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Just an Ordinary Day

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This letter, written by Joe to Evelyn, is a very nice portrayal of what it was like for a soldier writing to a friend during World War II. He begins by saying how he’s glad that Evelyn and her mother are getting along. This immediately makes one wonder what the history is there, perhaps a fight, maybe a misunderstanding, or maybe something else. I find his capitalization of “OK” interesting, as today that is not something we typically capitalize. However, back then it was just beginning to be shortened from the word “okay,” so it is likely that the abbreviation was written in caps as a formality.

In the next paragraph, Joe mentions how the Army is very tough, the “wash out rate” is very high, and yet again that they are tough. The uses of the word “tough” display his strong opinions of how the Army is (and perhaps he just couldn’t think of a better word to use). Here, however, the word could have two different meanings. Initially I took it to mean that it is tough work, difficult to keep up with, and hard. This is very likely, as many people drop out of boot camp, etc. for it being too hard, too taxing on their bodies, and much more work than they anticipated. But, it could also mean that the Army is strong, and works through the pain. Joe could be mentioning the wash out rate as a subtle tip as to how tough he is, for being able to keep it up and stick through the work.

The very next sentence, though, truly shows how taxing this work is. It has been physically difficult for him, he may have trouble
adjusting, and his immune system may be weakened. He got the Mumps, a very serious illness, and was so set back by it that he had to request leave. This illness is twofold, as not only was the work weakening him to the point of getting sick, being sick isn’t going to make him any stronger to keep up with his work.

In the next paragraph, he talks about a toy he received or otherwise chanced upon, and is now in the possession of. I imagine this is something from his childhood, and he uses the phrase “worth more to me than money will ever buy.” This is a large statement, showing that the object has an immeasurable sentimental value to him.

Historical:

This letter is dated July 27, 1943. This was the date of the British Bombing of Hamburg, a very important date in history as this was when the British Air Force set the precedent of civilian bombings being an acceptable way to wage war. The intent was to prevent Germany from establishing themselves as a powerhouse in Western Europe, as they were threatening Britain’s territories in Asia and Russia. However, as a side effect of the mass bombing of civilians, they also hit many workers from across Europe, people who had been taken to by the German army from areas the Germans has begun to occupy. Roughly 45,000 people were killed in this bombing, and over 50% of the city’s homes and public buildings were razed. All types of bombs were dropped, and they were meant to “make the enemy burn and bleed in every way,” as Winston Churchill stated. It was also entirely intentional that they were to hit civilians; the chief of Air Staff said
was quoted to say “I suppose it is clear that the aiming-points are to be built up areas, not... the dockyards or aircraft factories.” Their goal was not to cut off German supplies and equipment, the goal was to eliminate Germans and cause fear.

This type of event would definitely be known to someone like Joe, as the letter head suggests his affiliation with the U.S. Air Force. This is perhaps what they were training so hard for; knowing that they would be in similar situations and that retaliation was inevitable. The Germans at this point still thought that they were going to win this war by a landslide, partially because of propaganda being so heavily distributed by the Nazi party, as well as heavy punishment for anyone who said that they might lose the war. A “defeatist” attitude was not tolerated in Germany, and was considered a crime.

The Allied Forces later went on to orchestrate further broad civilian bombings in places such as Dresden, Germany, and Tokyo, Japan. These of course culminated in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, but lower-scale bombings over Tokyo and tens of other Japanese cities claimed more lives than the atomic bombs did. Joe might have been involved in these types of missions, as his training would most likely be geared toward what appears to be a very common war tactic of the time. These later bombings of Dresden and other German areas were often double teamed by combined U.S. and British forces, with the United States Air Force coming by day and the British Air Force coming back through at night.
Written By: Joe Vanbladel

References:
