

Sample Examination II

Section I

Questions 1-13. Refer to the following passage.

The following is excerpted from author Gene Smith's 1964 reflections upon revisiting World War I battle sites fifty years later.

- (5) O Verdun!¹ All along the dull road up from Bar-de-Luc there are concrete posts with concrete helmets on top and raised lettering saying this is *La Voie Sacree*², the Sacred Road. At Souilly, Pétain's³ headquarters is unchanged from the way it looks in the pictures that show him standing on the steps to watch the youth of a nation go northward to its fate.
- (10) Seventy percent of the French army went up this road. Night and day the trucks went grinding by; battalions of men stood and flung crushed rock under the tires so that they would not sink into the mud.
- (15) Today it is strangely silent, however one much strains to hear the sounds of motors and sloshing boots and the mumbled throbbing of the distant places where for months on end the guns were never quiet. But the visible signs of battle are still present. Here are the long trenches, twelve feet deep then, six feet now that nature has half filled them up; here are the craters with cows scrambling up their sides;
- (20) here is the metal plate used for protection against the shells and now used to roof sheds and support garden walls. In these fields it is impossible to walk for long without seeing rusted metal protruding up through the wet moss; here if you leave the road and go past the signs warning of *Danger de Mort*—Danger of Death!—
- (25) you will soon lose yourself in the scrub pine planted in the thirties when experts finally decided that the soil was too gas-and-shell-corrupted to reclaim it for agriculture. Under trees or in stream beds are rusted grenades or shells, as terrifying as coiled snakes. Dig and you will find
- (30) bullets, shell fragments, broken rifles, sardine tins, decayed canteens, unidentifiable bits of metal. It requires but a few
- (35)
- (40)

minutes of work to hold in your hand what was last seen two generations ago by a boy in field grey or horizon blue. Now he is an old man in Leipzig or Nancy or, more likely, he is known as the grandfather or great-uncle who perished at Verdun.

(45) The name on the signpost, seen from a moving car, catches the eye and holds it as the car sweeps past. Verdun. In the city itself, in one of the long, deep galleries of the citadel where the French troops found rest during their infrequent respites from the ever-wet trenches (it always rains here), there is a one-eyed veteran. His glass eye never moves. He gives foreigners a piece of paper typed in their language which asks that they not forget to tip him. Inside the gallery there are eight coffins covered with oilcloth flags.⁴ (No cotton or silk would last long in this dank, wet place.) On the wall there is a great sign, "They Shall Not Pass".⁵

(50) Past the terrible sign is a great cemetery. On a hill facing the graves is the *ossuaire*. In the rear are scores of windows at waist level. One must bend and shade the eyes to see what is there. Bones are there—the bones of 150,000 unidentified men of both sides. Here is a window: See the neat piles of leg bones. Another: arms. Another: skulls. Look at the hole in this one. See the spider weaving his web

(55) between the eye sockets. Through other windows in the ossuary one sees bones piled in unsorted confusion. This collection is ever-growing; often a wild boar rooting in the earth will show where more bones

(60) lie. Or during a forest fire a 75-mm. shell will blow up, fifty years late, and uncover more Unknown Soldiers.

(65) All this happened at Verdun. And yet no drums beat and there are no bugles.

(70) Concentrating and looking back past the France and Germany that followed Verdun, past sick France sliding downhill and sick Germany with its monocled politicians in high stiff collars and their leather-booted

(75) prostitutes, you must say to yourself, Here

(80)

(85)

(90)

under my feet and within the space I see,
hundreds of thousands of men died, here
the entire world turned over.

¹ site of a crucial battle in the First World War

² the only safe supply line to Verdun

³ Henri Phillipe Pétain, French officer appointed to oversee the defense of Verdun

⁴ remains of unidentified French soldiers

⁵ *Ils ne passeront pas* (Fr): Pétain's pledge to thwart the German advance

Mr. Gene Smith is the author of
"Still Quiet on the Western Front Fifty Years Later",
"Until the Last Trumpets Sound", "Leon Grant",
"When the Cheering Stopped"
and other famous works.

1. The author develops his essay around which of the following contrasts?

- (A) reality and romance
- (B) past and present
- (C) victory and defeat
- (D) youth and age
- (E) courage and cowardice

2. The author's primary purpose in the passage is to

- (A) pay homage to the fortitude of the combatants
- (B) lament the tremendous sacrifice demanded by combat
- (C) criticize the strategy of a military commander
- (D) salute the efforts of archaeologists in recreating an important battle
- (E) delineate the effects of time and weather on historical sites

3. The exclamation, "Oh, Verdun!" (line 1), is likely an expression of

- (A) recognition
- (B) frustration
- (C) surprise
- (D) mourning
- (E) nostalgia

