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Search and Seizure #4
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The Second World War entered people's lives with a force that was answered by every segment of the population in the United States. The letters from the people who fought in the war provide, for the historian, information that tells us about their experiences and gives us an understanding of what they were feeling and thinking when the events were taking place. Though the immediacy of the letters gives us an understanding of what the circumstances were, it is important to recognize that what is written down is influenced by different factors such as the writer's subject-position and the audience. In this case it is the former president of the Humboldt State University Arthur Gist, are examples of these factors. The letters provide descriptions of the locations, the people, and leisure activities the soldiers participated in. The disadvantage in this primary source is due to the public audience. The letters do not describe the personal feelings and thoughts of each soldier regarding the war. So that in reconstructing a narrative it is crucial to understand that the descriptions in the letters are constructed through the filter of the authors' personal biases and perspectives. Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of using this type of primary source can reveal the power dynamics at play when this archive was constructed. Of course this will be incomplete representation of the events because we do not actually know what the correspondence was that the soldiers were answering. A second primary source will be used to further divulge what the first leaves silent. Researching the school newspaper and yearbooks will shed light on what life was like at HSU and how it was affected by the war years. So that

we can see how this militarized the citizenry and how that militaristic mind-set played out when the recruits were faced with the reality of war.

The first letter was written by Jack Ellis, who was stationed in France a month before Soviet forces were to seize Berlin. In his letter he reflects on memories of living in Arcata and muses about life in the French countryside mentioning that “the famous wines, cognacs and champagne of the first war seems to have gone along with the preverbal gaiety of the French People.”¹ He attributes this to five long years of hard fought war. But despite the terrible state of the countryside, he observes that the farm houses and green fields where they still use two-wheeled carts had readily available timber in spite of the shortages of the resources. The greenery of the countryside was like a breath of fresh air compared to his previous assignment in the Aleutian Islands. It would have been interesting if Ellis would have written about his specific activities and duties at this stage of the war. From this letter we get an understanding of what the French countryside near the battlefield was like.

Harold Feltz wrote the second letter. He was stationed in Australia in September of 1945 after V-day. In his letter he talks about his travels from Brisbane to Sydney back to Brisbane and describes his experiences in each. His time spent in both cities gave him a unique perspective to compare both places to each other. In Brisbane he mentions that they “felt and were made to feel out of place.” He attributes this to the fact that people in Brisbane have “seen U.S. troops since 1942, they are tired of us and don’t mind showing it.”² He also mentions his visit to Hyde Park in Brisbane. Sydney had many more parks in

¹ Jack Ellis to President Gist, March 17, 1945, Arthur Gist Papers, Box #1 (Special Collections, Humboldt State University Library, Arcata, CA).

² Harold Feltz to President Gist, September 9, 1945 Arthur Gist Papers, Box #1 (Special Collections, Humboldt State University Library, Arcata, CA).

better condition. He also makes a similar observation in reference to the port in Brisbane calling it ugly compared to the port in Sydney. Besides this insight into life in Australia, his letter mostly talked about the end of the war and his frustration at not being released early enough. He reflects on dead comrades expressing hope for a future with no war, but if there was to be another war, it would be the last. In these comments, Feltz demonstrates an intimate sentiment that was probably shared by other servicemen. He goes on to complain that his group's discharge will take some time, the delay is estimated for 9 months and that morale is low because of this. His 19 months of tropical duty is common, but the fact that the war is over compounds his frustration pointing out that his friend Brad Barnes is already discharged and returning to Humboldt College. Overall, his letter has the tired tone of a worn out soldier. Like Ellis, Feltz does not write about his combat experience but considering the tone of the letter it is understandable. In his reflection of the war, it can be inferred that Feltz experienced the war very closely which is similar to Ellis's letter though neither of them explicitly talk about it.

The next letter was written by Elio Fanucchi, a tail gunner in a bomber stationed at a French Air Base near Paris. This was during a point in which the final allied offensive was beginning. He participated in bombing missions over Germany from which point he made observations regarding the "terrible blow France has had."³ From his vantage point it appeared to him that "towns [was] blown to ground level but despite this French morale is tremendously high."⁴ His leaves in Paris remind him of big cities in the U.S. except for fewer cars. He had a removed position from the battlefield. He was spared a direct experience of the brutality of the war. It would be interesting to have

³ Elio Fanucchi to President Arthur Gist, February 29, 1945, Arthur Gist Papers, Box #1 (Special Collections, Humboldt State University Library, Arcata, CA).

⁴ Elio Fanucchi to President Gist, 24 February 1945, Gist Papers, Box #1

heard him write more about what his thoughts were about the war. Comparing his letter to the letters written by Ellis and Feltz reveals how the tone is influenced and changed even though Feltz and Fanucchi were both in France. Was this a result of the soldiers' proximity to the battle front?

Philip Gilhousen wrote the fourth letter under review and he begins it by passing on his mother's reflection of spring in Humboldt. Gilhousen was stationed in Scotland visited Glasgow and Edinburgh the latter being, according to him, the best city in Europe. His experience was unique in that he lived in private home but ate at the base mess hall because of the scarcity of food. The advantage of this letter is that it revealed a context of the war seen from the Scottish perspective. Like some of the other letters written, Gilhousen is not explicit about his role in the war or what his duties are. Probably because this letter was written toward the end of the war, the tone in the letter reflects the enthusiasm shared by most people that the war would soon end. Where his comrades reflect a more reserved perspective of the war in Gilhousen's letter we still find a strong tone of military zeal. Further research could show how his attitude changed over time if at all. It might also show how his late arrival into the war informed his perspective on the war compared to people who had served longer.

The final letter was sent by Howard Goodwin who was stationed at a B-29 air base on one of the Mariana Islands which he describes as a small compound with coconuts and banana trees. Goodwin is unclear as to what his duties and assignments were on the island. In his letter he mentions that Japanese soldiers were still in the vicinity living in little niches, but they were unorganized and didn't bother them. Patrols led by natives were sent to hunt them down. He also mentions that he has met a lot of

people from the states but non from Eureka. But he was lucky enough to meet someone who knew his friend from home, Rod Belihouse. He goes on to describe his time in Honolulu Hawaii and how it reminded him of Juarez, Mex. From Hawaii he traveled by boat to his current station. It can be assumed that Goodwin was probably in the air force and worked in a support capacity. Whatever his official duties as of this letter, his only interaction with the enemy was the threat of a few Japanese soldiers left behind. Comparing Goodwin's letter to the other men gives us a spectrum of perspectives from GI's who were involved in direct military confrontation to those that were far removed. This range of perspectives influences each soldier's perspective of the war and how they represent their experiences.

Being that all the soldiers shared the same point of origin it would be beneficial to research what life was like at Humboldt State University and how a shared origin informs how the soldiers viewed their role in the war. The 1941 Humboldt year-book describes the Drama Department performing "Margin for Error" describing it as first play of the year. It was written by Clare Boothes as a satirical anti-Nazi melodrama. The performance of this piece by students at HSC shows us that the war was entering a more prominent position in the general discourse around town. What does this say about the general attitude toward the War, and what was its impact on the social structure?⁵

The 1943 year book begins with a dedication to fallen servicemen and a list of their names printed on the first pages. This year the drama department performs "Heart of a City" It was a stirring drama of the war set in London. It also provides the first mention of Naval reserve club and commando training on campus. By this time we see the war

⁵ *Sempervirens* (Arcata, CA: Associated Students of Humboldt College, 1941), 54

taking a more prominent role in the structure of the University and by extension a general discourse that begins to militarize the student population.

The yearbooks provide a context that combined with the school newspaper, the *Lumberjack*, adds to an understanding of what Arcata was like during the war years. The front page of the *Lumberjack* of January 20, 1943 announces the establishment of new HSC course that would be in line with expanding the university's program of cooperation with the war effort by offering a specialized course in Commando stating that "Commando will be required of all male students, one hour a day, five days a week."⁶ Both these sources make self-evident the gradual militarization of the civilian population in response to the aggression over seas from 1941 to 1945. The from adjustment of curriculum at Humboldt and, presumably, adjustment in the general population we can infer that by time they entered the war a militaristic mind set was firmly established in the recruit's psyche.

The experience of these people provides a context for understanding what was happening during World War II from the perspectives of U.S. GI's who served on both the European and the Pacific fronts. Through their letters we also get a glimpse of what was happening in places that had close contact with the war and how these places were trying to reconstruct themselves. Though the letters were a bit detached in tone and personal information was clearly omitted, they still provide a wealth of information that helps in reconstructing the context in which these primary sources were constructed and the varying influences. In conjuncture with the secondary primary source we begin to interpret how the description of events and locations was influenced by the soldier's personal ecology. We can see a correlation between the soldier's proximity to the war

⁶ No author, "Commando Courses offered at HSC," *Lumberjack* 20 January, 1943, p1

and the tone of letters that reveals how a power dynamic influenced the soldier's experience. How that power dynamic molded by a social militaristic mind-set was to play out in the coming decades when political movements for change were challenged.

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