From: Harry To: Evelyn June 1st, 1942

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The Character of Clarence

This letter, addressed to Evelyn Corrie, was written on May 24th, 1943 by Sgt. Clarence Clark of Company E 133rd Infantry 2nd Battalion. Of the letter selection in the World War II scrapbook, this letter appears in the midst of a larger gap in time from the preceding and subsequent letters from Sgt. Clark. It joins the months of February and August where Sgt. Clark had been stationed in North Africa and Sicily, respectively. It is a single-page letter, unique in its ornate stationary apart from neighboring letters and Sgt. Clark's entire collection as a whole. Additionally, this letter is unique in that it does not specify Sgt. Clark's whereabouts unlike his common practice in his letters. Instead, only the New York post office is referenced as the location of transmitting international letters. However, Sgt. Clark gives a number of clues indicating his writing location. The primary indicator of his location comes from his reference to swimming in the ocean. He remarks that he enjoyed his time more than when he visited the ocean the previous January. Sgt. Clark's only letter in the archives of the specified month comes from January 15th in which he notes his presence in North Africa. Also, the sergeant's previous letter from February 10th originates from the same location. The sergeant's phrasing suggests that he has not relocated from his position in North Africa for at least several months time.

At the time Sgt. Clark wrote this letter to Evelyn, the Allied forces in North Africa were celebrating the surrender of Axis forces in the country not two weeks prior. The sergeant notes his static duties—suggesting his accustomed nature in light of the recent military achievements. In Sgt. Clark's subsequent archived letter dated August 5th, he mentions that he has been stationed in Sicily for some undisclosed amount of time. Although not explicitly stated,
Sgt. Clark was most likely relocated to Sicily within a few weeks time after writing from North Africa.

The first section of Sgt. Clark's letter addresses his location's climate. In particular, heat is a problem to work in during the day, but sleep is permissible in the cooler temperatures of the night. Although the sergeant's specific location is not mentioned, regions of the North African deserts can range in temperature during the day anywhere from 70–140°F and significantly drop at nighttime. He also implies previous issues with a shortage in troops' canteen rations but have improved as a result of the Axis powers' surrender. Sgt. Clark's letter accurately addresses common problems troops faced in North Africa.

Sgt. Clark's letter is not exactly the most eloquent piece of rhetoric nor is it the most exciting. The letter's content reflects the voice of a tired yet hopeful man. It seems as if the sergeant is fully aware that he does not have much to say. Despite the apparent monotony of his daily routine, it would not be hard to imagine the sergeant recounting even the most remarkable of endeavors with his modest tone. Sgt. Clark does not attempt to impress his former lover, and he does not speak in generalities; Sgt. Clark's words embody a voice not dissimilar to that of a scientific abstract—he tells it how it is. That is not to say that the sergeant appears apathetic in his casual dialect, but rather, Sgt. Clark is a man without an unspoken agenda or ulterior motives for writing Evelyn. He is writing for the sake of friendly interaction and the maintenance of a friendship.

Sgt. Clark does not seem intent on seeking sympathy from his letter's recipient, Evelyn. However, as an outside observer, it is difficult not to feel the slightest tinge of pity towards the sergeant. He does not complain about any hardships or give any reason to
doubt his contentment, but Sgt. Clark's particular innocuity attracts an observational melancholy.

In the letter's middle passage, the sergeant tells Evelyn that he has been trying to accumulate souvenirs indigenous to the region of which he is stationed. However, the locals are reluctant to exchange their belongings unless the favor is returned with spirits or sweets—of which their supply is limited. Although almost assuredly unintentional, Sgt. Clark's remark coincidentally alludes to his current predicament as a metaphor. The troops' waning supply of bourbon is a figurative representation of the sergeant's lack of reliance on treatment from life outside the war. He is optimistic; he is accepting. On the other hand, the dwindling supply of candy represents Sgt. Clark's lack of sweeter things in life—evidenced by the incessant heat, endless work duties, and rare communication with those back home.

Sgt. Clark knows that things could be much better off. However, he does not complain, but he finds comfort in life's simpler gifts—a good night's sleep, foreign souvenirs, swimming in the ocean, and water to drink. Despite whatever terms caused the dissolution of the relationship between Evelyn and Sgt. Clark, it is apparent that he is content with his friendship and needs little to get by. His honest, genuine character is reflected through his rhetoric.

Written By: Scott Gaul

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