

Chapter 3
The Man Who Knew Too Much

Page No: 25

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.

Page No: 26

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.

Page No: 27

(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 thick heads are too thick to change.

6. At first, Private Quelch was a hero in the eyes of his fellow soldiers. Support this observation with suitable examples from the story in about 100 words.

Answer

In the beginning of the training, when all interacted with Private Quelch, they thought him to be far intelligent than any ordinary fellow. However, it was only with the passage of time they came to know the other side of the truth. No doubt, The Professor was a rapacious reader and his intelligence was admirable and the knowledge he acquired was not ordinary; however, the fashion in which he exhibited his learning not just annoyed his mates but also let him down in front of his seniors. Not just this, Quelch became an object of mockery and was laughed at by fellow soldiers.

In the first lecture that the platoon had in musketry, The Professor pointed out the exact figure of the muzzle velocity at which a bullet leaves a rifle, two thousand, four hundred and forty feet per second.

Even during the training marches of the battalion, Private Quelch never ran out of enthusiasm and was tireless. He used to work hard; he had brains and was sure to get a commission before long. He would stay up late at nights reading borrowed training manuals. He was a hero in the eyes of every soldier. All admired him for his knowledge and the spirit he had. However, this all lived not long and soon all lived in terror of The Professor. He would publicly correct anyone who made a mistake. Quelch was so condescending that he was disliked by all.

7. Private Quelch knew 'too much'. Give reasons to prove that he was unable to win the admiration of his superior officers or his colleagues in about 100 words.

Answer

Although Private Quelch was far knowledgeable than his fellow soldiers, he was little admired and more disliked. He always exhibited his learning without being asked for and had uncanny habit of correcting any and everybody. He did not spare his seniors as well, who came to deliver lectures to the platoon. He did it first with the Sergeant who came to deliver a lecture on the mechanism of a service rifle and later in the class of Corporal Turnbull who was taking lesson on hand grenade. Although he always had been correct with the facts he gave, he was not appreciated for his condescending nature. He tried best to impress his seniors with his knowledge and know how, he forgot that they were his seniors after all and had much experience of life and far better knowledge of technicalities of any subject. The Sergeant though did not say much to The Professor; Corporal Turnbull did not miss his chance and assigned Private Quelch permanent cook house duties to teach him lesson. Thus, the great knowledge that The Professor possessed doomed him and became the reason for him being disliked by all.

8.

(a) Write down the positive and negative traits of Private Quelch's character instances from the story.

Positive traits	Instances from the story
(i)	
(ii)	
(iii)	
(iv)	
Negative traits	Instances from the story
(i)	
(ii)	
(iii)	
(iv)	

Answer

Positive traits	Instances from the story
(i) He was very hardworking.	He sat up reading books till late night.
(ii) He was very confident.	He had the guts to interrupt his instructors like the sergeant and even Corporal Turnbull.
(iii) He was blessed with an excellent memory.	He could remember technical definitions and other information very precisely.
(iv) He appeared most enthusiastic and tireless.	He could think of a song, even after 30 miles of walk.

Negative traits	Instances from the story
(i) He was not pleasant in his looks.	He always had a frown, was lanky and stooped.
(ii) He was very condescending to his team-mates.	He would pretend to help and show off in the bargain.
(iii) He was tactless and ill-mannered.	He rudely interrupted his instructors and pretended to have superior knowledge than them.
(iv) Quelch's worst flaw was his tendency to overshadow others.	He needlessly tried to show his knowledge, belittle and humiliate others.

(c) Attempt a character sketch of Private Quelch using your notes in about 100 words.

Answer

Private Quelch, just another soldier in the platoon, who thought not so of himself; too much learned to be a student, he was called 'The Professor' by his mates. He had thorough knowledge

about almost everything. He had an ambition to get commission in the army. He borrowed training and studied them till late in the night. He corrected the Sergeant and answered all his questions promptly and correctly. He gave an excellent lecture when asked by Corporal Turnbull. His salute at the pay table was a model to behold. The orderly officer praised him generously because Quelch kept his hut meticulously clean. He was tireless after long route marches and liked to sing. He surprised his colleagues by recognizing an aircraft by its harsh noise that others could not recognize.

Writing Task

9. You are the 'Professor'. Write a diary entry after your first day at the cookhouse, describing the events that led to this assignment, also express your thoughts and feelings about the events of the day in about 175 words.

Answer

Dear Diary

Sunday

23rd November 2014

Today was my first day in cookhouse. It was not so bad as I thought earlier. I felt greatly depressed and dejected when I was assigned permanent cook house duties for no fault of mine. Never in my mind I had imagined that I'll be punished for

my knowledge. I didn't want to annoy the corporal by exhibiting my knowledge of the subject. My sole aim was to excel in my field because being an orphan I had struggled a lot and wanted to do something big in my life. However, I will do my every task perfectly. I saw that they were peeling off potatoes which was unhygienic and also noticed a thing that they did not use different khadais for different dishes and the quality of rice was also not so good. I will try to improve these things in after days. I will also try to get out of here and proceed to my ambition to get a stripe