays as well as Les Brown's Orchestra". and *Meanest Man in Town* (He meant "[Meanest Man in the World](#)"), both involve a comedic interpretation of humanistic themes. Humor was a particularly important part of pop culture in the 1940s and 50s. The American public wanted to laugh, to relax, and to understand, similarly to the reason we watch movies or listen to music today. Entertainment of this era allowed an escape from the fear and anxiety felt around the globe during World War II.

Richard also mentions his desire to see Les Brown's Orchestra perform live. Les Brown was a big band leader and composer as well as a clarinetist and saxophonist (Eder). One of Les Brown's biggest hits was "[Sentimental Journey](#)" which he recorded with Doris Day. The song was released at the end of World War II and includes phrases such as "wild anticipation", "gonna set my heart at ease," and "Like a child" that spoke passionately to soldiers returning home. Without much television influence or trashy magazines to read, stage plays and live music were a large portion of entertainment available to soldiers



during World War II. The morale of these drafted troops at Jefferson Barracks would have been easily uplifted by the comical characters and optimistic melodies mentioned by Richard in his letter.

Written By: Madalyn Rasor

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