War-Time Coalescence

Alex Rier

University of Iowa
Was Clarence friend zoned?!

In the letter, Clarence makes his intentions clear: he cares about Evelyn, as more than a friend. He wants to hear from her often and doesn’t care what they talk about. He does a decent job of covering up his feelings with minute details, saying things like, “All of us are finally back here. The last of them just got in this morning.” And makes excuses for writing so often. Camp Claiborne was not just a place where Clarence wrote Evelyn letters, it was a huge operations area where the U.S. military gained insight on tactics for World War II.

Rhetorical Analysis

Clarence used several topics to evoke emotions from Evelyn without being straightforward about his true thoughts. Clarence starts the letter saying: “yes its me again, I don't usually write quite so often but thought I'd better this time.” He could be worried about whether he will get to write again soon as well. His reasons for writing are the most important aspect of the letter because Clarence mentions the topic more than once in the letter. Clarence ends with:

I don't usually write quite so soon but as I'm changing my address maybe its best because I want to hear from you. Who Knew? Writing so often it might become a habit. Wouldn't be a bad habit to get into.
Hinting that he misses Evelyn, Clarence also wants her to notice how often he is writing. His wish is for Evelyn to reply more frequently to his letters.

Clarence says, “I imagine that by now you are back at the job.” to show he cares about what is going on in her life. He makes a joke saying, “If you didn't get stranded in a snow drift somewhere.” to lighten up the letter, hopefully getting her to chuckle. He rambles on about men returning from their furlough, but refers back to weather saying,

I always wanted to spend a winter in the sunny south and thought for awhile that this was it. Didn't care to spend it in the army though. Don't look as if we'll be in much warm weather very soon as we were just issued 4 heavy blankets and a comforter and heavy jackets, overshoes. So winter weather here I come.

By contrasting his dreams of a winter in the south with the heavy blankets and clothing he has been given, Clarence makes Evelyn feel bad. I feel as if weather comes up in casual conversation regularly. Comments, like Clarence’s comment about weather, can cover up the fact that he misses Evelyn. I believe when writing this letter Clarence held back what he truly felt, that he missed her. He uses the weather and other minor things as a crutch to continue to write to Evelyn without being too emotional or straightforward. If he was honest Evelyn might ignore him, due to their history.

Clarence tells Evelyn about his life in the Infantry. Saying things like:

Their in vacant tents all over this place. They are starting to build another camp right out northwest here. Will have it finished in 18 days and it holds 15,000 men.
And

That’s getting things done in a hurry. We've got all our trunks and heavy game loaded on the train now. Worked most of last night. We should pull out ourselves some time tonite or at the latest tomorrow for the north.

In each case he gives her the basics and withholds the details. It seems to me that he hopes to make her more curious, or hopes to get her to write a letter.

I know the feeling because at the moment I have a friend in basic whom I write letters with. I always want to hear more information and one letter never fully answers all of my previous questions. In my case the letters are between close friends. Now, writing letters with an ex-boyfriend would be hard for me. The correspondence would bring back memories and emotions from past experiences. I would also want to know every detail of their life, because they were once so important to me.

Historical Context:

Clarence wrote Evelyn from Camp Claiborne located in Rapides Parish in Central Louisiana. The camp was established in the 1930s as Camp Evangeline, but later renamed for the Governor of the Territory of Orleans and first governor of the State of Louisiana, William C. C. Claiborne. Camp Claiborne was mainly used for basic training and artillery practice. Prior to the United States declaring war, the camp
was used as part of Louisiana Maneuvers, a 400,000-man training exercise involving two fake countries fighting one another. The Louisiana Maneuvers were designed to evaluate U.S. Training, logistics, doctrine, and commanders. As war approached, there was a need to modernize the military and to conduct large-scale maneuvers to test all aspects of a fast-growing, inexperienced force. The training through the maneuvers was not limited to Camp Claiborne, but also made use of Camp Beauregard and Camp Livingston. These camps were right for the Louisiana Maneuvers because the area was heavily forested, hot, and hilly. This terrain replicated what the U.S. soldiers faced in World War II. From August to September of 1941, the military used Camp Claiborne for simulated combat, which allowed it study navigation rights and strategies along the Mississippi River. Twenty-six men died during these exercises; the most reoccurring causes of death were drowning and vehicle/motorcycle accidents.

Louisiana welcomed the soldiers, among them some were privileged enough to stay in residents’ homes. Some locals snuck fresh bread and water to the soldiers because all they had to eat were rations. Housewives baked bread and teacakes that were sold to the soldiers. Others did laundry and pressed clothing to earn money. When the soldiers received $11 million the economy flourished, it was no longer a rural southern community depending only on sheep farming, sugar cane fields, cotton, and lumber.

The U.S. military was prepared for the worst in these camps but tried to remain isolationist. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was all it took for the U.S. military to be called into action. Near the end of the war, German Prisoner’s of War were held here. Camp Claiborne was deactivated in 1945, and became part of the National Forest System, administered by U.S. Forest Service. Clarence’s company, the 168th Infantry 34th Division, was the first American
force sent to Europe because of their showcase of skills during the Louisiana Maneuvers. Many Army officers, whom were present at the maneuvers, later rose to senior roles in WWII. The Louisiana Maneuvers were important because they helped the higher ups see what the military needed to work on, and also to get a better idea of what would and wouldn’t work in battle. Camp Claiborne and the Louisiana Maneuvers played an important role in preparing the U.S. for WWII.

Clarence holds back when it comes to saying how he truly feels. Clarence misses and wants to talk to Evelyn. We know this because Clarence repeats himself in saying why he writes so often and makes up excuses. Clarence is part of an important war tactic in history and fails to mention the Louisiana Maneuvers. He may not have realized how important it was, but the discussion of war was not the main topic in Clarence’s mind when writing this letter.

Written by: bobbilawton

References:


http://diyhistory.lib.uiowa.edu/transcribe/scripto/transcribe/3197/78006

http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/birkby/id/3712