Another World War II Letter to a Pal

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Written By: Katie Hughes

World War II was one event experienced by individuals of the time in their own way. Each person has their own story to tell of the impact the war had on those four years of their life. Letters are our best way of analyzing the lives and emotions of those living during the war. I chose to historically and rhetorically explore a letter to Evelyn, a young girl in her early twenties, from a young man, Edward, currently enrolled in schooling to partake in the navy. As the letter from Edward to Evelyn unfolds, the history behind the simple words and dates as well as their close friendship shows the importance of dipping into a little piece of the past.

A simple, quick glance at the letter can tell you many details of the context. It is faded ink, on a slightly yellow piece of paper, so the letter has been around for a long time.

The upper right header informs the reader of the place and purpose of this letter. Written from Gyro School in Brooklyn New York at the U.S Naval Receiving Barracks, we know this letter was sent from a man training to be part of the army. The letter ends as the man expresses the date, telling us it was sent out the 30th of December.

The tone of this letter is casual and informative as Edward appears happy to be sharing his past events with his friend while also sincerely interested in her life. The letter does not contain any flirtation techniques or inside jokes so we know Edward has accepted or perhaps never tried to leave his place in the friend zone. He refers to her as “pal” and signs it “your pal” so I think it’s safe to assume that they are pals. He discusses his past and current enrollment in schooling for the navy and tells her about his schedule. By giving her specific details of each hour he spends we
know they must be in a close relationship where they tell each other details others would not care to know. He maintains an upbeat attitude throughout the war except for a short paragraph where he mentions the effect the war has had on Times Square, describing it as dark and empty. This brings about a sad tone and is the only mention of a negative aspect of the war. However, he quickly changes the subject towards Evelyn as he asks about her Christmas and work.

Edward asks questions and shows concern to his fellow reader. He appeals to her feelings by saying she deserves to have a special someone in her life with her. He also gives her space by keeping a fair distance and admitting he does not want to be completely in her business. Words such as “grand girl”, “chow”, and “liberty” reveal the time period of the letter as being from a while ago. Using the analogy of comparing the amount of towns Iowa has to the amount of parts a compass has makes the context relatable for his friend and tells us he is most likely originally from the state of Iowa. He says he hopes to hear from her very soon and the tone is assuming he does not doubt she will respond.

The letter is chronological as Edward writes in a structured manner making it easy to follow. He begins by summarizing things about himself and ends with questions about Evelyn and her life. Overall, their friendship and close relationship is displayed well through the words written.

World War II is known to have lasted for a brutal six years with many deaths and casualties. The time of this letter was written precisely in the middle of the long fought war. The letter discusses the training necessary in order to be sent to war such as electrical school, amphibious training, and gyrocompass school. The training
of a young man so many years into the war shows there was no answer of when World War II would come to an end.

Electrical school was common during World War II as men needed to learn about it for various different tasks throughout the war. Electrical school was mainly conducted in Torpedo schools but after 1939 when the war began the schools became diversified around the world as fear of possible destruction of electrical establishments came about. Schools varied across the United States and even spread to the United Kingdom. Amphibious training was also a key part of a future navy man’s training as amphibious warfare was a huge part of the war. It was the jobs of naval ships to project ground and military power onto a hostile shore.

Gyrocompass school in 1943 trained men on how to use this complex compass to help navigate the ships. It is a non magnetic compass that finds geographical direction without the interference of other materials and is based on a disc and the rotation of the earth. There are no findings of specific schools in New York at the time the letter was written showing that they were kept secretive and little information about them was known. However, we can assume there was a particular gyro school in Brooklyn, New York in the year 1943 according to the letter written.

On this particular day during World War II, the Battle of the Barents Sea took place between the German Navy and British ships. Ironically, the writer of the letter was writing from a United States naval base at this time. Germany took a hard loss, making Hitler mad as he exclaimed they would now focus on the U-boat fleet instead of surface ships. This would mean that Edward would probably be hearing about this battle the day after writing this letter and being told of new strategies the United States hoped to
try. U-boats are equivalent to that of a submarine meaning it would not be seen from the surface and therefore more complicated for a navy member of the opposing team to find and destroy this ship.

Edward questions how Evelyn likes Waterloo and unfortunately this town is about to be in a state of shock. It was home to the five Sullivan brothers who were killed as a result of the sinking of a vessel they all had served on, the USS Juneau, by a Japanese torpedo. This tragedy had happened on November 13, 1942, just over a month before the letter was written yet the Sullivan boys parents would not be notified of their son’s deaths until January 12, 1943; about a week and a half after the sending of the letter. The five boys had joined the Navy together to avenge their sister’s boyfriend who was killed in the Pearl Harbor attack. The tragedy was kept secret for so long because the United States did not want the enemy to know of the event.

Overall, the letter has many possible connections behind it and it is just the insight of two people living during the war. So next time you read a letter, remember to keep an open mind.

References:

