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12-31-1918

1918-12-31, Wesley to Family

Wesley F. Diedrich

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1918-12-31, Wesley to Family

Keywords

U.S.A., Stamp, U.S. Soldiers, correspondence, Western Front, military occupation, Luxembourg, Mother, Father, son, brother, Family, Echternach, comradeship, going home, soldier slang, Christmas, New Year, government, movies, death, Theodore Roosevelt, President Woodrow Wilson, John J Pershing, recruitment and enlistment, racial stereotyping, racial slur, self-determination, patriotism, nationalism

Identifier

2014.160.w.r_ Diedrich _worldwarone_1918-12-31_055

GRAND HÔTEL DU CERF, Straus soeurs
ECHTERNACH (Luxembourg)

W Diederich
108 Engle
U.S.A.



Mrs. W. Diederich
108 Glenwood Av.
Joliet Ill
U.S.A.

OK
J. Campbell
at Joliet

Joliet Ills 12-31-18

My Dear Son

Your mother having written your Christmas Eve on the Soldiers Mother. I will try & write you one tonight New Year's Eve on the Soldier. I write it part from memory, part from history, part from present & part from past act. I will entitle it the Great Adventure. You may pass it to your comrades for their perusal after you read it if you so desire. I write it as the Father of 2 boys (soldier) who are true blue & went through the mills. I am using copying paper as the letters to both of you are in the same identical word, spirit & letter & carry with it my honest opinion & prediction.

The Great Adventure

The war was the great adventure of this generation. Into a scheme of life which may properly be defined as organized hunt down the war brought opportunities for adventure on a scale never before approached in history & mankind eagerly embraced it. Not Patriotism but the thrill of danger, not such abstractions as making the world safe for Democracy were more than half the cause, but the instinctive love of action & daring moved the youth of America & added Cantigny, Chateau Thierry, St. Mihiel, & the Argonne Forest to the roll of glory in American History. We come of a race that has always sought adventure & loved danger. A Race which has always loved battle & exalted the heroic. Why deny our heritage. Even in the walks of peace this heritage showed itself. Our industries were adventurous & sought to conquer the world. But the old instinctive longing for danger & daring was not dead. Denied a direct outlet it found vicarious satisfaction in other ways notable the motion pictures. It was not accident that made the movies of violent action & blood curdling thrill the most popular of all the films. It was the desire to enjoy adventure if only in imagination that gave the motion picture its universal appeal and so long as it provided the thrill its crudities & improbabilities were charitably overlooked. A generation ago the American youth in search of adventure went west. On the great plains there was danger & he sought it. It is impossible to appraise correctly how great a part the lure of Indian fighting had in settling the west. The dangers which beset the path of the pioneer hastened rather than retarded that quick settlement of the western plains which was one of the astonishing chapters in American history.

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The settlement of the west was the great adventure of the seventies as the civil war had been of the sixties. In the fifties there had been the rush to California & its gold fields. In the forties the Mexican war. The period from 1820-1840 was a period of mid-western settlement but just before there had been the War of 1812-1815 & before that the war of the revolution. Preceding the Revolution there had been the French & Indian war of 1757.

With such a tradition of adventurous activity a people could not be anything but adventurous by nature. Industrial life might lull into somnolence the instinctive desire for daring & danger but it could not extinguish it. It was the most natural thing in the world that young America should welcome gladly the entry of the United States into the great war.

In all ages mankind has exalted the Hero & admired the heroic. Thomas Carlyle believed that the Hero was the crystalizing force in history & gave direction to the tendency of every age. The early literature of every people but notable that of our own race is heroic.

For thousands of years the tales our race has told from generation to generation has been adventure stories & these are still the popular literature today. Six Presidents of the United States have been War heroes. George Washington, Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Ulysses S. Grant and Theodore Roosevelt and the possibility of John J. Pershing as a successor to Woodrow Wilson is great. The fighter, the man whose leadership in War makes him the supreme adventurer, embodies an ideal which lies deeply hidden in the common breast & in exalting him the common man feels that he is elevating that which is noblest.

There are "intellectuals" who will deplore this admiration for the adventurer & who will see in humanity's longing for adventure only a disorganizing and an anti-social tendency in mankind. But "intellectuals" are ever timid and distrustful of ideas that are not their own. Greater was the insight of H. G. Wells' hero Mr. Bristling when he said that after all adventure is the only part of life that counts. Those who tremble lest the returning thousands of Pershing's crusaders will refuse to readjust themselves to the workaday world, are over anxious. There will be some of course whose return to hindroom life will be irksome, but for the greater part those hundreds of thousands of clerks, mechanics & farmers will settle back into civil life without any difficulty. True enough they will not be exactly the same as if they had never been "over there". They will be richer in

(3)

Experience and in memories. They will have a new perspective of life. How can the trivial tasks of everyday life be important to men who saw their comrades stricken by thousands & who themselves faced death with a smile & a song?

If the war is a great adventure it is both Physical & spiritual. William James the acute philosopher & yet one of the men of greatest common sense that America has yet produced has put this thought in one of his most penetrating essays "The moral equivalent of War". James says that War is not wholly destructive & that with all its sacrifice it yet leaves mankind with an emotional gain which compensates in some degree for the losses which War entails.

If history is examined it shows plainly that nations are great only so long as they are adventurous. China the greatest nation in the world in point of numbers is stagnant & unimportant because its people have no conception of adventure.

In the larger view conflict seems to be the motive power of human progression. Out of conflict with nature mankind gains in wisdom & ability. In the conflict between opposing ideas truth is tested & its validity is established. Out of the conflict between the restrictions of social life & the impulse to individual life rises the desire for adventure & the fact that these desires persist after thousands of years of increasing order & regulations in human affairs proves that adventure is a real part in the great scheme of things.

Only in adventuring can a man obtain a true measure of himself. Only in the face of risk can he test his courage & only as a man knows himself to be courageous can he esteem himself.

We need courage, it is the foundation of achievement. Courage to face the unknown and to conquer it if may be but courage at least to face it. Nearly all errors are the error of fear. Nearly all the failures are the failures of timidity.

Nearly all the failures are the failures of timidity. For perhaps a million years the human soul has been fighting & conquering fear. As a race we have gone farther than any other race on earth. Demons no longer exist for us. The tremendous forces of nature no longer awe us. The hurricane & the Earthquake have lost their power to terrify us. We meet the devastating tidal wave with a sea wall as at Galveston. We rebuilt a new & better San Francisco on the site of the city that has just been shaken down. We tame the flood and we refuse to take or accept nature's dictum that this or that area shall be a desert or that an isthmus shall bar our path to the East.

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On behalf of Mother & I we wish you a Happy New Year with love & kisses

Your loving Father

A. Diedrich

[[Nick Dante 10/13/15]]

[Diedrich Correspondence #55]

[[Page 1-Envelope]]

SOLDIERS MAIL

[[image-envelope heading: GRAND HOTEL DU CERF, STRAUS SOEURS
ECHTERNACH (Luxembourg)]]

W Diedrich
108 Engrs.
U.S.A.

[[image –black stamp, ON U.S. ARMY
POSTAL SERVICE FEB 8 1 PM]]

Mrs. N. Diedrich
108 Glenwood Av.
Joliet, Ill
U.S.A.

[[image- very faded purple circle stamp
A.E.F. PASSED AS CENSORED]]

[[Illegible signature of commanding officer]]

[[Page 2-Letter]]

Joliet Ills. 12-31-18

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On behalf of Mother & I we wish you a Happy New Year with love & Kisses.

Your loving father

N. Diedrich