



By Alexander Baron

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3. The 'Professor' knew too much. How did he prove himself? Fill up the space with suitable examples from the story, using the given clues:

- (a) about muzzle velocity:
- (b) after a thirty mile walk:
- (c) his salute on payday:
- (d) the loud sound of a high flying invisible aeroplane:
- (e) about hand grenades:
- (f) during cook house duties:

Answer:

(a) Once a Sergeant was describing the mechanism of a service rifle, "The muzzle velocity or speed at which the bullet leaves the rifle is well over two thousand feet per second." On this, The Professor interrupted and corrected the Sergeant, "Two thousand, four hundred and forty feet per second.

(b) he Professor drilled with enthusiasm and on route marches he was not only miraculously tireless but also extremely hearty and enthusiastic. At the end of a thirty miles walk he would ask the others if they would like to sing a song much to the chagrin of his colleagues.

(c) The Professor's salute at the pay table was a model to behold. Whenever there were officers in sight he would swing his skinny arms and march to the canteen like a Guardsman.

(d) The soldiers used to pride themselves on aircraft recognition. Once, while all were out for a walk, they heard the drone of a plane flying overhead. The sun was glaring and none of them could see the plane. But The Professor didn't need even a sight of the plane and announced, "That of course, is a North American Harvard Trainer. It can be unmistakably identified by the harsh engine note, due to the high tip speed of the airscrew." The rest felt like louts and felt out of place with Private Quelch.

(e) One afternoon Corporal Turnbull was taking a session on hand grenades. The Corporal began by telling about how the outside of a grenade is divided up into a large number of fragments to assist segmentation. However, The Professor interrupted by pointing out with the exact number of fragments, which was 44, and went on suggesting that Corporal should have started his lecture by first explaining the five characteristics of the grenade. In reaction the Corporal let Quelch take the lecture. After The Professor was through and all had fallen in, Corporal Turnbull assigned Private Quelch, the permanent cookhouse duties. Of course, it was a joke for days afterwards; a joke and joy to talents.

(f) The Professor was assigned by Corporal Turnbull for 'permanent cook house duties'. One day while the narrator and his friend Trower were returning from the canteen to their own hut,

they saw through the open door three cooks standing against the wall as if at bay. From within they heard the monotonous yet familiar voice of the Professor. He was criticizing the cooks for their abominably unscientific and unhygienic method of peeling potatoes. According to him it was a sure waste of the vitamin value of the potatoes.

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4. Based on your reading of the story, answer the following questions by choosing the correct options.

(a) Private Quelch was nick-named 'Professor' because of _____.

- (i) his appearance
- (ii) his knowledge
- (iii) his habit of reading
- (iv) his habit of sermonising

Answer:

- (iv) his habit of sermonising

(b) One could hammer nails into Corporal Turnbull without his noticing it because _____.

- (i) he was a strong and sturdy man
- (ii) he was oblivious to his surroundings
- (iii) he was a brave corporal
- (iv) he was used to it

Answer:

- (i) he was a strong and sturdy man

(c) The author and his friend Trower fled from the scene as _____.

- (i) they had to catch a train
- (ii) they could not stand Private Quelch exhibiting his knowledge
- (iii) they felt they would have to lend a helping hand
- (iv) they did not want to meet the cooks

Answer:

- (ii) they could not stand Private Quelch exhibiting his knowledge

5. Answer the following questions briefly.

(a) What is a 'nickname'? Can you suggest another one for Private Quelch?

Answer:

A nickname is a name that may be given to somebody in addition to the person's actual name. This nickname may represent the person's unique traits or his intellect.

'Mr. Knowledgeable' could be another one for Private Quelch as he had knowledge of all the things by heart.

(b) Private Quelch looked like a 'Professor' when the author first met him at the training depot. Why?

Answer:

Private Quelch was a lanky, stooping man who frowned through horn rimmed spectacles and so was nick named 'Professor'.

(c) What does the dark, sun-dried appearance of the Sergeant suggest about him?

Answer:

The Sergeant was as dark and sun-dried as raisins. He wore North-West Frontier Ribbons. He was to deliver a lecture on the mechanism of a service rifle. His appearance spoke much about him. He appeared to be a man who had dedicated his whole youth serving army. His ribbons reflected valour and gallantry. He was not a man to be fooled around or impressed easily, a man not to be incited with anger.

(d) How was Private Quelch's knowledge exposed even further as the Sergeant's classes went on?

Answer:

Quelch not only corrected sergeant's knowledge of the rifle but he could answer all the questions directed towards him. He was particularly very good with technical definitions.

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(e) What did the Professor mean by "intelligent reading"?

Answer:

By "intelligent reading" the Professor means to do a thorough study and have all knowledge available on a particular subject. For instance, if one is studying about 'the mechanism of a service rifle', one must know every detail-technical definitions, the parts of the rifle, its uses and care, muzzle velocity everything by heart.

(f) What were the Professor's ambitions in the army?

Answer:

Professor Quelch wanted to race ahead of all his batch in getting commission. His first step was to get a stripe.

(g) Did Private Quelch's day to day practices take him closer towards his goal? How can you make out?

Answer:

Quelch was highly ambitious, very diligent, brainy but his strategy to impress his instructors, backfired. In pursuit of showing off his own knowledge, he irritated and tried to belittle his instructors. He rudely interrupted them in front of the squad and exhibited his knowledge. No wonder he is relegated to the back quarters of the kitchen house.

(h) Describe Corporal Turnbull.

Answer:

Corporal Turnbull had a great reputation of being tough and was not the one to be rubbed the wrong way. The squad were in awe of him and it was believed that one could hammer nails into him and the fellow would not even wince. He was young and had recently come from Dunkirk.

(i) How did Private Quelch manage to anger the Corporal?

Answer:

Private Quelch was a much learned student. He loved to exhibit his knowledge and he cared little of how people around him responded. Once, when Corporal Turnbull was taking a lesson on hand grenade, The Professor went on correcting him on the number of segments that a hand grenade is divided into and also The Professor suggested him, as an expert on the subject, on how Corporal should have started his lecture. Turnbull, though a calm person on the exterior, was a man not to be trifled with. Although he did not react at first and patiently let Quelch take the lecture. However, he took his revenge in the end of the class by assigning Private Quelch permanent cookhouse duties. The episode, of course, was to become a popular joke among the whole platoon.

(j) Do you think Private Quelch learnt a lesson when he was chosen for cookhouse duties? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer:

Private Quelch was conceited and satisfied in his own cocoon. He was totally indifferent to what others thought about him. When he was relegated to cook house duties, he might have felt bad temporarily but he would never change. It is evident from his lecture in the cookhouse, that some thickheads are too thick to change.

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