

Masthead Logo

Archives Alive

3-4-2014

From Tunisia with Love ... A Letter from Clarence to Evelyn

Leslie Cooper
University of Iowa

Copyright © 2014 Leslie Cooper

Hosted by Iowa Research Online. For more information please contact: lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Sly Clarence

After a quick skim through this letter, it's hard to believe that there would be anything to analyze. It is amazing how information can be found through simply analyzing and researching certain portions of any document. Even though Clarence Clark is not always the most entertaining writer, he is able to at least bring some humor and hidden emotions into his letters, specifically his letter to Evelyn Corrie on January 12th, 1942.

Before I go into depth about different things about what I analyzed and researched, let me make one point clear. Clarence is madly in love with Evelyn Corrie. There is no other solution to why Clarence would attempt to hint to her multiple times throughout this letter, and multiple other letters in the war, if Clarence did not have any 'hidden' feelings for her. It is easy to tell that he has not been able to move on from his and Evelyn's past relationship, or at least he isn't trying to. Clarence has a few lines throughout his letter that show his true intentions and feelings toward Evelyn.

"You've been hearing from me pretty often lately but they keep changing my address and so I keep writing and letting about everyone know my new one."

This line is at the very beginning of the letter, and at first seems like an ordinary sentence, but after thinking about it, is actually quite clever of Clarence to still show his affection for Evelyn. He talks about how he they have been moving him so often, which is true, as he was just moved from Camp Claiborne in Louisiana to Camp Dix in New Jersey at this time. He then mentions he keeps writing and letting everyone know my new one. Who is everyone? When thinking about this, it is safe to assume that he would not have time to write to everyone every single time he has been moved to change his

address. Unless everyone entails only Evelyn and possibly his immediate family, it sounds pretty convenient that he was able to still write to his ex-girlfriend, hoping that she will possibly respond and send mail to his new address. As Evelyn was reading this, she must have only assumed that he was just sending 'everyone' letters about his new address, which makes it seem less important and hides Clarence's true feelings for her. One other part where Clarence holds nothing back to hide his feeling for Evelyn is in the last lines of his letter.

"May be a long while before I'm able to write you again but I'll be thinking of you."

In this sentence, he clearly shows his dedication to staying in touch with Evelyn by stating that even if he can't write as often, she will always be on his mind. I would have considered that cute if they were still together, but that is obviously not the case. Although it seems kind of creepy knowing that they have broken up and Clarence still saying this, I applaud him for his bravery in not holding back anything and telling Evelyn how he feels no matter the circumstance. In all honesty, it makes sense why he would write that in his letter. When thinking about the environment he is in, around hundreds of other men who probably all have sweethearts that they write to almost every day, poor Clarence is left writing to his ex-girlfriend and trying to win her back or maintain what they had before the war. Even though Evelyn married someone else, we can only imagine that Evelyn and Clarence might have had a serious relationship before Clarence left for the war, and he has still been unable to move on from her.

Along with the rhetorical aspects of this letter, there is a lot of interesting historical facts that can be analyzed. After some research, I was able to find that Clarence was part of the "Red Bull"

34th Infantry Division. The 34th Infantry Division were the first soldiers sent into Europe in World War II. As it seemed inevitable that the United States would join in World War II, Clarence's Infantry was seen as one of the most service-ready units, which is why they were the first division sent to Europe. Clarence's division was activated on February 10, 1941, about 11 months prior to writing this letter. His division was then sent to Camp Claiborne in Louisiana in April, where he went through extensive trainings with the Louisiana Maneuvers. Although we have no certain time period for when Clarence joined the division, we know that he was at Camp Claiborne training using the Louisiana Maneuvers because of the letters he had written to Evelyn addressed from the camp. He didn't talk much about his trainings and harsh conditions when writing to Evelyn, either to get his mind off the subject of war or to show Evelyn that it didn't bother him since he was a strong soldier. Then on January 8th, 1942, the 34th division was transported to Fort Dix (Camp Dix), which is four days before Clarence wrote this letter. This also explains and affirms that Clarence really did change addresses hence the letter to Evelyn. Camp Dix, where Clarence wrote this letter, is now called Fort Dix and is a permanent Army post. The camp maintained the same purpose that it did in World War I, to serve as training and staging grounds during the war, and also acted as a demobilization center for after the wars. Evelyn also mentions in one of her letters when submitting the rest of the war letters that Clarence was later in heavy and intense battles in Italy. From some of my research, I was able to find out that the Red Bull Infantry was in the Winter Line in Pantano, Italy for quite some time in battles, which supports Evelyn talking about where Clarence had fought.

It was an exciting experience to be able to research and transcribe these letters and learn more about some past history, while still being able to relate our work to our Rhetoric class by rhetorically

and historically analyzing these letters. At first, I felt that we were almost intruding on Clarence and Evelyn's personal lives a little too much, but after I went deeper into researching small details Clarence left in his letters, it made the whole project a lot more exciting. It's really cool to understand how much you learn about something when it doesn't seem like there would be much to analyze, and I'm glad I could participate in such an interesting project.

Written By: James P. Burke

References:

"34th Infantry Division." Wikipedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 7 Mar. 2014.

"Fort Dix." Wikipedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 7 Mar. 2014.