

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Notes from a Basic Training.

Mann, Klaus

Nutzungsbedingungen

Bei zahlreichen Dokumenten auf monacensia-digital.de sind die Urheberrechte bereits abgelaufen. Sie sind gemeinfrei und dürfen ohne weitere Rücksprache mit der Monacensia weiterverwendet werden.

Bei den Dokumenten, bei denen noch Urheberrechte bestehen, müssen für eine Weiterverwendung stets die Rechteinhaber*innen angefragt werden sowie eine Publikationsgenehmigung der Monacensia eingeholt werden. Das Zitatrecht bleibt hiervon unberührt.

Zur Erteilung einer Publikationserlaubnis wenden Sie sich bitte an:

Monacensia im Hildebrandhaus
Literaturarchiv
Adresse: Maria-Theresia-Straße 23, 81675 München
E-Mail: monacensia.literaturarchiv@muenchen.de

Terms of use

The copyrights for numerous documents on monacensia-digital.de have already expired. They are in the public domain and may be reused without further consultation with Monacensia. In the case of documents for which copyrights still exist, the copyright holders must always be contacted for further use and publication permission must be obtained from the Monacensia. The right to quote under copyright law remains unaffected by this. To obtain permission for publication, please contact:

Monacensia im Hildebrandhaus:
Literaturarchiv
Address: Maria-Theresia-Straße 23, 81675 München
E-Mail: monacensia.literaturarchiv@muenchen.de

NOTES FROM A BASIC TRAINING

By Klaus Mann

2nd Signal Road, Serv. Sec.
Camp Ritchie, Md.

Political subjects are practically taboo in the Army. Not that the soldiers are expressly warned by the officers ~~against~~ not to discuss politics; they just don't care for them, out of laziness and skepticism. To the average American soldier, everything that has to do with politics is tantamount to what he terms - vaguely and contemptuously - as "propaganda." President Roosevelt in Casablanca? "That's just propaganda..." The R.A.F. has bombed Berlin again? People are starving in Greece, France and Poland? Hitler meets Mussolini? Franco is a Fascist? "Propaganda..."

The "debunking crusade" from 1919 to 1942 - the sweeping propaganda campaign against propaganda has been too successful. If the generation of the First World War was ~~too~~ easily fooled by big words, youth in 1943 is handicapped and often paralyzed by ~~its~~ ^{an} indiscriminate aversion to all idealistic formulas and appeals.

Do we have to choose between illusions and disillusionment?

-*-

"Let's do the fighting but don't bother us with ~~ideals~~!" ^{Your Talk} No doubt, there is something refreshingly reasonable to this point of view which seems generally accepted by the enlisted men. They are not particularly interested in the lofty ideas that are at stake in this war; but they take it for granted that the war will be won by the Allies, and that they - the American boys - will be instrumental in winning it. In other words, they are skeptical but by no means defeatistic: which is the decisive and encouraging difference between ~~the~~ French youth of 1939 and ~~the~~ American youth of 1943.

-*-

The boys really dislike the Japanese but they don't hate the Germans. "If I could only get hold of one of them damned Japs!" they would say, "I'd sure give him hell..." I have never heard them make such grim remarks as regards the Germans. There, they differentiate - generously and intelligently - between the wicked leaders and the misguided leaders. They believe that the Japanese, as a nation, approve wholeheartedly of their aggressive régime, whereas the Germans would like to get rid of their Fuehrer - an unduly optimistic point of view, I am afraid, as far as the Germans are concerned.

-*-

Most of the men I have seen in the Army so far seem to be fairly competent soldiers, but extremely few of them are enthusiastic militarists. They are doing their job - more or less effectively and thoroughly - , not with exaggerated ambitions but just "to get it done with."

Characteristically, it's by no means the martial songs and dashing melodies that are most popular with the boys. Nobody sings "The Yanks are coming..." when we are on a hike, or at night, in the barracks. The more sentimental and nostalgic a tune, the more liked it will be in the Army. "When the lights go on again..." is undoubtedly the greatest hit in camp. The other ~~night~~^{day} a fellow in our hut began to cry like a child when a girl sang, on the radio, "You're so nice to come home to..." "Stop it!" the sensitive soldier boy ~~whined~~^{said}. "Turn it off! It makes me so f..... homesick!"

-*-

They love to talk about love. They discuss the girls they met at the last U.S.O. dance, and the girls they picked up in the street; they show each other the appetizing portraits of movie stars and ^{to}

the less glamorous likenesses of their wives and sisters. They revel in dirty words and in romantic memories. The subject seems always new to them - always thrilling, ~~always puzzling~~ and wonderful.

Love is the unfamiliar name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.

-*-

I was struck by these words I found in T. S. Eliot's new poem, "Little Gidding." Mechanically - without quite realizing what I was doing - I read the beautiful lines aloud, in the presence of two or three of my hut-mates. They thought them "pretty crazy" but were at the same time curiously impressed. "It don't make no sense," they said. "Sounds kind of cute, though. Like music, or something." Evidently, they did not dislike it.

They don't dislike or scorn things they don't understand. In Germany, the uncultured people are ~~the~~ implacable enemies of culture: they loathe ~~it~~ and persecute it in all its forms. Not so in this country. Even the ~~the~~ illiterate are not without a vague, half-humorous respect for the vocabulary of science and poetry. It may be completely incomprehensible to them, but they respond to certain suggestions it conveys, and which they consider "smart" and funny and not at all unpleasant.

A European writer, who takes his basic military training together with farmer boys from the Middle West, waiters from San Francisco and barbers from the Bronx, will perhaps remain an outsider (his comrades may call him "~~the~~ Professor"); but he will not be treated as a fool or as an enemy. He will not be lonely, unless he deliberately isolates himself.

-*-

I did not feel lonely, the other day, when I was marching in the big parade of our regiment. It was a glorious day, and the band was playing as we marched by the stand from where the general was watching us - surrounded by his officers and their ladies. We were later told that they liked the performance our outfit gave, and - strangely, paradoxically - it made me a little proud, for a little while. All the other fellows were so happy and so excited that I couldn't help ~~being so~~ feeling the same way. "At least I didn't mess up their parade," I thought - rather pleased with myself. "Apparently, my basic training was not in vain altogether."

They have taught me how to march and how to fire a rifle. I have learned to pack a haversack and to ~~build a tent~~ ^{read a map} and to execute the terrible motion of running a bayonet into ~~an~~ ^{or} enemy's body. I am ~~now~~ trained in the basic gestures, ~~the basic tactics and tricks~~ ^{and} of warfare in this murderous century. I accept the boredom, the nostalgia, and also the pride of a soldier's life. May I never forget or betray the dreams and postulates for the sake of which these sacrifices and outrages become excusable and necessary.

---**---