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“How is it out your way, Evelyn?”

Alison Schwebach
University of Iowa
A Heartwarming Letter From Camp Shelby

The letter that I analyzed was composed on July 21st, 1942 by Harry Schlichting. It is part of the collection of Evelyn Bikrby, a woman who made her private life public and by doing so gave us an opportunity to explore past and the history of US.

Rhetorical Analysis:

My letter is short and concise, yet beautifully composed and deeply influential. Harry starts letter with describing the atmosphere in which he writes to Evelyn. He says “Dear Evelyn, As I write this letter I’m sitting by a bonfire for the light it provides – not for the heat.” Artistic introduction serves two purposes. First it creates image of Harry and his surroundings in Evelyn’s mind and makes her read the rest of the letter under the fire flame. Second – by saying that the sole purpose of bonfire is the light it provides, Harry shows the importance of writing to Evelyn. “I would have waited until we moved of the range with this letter but right now that time seems very indefinite.” The exact meaning of this piece of text remains indecipherable to me but it certainly shows some kind of significance and complexity of their relationship.

Harry further goes on describing the typical day of frontier. He uses rhetorical devises such as appeal to emotion to make Evelyn feel sad for his war troubles. He complains about sleeping in pup tents and waking up at five in the morning to do day’s work which “doesn’t cease until day light gives way to darkness.” The style and elegance of Harry as a writer amazes me, given the fact that he’s a young soldier in the World War II.

Harry was a man full of hope and optimism who knew how to create something heartening with a combination of words. Integral part of his letter to Evelyn is the birthday celebration. “There are many things I can and will write later but as for now, I wish to wish you a “Happy Birthday”, may your year have added some measure of cheerful memories despite painful recollections.” This piece further strengthens bond between Harry and Evelyn and makes her feel special and appreciated. Positive energy shines through Harry’s language when he says he will write many things later. World War II wasn’t easy to survive and many people wrote their letter as if they were their last. Harry on the other hand promises Evelyn that he can and will write more and more.
The ending of the letter sounds like a Facebook message or a voice mail to me. “Congratulations on your new job – tell me more. Your friend. Harry.” Letters in World War II would travel a long way and took months and months to reach their destination. They were often information rich, lacking emotion. Harry’s letter to Evelyn is completely different. It’s short and sweet. Assures Evelyn that their relationship will grow and makes her feel loved.

**Historical Analysis:**

Since my letter lacks historical details I emphasized on its rhetorical importance. However after reading the blog post of Nana Yaa I found out many details about Harry Schlichting. He was a soldier of 85th division, part of 337th infantry regiment. Two months before this letter was composed he was located in Camp Shelby in Mississippi. Given the fact that he doesn't talk about his location in the letter and doesn't give Evelyn any details about the war I assumed that nothing significant was going on at that time.

85th division started intensive war training in April 1942 at Camp Shelby. Camp Shelby has a long history and to this day remains as a basic training facility. In March 1942 the division was transported to Louisiana to begin army-level maneuvers. In October 1942, 85th division had desert training in New Jersey. They were not a part of anything historically significant until January 2nd 1944 when they arrived in Casablanca, French Morocco and after long amphibian training were sent to Naples, Italy where they took defensive positions on the north of the Garigliano River and The Italian Campaign officially started. On May 11th 85th division took Solacciano, Castellonorato, and Formia and after the fall of Itri they continued to mop up the Gaeta Peninsula. They entered Rome on June 5th 1944 which was the major victory of the division.

Harry's division had a nickname – Custer division. Soldiers themselves were referred to as Custermen. They had khaki, circular shoulder patches containing the initials “C” and “D” in red. 85th division was one of the most important US divisions. Member soldiers won 4 medals of honors, 4 distinguished service medals, 554 silver star medals, multiple legions of merit and bronze star medals.
Custermen are of great historical importance and there are many websites dedicated solely to memory of those who died and glory of those who fought and survived. However I was unable to find any info about Harry Schlichting. He wasn’t a significant figure in his division but surely had special place in Evelyn’s heart.

Written By: Tomar Kavlashvili

References:

Custermen - http://www.custermen.com/85CD.htm

Blog Post of Nana Yaa Wright - http://rhet103048sp14.wordpress.com/2014/03/08/just-an-ordinary-day/

The University of Iowa Libraries - Iowa Digital Library (Collection of Evelyn Birkby)

BBC – Your Paintings (Photo Credit – National Army Museum)

World War II Pictures - worldwar02.com

The National WWII Museum – New Orleans