4. In recreating the world of Verdun, the author relies upon all of the following EXCEPT

- (A) onomatopoeic diction that conveys the weather-induced struggles of men and transport
- (B) personal reminiscences of surviving veterans
- (C) topographical landmarks that men and nature have since altered
- (D) uncovered relics of the fierce conflict
- (E) parenthetical comments that describe the sodden weather

5. Which of the following is NOT characteristic of the style of the long second paragraph?

- (A) the use of inversion to delineate still-visible scars from the decisive battle
- (B) a subtle shift to second person which intensifies the immediacy of the experience for the reader
- (C) a preponderance of visual images which contrasts the ubiquitous silence
- (D) trenches that symbolize mass graves
- (E) a somber and ominous tone

6. The effectiveness of lines 37-39, "Under trees or in stream beds are rusted grenades or shells, as terrifying as coiled snakes," is abetted by which of the following?

- I. The innocuous connotation of the word "rusted."
- II. A comparison that suggests latent and imminent danger.
- III. The disarming nature of the pastoral locale.

- (A) II only
- (B) III only
- (C) I and II
- (D) II and III
- (E) I, II and III

7. Which BEST represents the arrangement of the objects listed in lines 40-42?

- (A) military to civilian
- (B) archaic to contemporary
- (C) whole to splintered
- (D) extraneous to pragmatic
- (E) large to small

8. The author likely includes the detail of the one-eyed veteran (lines 51-60) as a(n)
- (A) haunting image of the terrible carnage
 - (B) stark reminder of the impoverished and dependent lot of many older vets
 - (C) visible sign of the veneration afforded the Verdun dead
 - (D) permanent tribute to the unyielding defense of the fortification
 - (E) telling symbol of the political blindness that sparks such awful conflicts
9. The BEST equivalent of the word “terrible” in line 65 would be
- (A) terrifying
 - (B) offensive
 - (C) discomfiting
 - (D) macabre
 - (E) garish
10. Lines 83-84, “All this happened at Verdun. And yet no drums beat and there are no bugles,” suggest that
- (A) the heroic dead have been grossly dishonored
 - (B) there is no real victory at such a calamitous sacrifice
 - (C) the Verdun countryside no longer resonates with war
 - (D) present villagers have tried to forget the war
 - (E) the military preparedness of France is again lax
11. Which of the following pairs of adjectives BEST captures the author’s attitude toward the events at Verdun as expressed in the final paragraph?
- (A) heroic and lionized
 - (B) unappreciated and wasted
 - (C) costly and cataclysmic
 - (D) unforeseen and embarrassing
 - (E) momentary and forgotten
12. The third and fifth footnotes, and the initial description of Pétain in lines 7-9, suggest that he
- (A) took great pride in his French forces
 - (B) was eager for promotion
 - (C) was willing to absorb great casualties to hold the position
 - (D) was more boastful than determined
 - (E) kept himself out of harm’s way
13. In light of the passage as a whole, the phrase “They Shall Not Pass” and its explanatory footnote do which of the following?
- I. Account for the extreme number of unidentified remains in the *ossuaire*.
 - II. Question grimly the sense of such adamancy.
 - III. Epitomize the concept of “Pyrrhic victory”
- (A) I only
 - (B) III only
 - (C) I and II
 - (D) II and III
 - (E) I, II and III

Sample Examination Two: Explications and Answers

Explication of Passage One: From Gene Smith's "Still Quiet on the Western Front"

The initial passage in this exam reflects upon arguably the most crucial and costly battle of the First World War, Verdun, in which the German commander, Erich von Falkenhayn, besieged the French fortifications of the city in an attempt to inflict insurmountable casualties on the French army. Under the leadership of General Pétain, however, who organized a series of counter-offensives, the French army denied the German advance until Allied troops diverted the German focus on Verdun with an attack along the Somme River. All told, the price of upholding Pétain's defiant claim, *Il ne passeront pas!* ("They shall not pass!"), was approximately 400,000 French fatalities, with a similar number suffered by the German attackers.

Smith's account of the battle of Verdun is not a vivid description such as one finds in the poetry of Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, but an account of a visit years after the conflict. The narrator functions as somewhat of a tour guide, but one who is respectful of the great sacrifice that was made here. The description of Verdun is a mix of present and past, a catalog of the scars and relics that yet survive occasionally interspersed with imagined scenes of the actual battle.

The author begins with a mournful exclamation, "O Verdun!," as if this were "too bloody a spectacle" to conceive. The initial details noted are commemorative, "concrete posts with concrete helmets on top and raised lettering saying this is *La Voie Sacree*, the "Sacred Road" (lines 2-5). Though the derivation of the road's nickname was its status as the sole supply road to the besieged city, its bloody toll, exacted by the fierce fighting, calls to mind that other road of suffering, the *via dolorosa*, the bloody path of Christ's journey to Golgotha and the crucifixion. Here the author first mentions Pétain (noting how his headquarters remain nearly unchanged) as well as the endless progression of men and equipment that slugged its way through the mud under his approving glance.

In the second paragraph the author notes the eerie silence, that ethereal sense of reverential calm that pervades Normandy, Gettysburg and all the sites of great human sacrifice. He also observes the "visible signs of battle" (line 20) that still remain to the present day: trenches in which men desperately fought, armor now scavenged and used to roof rustic sheds. Indeed the remnants of war are so omnipresent, notes the author, that signs still warn of the potential for death if one wanders too far into the gas-and-shell corrupted wasteland. He notes how just a little bit of excavation can yield everything from undetonated shells to rusted canteens, ironic reminders of the death and life of the combatants.

The third and fourth paragraphs shift to indoor scenes. The first is a commemorative museum in which a one-eyed veteran, a contemporary Tiresias, maintains a solemn guardian presence over eight coffins containing the unidentified remains of fallen soldiers that rest under a great sign repeating Pétain's adamant vow. The second is a more gothic edifice, an *ossuaire*, in which mingle the bones of 150,000 fatalities—neatly divided in some cases into classifications of legs, arms, and skulls; randomly juxtaposed in others in a confused collage of bone. While these two edifices remind visitors of the awful price of Verdun (and war, in general), the author's remark that "This collection is ever-growing; often a wild boar rooting in the earth will show where more bones lie. Or during a forest fire a 75-mm. Shell will blow up, fifty years late, and uncover more Unknown Soldiers" (lines 77-82), suggests that the toll of Verdun is never-ending; that the innocent web being woven by the spider in an unsuspecting skull is the fatal web of war in which humanity seems endlessly entrapped.

The simplicity of the opening two lines of the concluding paragraph—"All this happened at Verdun. And yet no drums beat and there are no bugles" (lines 83-84)—suggests that there is no reason for the proud defiance of martial tunes. Here "the ceremony of innocence [was] drowned," as Yeats would have it, and the nature of the world was forever altered. Smith's haunting, elegiac piece offers a solemn reminder of war's awful capacity for destructiveness, leaving the reader with little to offer but the feeble commiserating phrase, "Oh Verdun!"

1. The author develops his essay around which of the following contrasts? **(B) past and present.**

The first paragraph of the passage is devoted to flashbacks of the actual Verdun siege: portraits of the French army mucking its way up *La Voie Sacree* under the gaze of their stalwart leader, Pétain. The poet uses onomatopoeia to capture the trucks' struggle through the mud as they pressed to deliver supplies to the front. The third paragraph also flashes back to troops in the "long, deep galleries of the citadel" and the "ever-wet trenches" (lines 52-55). The remainder of the passage examines a more contemporary Verdun, one in which the visitor must "[strain] to hear the sounds of motors and sloshing boots and the mumbled throbbing of the distant places where for months on end the guns were never quiet" (lines 16-20). Here the scars of war are partly obscured by nature as in the "craters with cows scrambling up their sides" (line 24), or lurking seditiously to still mar the unsuspecting visitor, as in the "rusted grenades or shells, as terrifying as coiled snakes" (lines 38-39). The contrast is decidedly past vs. present.

2. The author's primary purpose in the passage is to **(B) lament the tremendous sacrifice demanded by combat.**

Choice B garners its support from a variety of places: lines 8-9, in which Pétain watches "the youth of a nation go northward to its fate;" the reference in lines 45-48 to grandfathers or great-uncles who perished in the battle; the haunting, Gothic-like partial remains of the 150,000 unidentified dead from either side piled neatly in the *ossuaire*; (lines 67-71) and the passage's closing paragraph, in which the author suggests all visitors must say to themselves "Here under my feet and within the space I see, hundreds of thousands of men died, here the entire world turned over" (lines 90-93).

3. The exclamation, "Oh, Verdun!" (line 1), is likely an expression of **(D) mourning.**

This choice of D is based upon the overall elegiac tone of the passage, which mourns the tremendous loss of life in this pivotal battle. The great sign on the wall that recounts Pétain's stalwart oath, "They Shall Not Pass" (lines 63-64), subtly implies the enormous sacrifices made for a principle.

4. In recreating the world of Verdun, the author relies upon all of the following EXCEPT **(B) personal reminiscences of surviving veterans.**

Onomatopoeic diction is evident in "grinding" (line 12) and "sloshing" (line 17), as well as in "mumbled throbbing" (line 18). The altered topography may be seen in the "craters with cows scrambling up their sides; here is the metal plate used for protection against the shells and now used to roof sheds and support garden walls" (lines 24-27). The uncovered relics of the fierce conflict are visible in lines 37-42, "Under trees or in stream beds are rusted grenades or shells, as terrifying as coiled snakes. Dig and you will find bullets, shell fragments, broken rifles, sardine tins, decayed canteens, unidentifiable bits of metal." The parenthetical comments that describe the sodden weather are visible in lines 55-56 "trenches (it always rains here)," and in lines 62-63, "(No cotton or silk would last long in this dank, wet place.)" This confirms choices A, C, D and E, leaving B as the exception.

5. Which of the following is NOT characteristic of the style of the long second paragraph? **(D) trenches that symbolize mass graves.**

Inversion is evident in “Here are the long trenches, twelve feet deep then, six feet now that nature has half filled them up; here are the craters with cows scrambling up their sides” (lines 21-24), the use of second person in lines 30-37, “here if you leave the road and go past the signs warning of *Danger de Mort*—‘Danger of Death’—you will soon lose yourself in the scrub pine planted in the thirties when experts finally decided that the soil was too gas-and-shell-corrupted to reclaim it for agriculture,” and in other places. Choice C gains credibility from the contrast between the paragraph’s opening statement, “Today it is strangely silent [. . .]” (line 15), and the visual reminders of the war recounted earlier in this paragraph. Choice E is supported by the sign warning of potential hazards, the “rusted metal protruding up through the wet moss” (lines 29-30), and the simile of the “coiled snakes” (line 39). There is nothing to suggest that the trenches are symbolic however tempting their six-foot depth may be.

6. The effectiveness of lines 37-39, “Under trees or in stream beds are rusted grenades or shells, as terrifying as coiled snakes,” is abetted by which of the following?

- I. The innocuous connotation of the word “rusted.”
- II. A comparison that suggests latent and imminent danger.
- III. The disarming nature of the pastoral locale.

(E) I, II and III.

Though the word “rusted” suggests something that is no longer extant, it also connotes potential danger. The simile “as coiled snakes” suggests something waiting to spring, while the setting of stream and tree beds suggests something idyllic, not directly threatening. The danger here is a subtle, not blatant one.

7. Which BEST represents the arrangement of the objects listed in lines 40-42?
(C) whole to splintered.

The arrangement of the objects moves from the intact (bullets) to the broken (rifles, shells and canteens) to the shattered (the “unidentifiable bits of metal”).

8. The author likely includes the detail of the one-eyed veteran (lines 51-60) as a(n) **(A) haunting image of the terrible carnage.**

Like a character out of Greek tragedy or the mariner of Coleridge’s famous “Rime,” the spectral presence of the silent, one-eyed veteran provides a haunting reminder of the Verdun carnage. Though he says nothing, only offering a card to visitors that reminds them not to forget to tip him, he is reminiscent of Ishmael in *Moby Dick* or the character in MacLeish’s *J.B.* who utters the refrain “I alone have survived to tell thee.”

9. The BEST equivalent of the word “terrible” in line 65 would be **(C) discomfiting**.

In context, the word “terrible” means upsetting, disconcerting. Of the choices, C is most suitable.

10. Lines 83-84, “All this happened at Verdun. And yet no drums beat and there are no bugles,” suggest that **(B) there is no real victory at such a calamitous sacrifice**.

Drums and bugles are associated with martial music, with proud parades of military might. The battlefield of Verdun is marked by an eerie but reverential silence. These details, when linked with the hundreds of thousands of fatalities and the pyrrhic rhetoric of Pétain’s oath, lead to choice B as the best answer.

11. Which of the following pairs of adjectives BEST captures the author’s attitude toward the events at Verdun as expressed in the final paragraph? **(C) costly and cataclysmic**.

The allusion to “sick France sliding downhill” (line 87) and to the sexual decadence of post-World War One Germany suggests both political and moral decline. The final sentence suggests the terrible cost in human life. This is best conveyed by choice C.

12. The third and fifth footnotes, and the initial description of Pétain in lines 7-9, suggest that he **(C) was willing to absorb great casualties to hold the position**.

In the initial description of Pétain, he is seen overseeing the fatal progress of over seventy percent of the French army. Pétain’s defiant boast, coupled with the enormous number of fatalities, confirms C as the best choice.

13. In light of the passage as a whole, the phrase “They Shall Not Pass” and its explanatory footnote do which of the following?

- I. Account for the extreme number of unidentified remains in the *ossuaire*.
- II. Question grimly the sense of such adamancy.
- III. Epitomize the concept of “Pyrrhic victory”

(E) I, II and III

Pétain’s determination to hold Verdun despite the awful toll that such a decision demanded certainly accounts for the 150,000 skeletal fragments that are neatly stacked in the *ossuaire*. It calls to mind the senselessness of such chauvinistic rhetoric in light of the enormous human toll, while at the same time epitomizing the infamous “Pyrrhic victory,” in which the price of victory severely outweighs the triumph. While one may perhaps argue that the battle of Verdun turned the tide of the war, the enormous casualties, like those suffered by each side at Gettysburg, make it hard for anyone to call this a triumph.