**Xmas War Letter Analysis Reading Notes**

**The assignment:**

HULSE CHRISTMAS WAR LETTER ANALYSIS 10%: Due 15 January 2015 (2 pages, excluding bibliography and title pages)

Sir Edward Hamilton Westrow Hulse, *Letters written from the English front in France between September 1914 and March 1915* (n.p.: Privately Printed) 1916: 56-70. The text can be found at: <http://archive.org/details/letterswrittenfr00hulsrich>

Consider what this letter, written in two parts, discussing the Christmas Truce of 1914, reveals about its author, Edward Hamilton Westrow Hulse, and about his experience of the truce.

**Notes:**

Page 56: Military / Professional first.

Hulse didn’t want the Germans to get to close to their lines, presumably so that they would not be able to see the Allied layout and defenses. Hulse later on the same page betrays his intention to do the same, and to close on the German positions for the purpose of gaining useful military intelligence.

He also insists that the German write out his note in English, presumably also for intelligence reasons.

He employs deception, allowing the Germans to believe that he is only a corporal to facilitate his espionage.

Also speaks to dehumanizing the enemy.

Page 57: Mistrusts the German who speaks in four languages. Hulse is keeping an eye open for espionage. Doesn’t use names. Very conscious of military units, though.

Page 58: Hulse succeeds in picking up useful info about the field.

Continues to mistrust the German officers and paints them in a very negative light, almost like a caricature. Once again dehumanizing the leadership of the enemy, but not the rank and file.

Page 59:

Betrays his suspicious nature but saying that he would have believed it faked if he’d seen it in news reels.

“I talked to a lot more Huns and found many very young fellows, but a good, strong, and pretty healthy lot. Probably only the best of them had been allowed to leave their trenches;” Why make this observation? He seems to be implying that the Germans are trying to overstate their strength or to intimidate the British.

Page 60:

Once again refers to the German as “nasty”.

Dines separately from his men. Old English custom, but once again shows a distinction between rank and file and command.

“I told him that when the truce was ended, any of his friends would be welcome in our trenches, and would be well-received, fed, and given a free passage to the Isle of Man !” I believe that he is offering to take them all as prisoners of war. Again, his military objectives are always top of mind, though he probably doesn’t really think it would work.

Page 61:

Suspicious of the cease fire, and orders troops to be doubly alert, as if the truce was a ploy to help catch them off of their guard.

Uses the time for military purposes to fortify his position.

“Well, he found an extremely pleasant and superior stamp of German officer, who arranged to bring all our dead to the half-way line.” First positive mention of a German officer.

Page 62:

The good German officer and George exchange gifts.

Refuses to allow his men out of the trenches. Assumes that the truce is at an end. The German’s watch without interfering as the British fortify.

Page 63:

Deserter reports (falsely) that attack is imminent. Hulse is again skeptical (correctly). Why doesn’t he believe it? Because of the truce?

Page 64:

Shares intelligence with the Germans. Hulse nows seems to want to keep things amicable.

Hands off instructions to his relief so that the truce, such as it is, can continue. Hulse is restricting his men from fraternization and is keeping it strictly controlled by the officer corps.

Page 65:

Hulse has so far not shared his opinion of what has been happening. It is largely a narrative and there are many implied judgements in his account. Let’s see if the second letter is different. Could this be primarily influenced by his position at the front? Will being relocated (to the rear?) change this?

Hulse frequently refers to his men by name. They are *people* to him. The Germans and the “Belgian” on the other hand are identified by their nationality and by derogatory comments only.

Page 66:

Comments on the situation at home and the support of the British people. “That is an extremely narrow and selfish way of looking at it, but those are our chief characteristics.”

Hulse is still trying to pursue military goals: “(I wanted to give them the cuttings with his statement as to their casualties.)” He wants to demoralize the enemy.

“except one well-educated fellow I talked to, who said that he thought it would go on 'for a long time ; I told him to improve his dug-out well, and we hoped to find extreme comfort when we take their trenches,” 2nd positive mention of a German, whom Hulse attempts to demoralize with a joke.

Page 67:

“Although I do not trust them a yard,” Hulse is a realist, but he is starting to humanize the enemy. At least the rank and file.

Page 67-68:

Hulse is arguing that the main objective of Germany is to make gains in the east and to simply hold what they have in the West. So the truce can be explained by Germany’s own military objectives! How cynical…

“This, I think, explains why they appear not to mind how comfortable we make ourselves here, so long as what we do tends to making them believe that we are going to sit quiet.”

Page 68-69:

Hulse arranges arguments to support his conspiracy theory.

Page 69:

Human, named references to allies again, especially the French family. He speaks of them affectionately and details their ages and interactions without suspicion.

Addendum:

Some of the above could be re-interpreted as class bias. State this in seminar.