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The Lives of Soldiers in World War II

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The Lives of Soldiers in World War II

Abstract

An examination of soldiers' quality of life during World War II. This is done through comparing and contrasting the letters of two different soldiers.

Keywords

WWII, soldiers, army, war correspondence

Disciplines

Anthropology | European History | History | Military History | Public History | Social and Cultural
Anthropology | Social History | United States History

Comments

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The Lives of Soldiers in World War II

Caroline Bosworth

FYS Bringing the Past into the Present



Overview

- The purpose of this research project was to gain an understanding of the lives of American soldiers serving in World War II and to examine the similarities and differences of those that served in the Pacific Theater and the European Theater.
- In order to understand the differences between the quality of life in the Pacific Theater and the European Theater, I contrasted the letters from a soldier stationed in France and a soldier stationed in Japan during World War II. This was able to be accomplished, as both soldiers had extensive collections of letters.
- John W. Duttera was stationed in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Carl G. Ohmer was stationed in the European Theater during World War II.

Background

- World War II began in September of 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. Japan entered into the war upon their signing of the Tripartite Treaty in Germany in 1940, thus leading to fighting in both the European and Pacific Theaters.
- On September 2, 1945, Japan surrendered to the United States, the USSR, and Great Britain, which officially ended World War II.

The Letters

- Carl Ohmer was a member of the 55th Quartermaster Depot Company in the United States Army, which was stationed in France from September of 1944 to the end of the war.
- The letters written by Ohmer were addressed to "Mom + all."
- The tone of these letters is the one of a son assuring his mother and the rest of his family that he is still alive and that there is no need to worry about him being overseas.
- John was a member of the 93rd Air Service Squadron in the United States Army, and was stationed in Japan and the islands from August to October of 1945.
- The letters written by Duttera were written to Ruth Feiser, who would become Duttera's wife following the end of the war.
- Duttera's letters are ones in which he shared with Feiser his concerns and frustrations that came with being in the army. These letters are different than those that Ohmer had sent, as he confides in Feiser with his thoughts on the war.

Comparing and Contrasting the Letters

• Living Conditions

- Ohmer described the billets where the army was staying in France as permanent, with a large wall around it for protection. While being blocked from the world, Ohmer also described the fear that the soldiers felt, as the Germans would mark the wall with swastikas.
- Duttera shared in his letter that he stayed in a hut on the island of Okinawa in Japan, and could see the ocean from the hut.

• Interactions With Civilians

- Ohmer shared of peaceful interactions with civilians: being offered apples from a French orchard, being greeted with cider from a young boy, and signs from the French welcoming and acknowledging their American allies.
- Duttera states that the Japanese children were always excited to see the soldiers and to interact with them as they traveled through the towns. In contrast, Duttera and the other soldiers were told to not talk interact with the natives on Okinawa, as they were considered unfriendly.

• How Free Time Was Spent

- Both Ohmer and Duttera described that their free time was spent in very similar ways. The men both told of how the majority of their free time was spent watching movies with their fellow soldiers. Sometimes it was difficult for them to have ways to watch movies and they would have to do without that form of entertainment. Also, it seems as if a lot of their free time was filled with letter writing, in order to communicate with those that were still in the United States.

• Competence in the Army

- It was very clear in reading Ohmer's letters that he felt confident in his ability to perform to his highest ability in the army. He admitted that he was a bit unsure of his new position at first, but that he was being trained and he was learning the job quickly.
- Duttera shared that he didn't feel comfortable in his role as a soldier, and that one of the rare times when he did feel confident was when he was fixing the army's radio machine. He confided in his letter that he viewed himself as more of a radio man and an electrician than a soldier.

Value of the Letters

- The letters are valuable in that they provide insight into the lives of some soldiers in World War II. It is important to acknowledge that these letters do not provide information on all soldiers during the war.
- These letters do not cover the entirety of the life in World War II, but they can be used as a foundation for further research into the quality of life in the European and Pacific Theaters.

Conclusion

- In attempting to tie my research of this topic to secondary sources, I discovered that there is a lack of scholarly articles that focus on the quality of life for American soldiers in World War II.
- This analysis of letters from the Pacific Theater and the European Theater is just the beginning of the research that needs to be done in order to gain more of an understanding of the similarities and differences between soldiers in the Pacific and European theaters.
- Most scholarly articles that focused on the soldiers were focused on psychological effects that the war had on these men in the years following the war. It is important to acknowledge that all aspects of the war need to be studied and understood.

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