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A California Love Interest

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In a letter dated April 23, 1943, Harry Schlichting writes to Evelyn Corrie, a friend, during World War II.

Responding to Evelyn’s previous letter, Harry quickly starts off the letter correcting her saying, “No, I'm not an instructor. I'm a line (buck) sergeant in a line outfit out on maneuvers.” He writes ‘buck’ in parentheses, which is defined as the lowest rank in a specified military category. In this case, Harry is a low-rank line sergeant on duty at an unnamed camp and is making fun of his inferior title.

Harry explains that he will soon be moving to a different camp, or “coming off maneuvers” as he stated in the second paragraph of the letter. An army maneuver is the “highly coordinated movements of troops, supplies and machinery.” He mentions to Evelyn that they will be switching camps soon and he says the new camp “definitely won’t be Shelby.” The shortening of “Shelby” suggests that Harry and Evelyn have discussed this place before in other letters and that Evelyn is aware of his duty at previous camps.
Since this was the last letter in the scrapbook between Harry and Evelyn, I inferred that there were previous exchanges between them prior to this one. Searching through the Archives, it appears that Harry and Evelyn wrote to each other for about a year. There is a large gap in the dates of their exchanges, the last letter written in September 14, 1942 with a response not until April 23, 1943. Many of the letters Harry writes on, prior to this one from April 1943, contain a seal from a camp called Camp Shelby. Camp Shelby, a military post in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, served as a training camp for the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Battalion during WWII. It closed after the end of WWII but is back open as a training camp for the National Guard today.

The camp that Harry moves to “definitely won’t be Shelby,” because Harry seemed to have witnessed a lot of danger while serving there, including a “hike which killed five and caused over half the regiment to fall out,” which he explains to Evelyn in another letter. Harry letting Evelyn know that the camp he moves to “definitely won’t be Shelby” shows that he doesn’t want her to be worried that he’ll be in that hazardous environment again.

Harry comments that he is “glad to hear that [Evelyn] is up to [her] earn in work,” inferring that she was unemployed the last time he
talked to her, adding a comment that being unemployed is “the devil’s workshop.” He is congratulating Evelyn on a new job and is happy that she can make ends meet, interpreting that she was out of work for a long time because of working conditions, showing that Harry is caring and sympathetic towards Evelyn’s state.

In the 1940’s, minimum wage was $0.40 per hour. The value of a $0.40 income value in 1943 compared to today is about $14.00, actually showing double of what the minimum wage earner receives nowadays. As I researched this decade, I noticed that in 1943, the government reclassified many of their jobs, so women, both single and married, were allowed to work and take over the men’s jobs, which were now off as soldiers. This fact can definitely refer to Evelyn’s idleness in employment, as Harry states that he’s happy that she can now make money to support herself.

Following that paragraph, Harry writes that he’s “got an itching foot and would like to move.” He is clearly tired with the camp he is currently at and is ready for different work on duty elsewhere.

The conclusion of the letter shows that Harry is close with his Christian faith and follows the religious holidays, but has trouble taking part in them with the amount of work at the camps. The closing of the letter reads, “As ever, Harry,” a phrase usually used in a letter to someone who you aren’t close to or haven’t seen in a long time.

Looking through the Archives at other exchanges between Harry and Evelyn, I noticed that they wrote from 1942-1943. In other
letters, Harry gives updates on his current duty and doesn’t ask much about Evelyn herself. He seems to answer questions she’s asked, but doesn’t seem to be that involved with Evelyn’s personal life, excluding the comments he made about her getting a new job. Harry writes, in another letter dated September 14, 1942, “I destroy all letters after reading them so if I don’t answer right away I sometimes get mixed up. My month’s lapse wasn’t intentional.” This brings up many questions as to why Harry gets rid of all of his letters so quickly. Perhaps he doesn’t want to remember the war and doesn’t want to document his time serving in the war. Evelyn’s letters, however, seem to bring Harry some comfort as it can be inferred at the end of the letter when he adds, “If I miss, write anyway.”

This postscript suggests that Harry’s destroying of his letters isn’t anything against Evelyn and acts as a form of persuasion, insisting that she writes to him no matter what because Evelyn’s words keep him company during this stressful time in his life.

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References:

YouTube Video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHn6gchqjcM

Works Cited:


