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Clarence’s War: The Occupation of Sicily

Patrick Taffe
University of Iowa
Merry Christmas Evelyn

Elizabeth Salerno

Rhetorical Analysis

The letter I transcribed was divided into two sections, the first of which was written on December 23, 1941 and the second written on Christmas day. In the letter, you learn about Fred’s personality—he has a good sense of humor but can be serious when the situation demands it. You also begin to question the state of Fred and Evelyn’s friendship. The two halves of the letter differ greatly in subject and emotion, but share the same goals: to inform the reader, Evelyn, about recent events in Fred’s life.

Fred updates Evelyn on current events by telling her stories. He walks through the day he learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and goes into detail by telling her exactly what he was doing and who he was with when it happened. The way Fred described that day reminded me of the day I heard about the attacks on September 11th. I can recall exactly where I was and what I was doing when it happened. It’s like we can stand in Fred's shoes for a moment and see everything that he's seeing.

Fred and Evelyn’s relationship is questioned several times throughout the letter. Are they in love or not? In the first half, Fred begins with an apology, saying that he is sorry that he couldn’t send Evelyn a photograph. He seems to genuinely care by saying “my intentions were good” and using modifiers like “very” to describe just how sorry he was. Further evidence make it appear as if they’re in a relationship (much like in EVERY other letter written
to Evelyn.) Near the end of the first part of the letter, Fred flatters Evelyn by telling her, “there was only one girl I had my mind on and that was you.”

The state of their relationship is put in question in the second half of the letter. Fred admits to standing in the studio when he was about to get his picture taken, only to be distracted by Harry Slack. This suggests a stronger bond between Fred and Harry than Fred and Evelyn. Also in the second half of the letter, Fred mentions, “I must write to Helen also.” Who is Helen? Perhaps Fred isn’t admitting to something there.

In contrast, Fred shows his more humorous side in the second half of the letter. He kids that he has a lot of gals but he wishes half of them were women. He also jokes that someday he is going to marry Harry Slack. At the time, this lightheartedness must have helped the moral of both the soldiers and the women reading their letters. In some of his previous letters he even included funny drawings with his words. Sadly, he did not include one in this letter.

Historical Context

My letter was one of the earlier written ones. According to the University special archives, Evelyn most likely had just graduated from the University of Iowa. At the time this letter was written, Evelyn was believed to be a teacher. All of the letters written to her were also addressed to Waterloo, Iowa—where she was most likely living at the time.
So where in the world is Fred? In the corner of one of Fred’s previous letters is a Camp Callen letterhead. He also references the camp several times in his letter. This camp, located in La Jolla, California outside San Diego, served as a Coastal Artillery Training Camp during WWII. Many of the camps at this time were small, but this one was enormous. It contained five post offices, three theaters, five churches, and thousands of young men wanting to help in the war effort. Soldiers from across the country would go to Camp Callen and train for thirteen weeks on how to defend the harbor. Sadly, there are some things that no amount of training could have prepared them for.

Fred writes in his letter, “it was in the Theater that we found about the bombing of Pearl Harbor.” I find it eye opening to be able to read someone’s first hand account of that day. In FDR’s speech the following the attacks he refers to it as, “a day which will live in infamy.” All of the United State’s battleships were destroyed, except for one (luckily it was no where near the harbor on that day.) Fun fact: the USS Arizona, the battleship that the Pearl Harbor Memorial is built around, is actually still leaking oil today.

That same day, December 7th, there was a Japanese invasion of Wake Island, a small piece of land located about 500 miles away from Pearl Harbor. That battle waged on for over two weeks, during which over one thousand soldiers were killed. Coincidently, the United States gave up and surrendered the island to Japan the same day Fred’s letter was written. Fred never mentions Wake
Island in his letter, most likely he never heard about it due to dealing with the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor.

We never actually learn of Fred’s whereabouts. He only ever refers to his currently location as “here.” During this time, all letters were screened to prevent any information from getting into the wrong hands. At first I thought maybe he was in Pearl Harbor, but in the second part of his letter he says that Harry Slack is going there. Most likely he’s at another military base somewhere on the West Coast.

I found transcribing and researching very interesting. It gave me a chance to get a first hand perspective on the war, rather than just reading facts about it in books. Also I enjoyed the sincerity and sense of humor in Fred's personality. It's almost too bad he didn't end up marrying Harry Slack. They would have made a hilarious couple.

Written By: Elizabeth Salerno

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