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What is True?

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What it takes to be a Red Bull

As a soldier in the 34th “Red Bull” Infantry Division, Clarence Clark was enrolled in the first American military unit that fought in Europe during World War II (WWII). On the 12th of October 1942, the Iowan fighter has not seen the theater yet and writes to his previous girlfriend Evelyn Corrie from “somewhere in England.” His lack of experience of the battle field appears through his writing as the topics he tackles deal more with travel and entertainment than war. At the same time, Clark expresses nostalgia to be away from home. More historically speaking, the soldier’s letter emphasizes well how the state of Iowa played a major role in America’s preparation for their first battles in WWII.

Rhetorical analysis:

Rhetorically speaking, Clarence Clark’s letter reveals his inexperience of the battlefield. Despite he is preparing for war, the soldier doesn’t appear to be scared by the imminent fight. On the opposite, he focuses on light and entertaining subjects while showing he misses his beloved ones.

As he starts writing on the 12th of October, the soldier hesitates as if he had nothing important to say. His indecisiveness appears through the choice of his verbs: “I don’t know,” “but may be able to write a few lines.” “May”
particularly shows that he doubts the importance of his stories. After this moment of hesitation, the soldier decides to enquire Evelyn about her own situation. He seems eager to know what is happening back at home. The infant emphasizes the physical distance between him and his beloved pen pal by using the phrase of location “back there.” This phrase shows his melancholia to be at the front when the rest of the population is protected “at the back”. Also, Clark uses the periphrasis “hard working girl” to designate his correspondent. His affection for Evelyn shows through the noun “girl” as he misses her.

In the letter, the preponderant topics of children, travel, and entertainment also betray the soldier’s nostalgia and unexpected optimism for his future. Children are important to the young infantry soldier. The lexical field of childhood appears throughout the first two paragraphs: “kids” (three times), “school,” “orphan,” “tales.” Clark conveys the impression of missing his family members as he expresses the desire to “sit by the fire and tell the kids some big tales”, “some day”. The adjective “big” also proves that Clark is proud of his travels around the world. The periphrasis “big tales” however is unexpected. The substantive “tales” has a connotation of magic. Would a soldier shadowing the horror of war describe the experience as fascinating? Through this particular comment, Clark appears as slightly careless.
Additionally, the use of the future tense “I will be able to tell” betrays his remarkable optimism for his future. How can Clark make plans when he doesn’t know if he will make it back from the battlefield? Further in the letter, Clark uses a chiasm to express his desire to see his past discoveries repeated in the future: “That is of what I saw so far and with what I’ve yet to see.” The chiasm emphasizes the continuity between past and future as if the soldier’s journey had no end. The discovery of new countries seems to excite him more than the military training.

In the last paragraph, Clark nonchalantly depicts the entertainments offered to soldiers. The lexical field of leisure denotes of the carefree atmosphere of the training camp: “couple dances,” “mess hall, “listening to the music,” “civilian girls from town coming out”. The soldier’s proximity to women seems to raise his interest as he mentions them three times: “civilian girls,” “wacs,” “W.A.A.C.S.”. Clark’s carelessness shows finally through his statement “It won’t be long until Xmas”. The fact that he is thinking about Christmas more than two months in advance proves he has not a lot to worry about. As an infantry soldier in the 34th Red Bull Division, he hasn’t been told yet that his first battle is in twenty-seven days and therefore focuses more on the adventurous side of his travels than the final goal of his enrollment: to fight.
Historical analysis:

The fact Clarence has only been traveling and training may explain his carelessness. On the 12th of October 1942, the 34th “Red Bull” Infantry Division is training “somewhere in England”, most likely Belfast, to prepare for WWII’s first American battle supporting the Allies. As a soldier, Clark seems to not receive any information about the division’s destinations. Therefore, he may not be aware either, at the time of writing, that the first fight of his life is scheduled twenty-seven days later. The 8th of November 1942, the Red Bull Division fought in French Algeria. Nonetheless, before the intervention in Europe, the soldiers trained in Great Britain with English soldiers where we can assume Clark wrote his letter. At the top of the stationery, the eagle and motto *Per Ardua Ad Astra* (“Through adversity to the stars” in Latin) is the symbol of the British Royal Air Corpse. Therefore, we can assume Clark received the letter’s paper from one of the English soldiers he was training with.

Clark also mentions several times the auxiliary women helping at military camps. The initials “W.A.A.C.S.” refers to the ladies involved in the “Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps” while the acronym “wacs” refers to the ones involved in the “Women in Army Corps”. Both the acronyms have the same meaning, but the former was replaced by the latter in 1945. Female soldiers were usually hired to complete men’s easy
tasks because of the need for fighters. Clark mentions that “Des Moines must be over run with W.A.A.C.S.” for a particular reason: the first training camp for women was opened in Fort Des Moines, Iowa on the 20th of July 1942. Women from all states could enroll and learn cartography, company administration and “mess management”. This term refers to the organization of men’s entertainments such as the “dancings” in the “mess hall” mentioned by Clark. The term “civilian girls” however designates the auxiliary women who were not officially enrolled in the army but helped soldiers with the easiest tasks and entertained them during the military training. They came for example to the “dancings” organized by the waacs for the soldiers.

Eventually, Clark informs Evelyn that his company is going to “adopt orphan children”. According to Mrs Evelyn Birkby, American soldiers could sponsor European orphan childrens’ adoption by American or British couples during WWII. To do so, they could pay for the procedures involved by the process of adoption. This is the reason why it was “going to cost” “100 lbs” or “$400” to Clark’s company. The rate of exchange of year 1942 confirm that a British pound was around a quarter of American dollar.
In conclusion, Clarence Clark’s letter from the 12th of October 1942 represents a good testimony of the carelessness of soldiers after months of training. Unaware of the imminence of his first battle, the infantry soldier tends to focus more on entertainment such as traveling abroad and dancing with women soldiers than the dangers of war. Nonetheless, through his letter, the state of Iowa appears to play an essential role during the early organization of the U.S for war. Men enrolled in army and sponsored orphans while women trained for the first time in Fort Des Moines. As a young European myself, I am grateful to those citizens who permitted peace to come back in Europe for sixty-five years now.

Written By: Montuclard Astrid

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