

## Letters from an Airman, Jacques-Olivier Clerc

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Photo from Helge W. Gram, seen in a Swiss newspaper from 5 December 1995

 These remarkable letters from [Jacques-Olivier Clerc](#) are from "Faldne Allierede Flyvere" ("Fallen Allied Airmen"), p. 186, translated by KK:

F/O Jacques Oliver Clerc, 27-year-old Swiss citizen, professor at University of Saskatchewan in Canada, was drowned in the night to 17 August 1944 a few hundred yards from the coast near Sønderby Bjerge in the south of Funen.

Clerc was navigator of a Canadian bomber whose target was Kiel. He was buried in Sønderby churchyard on 17 August 1944.

Clerc stemmed from a well-known French-Swiss family. His father was professor of French Literature in Zurich. One of the books written by his aunt Dorette Berthoud, who was an author, has been translated into Danish, "Skatten i lerkar", Lohses forlag 1947.



Some letters from the fallen airman have been printed posthumously, they were written to his parents and his sisters and brothers from the time when he volunteered and until his death. The letters are found in an offprint from "Imprimerie La Concorde" in Lausanne 1945, titled "votre service raisonnable".

In May 1942 Jacques Oliver Clerc writes to one of his brothers:

**"--- I have neither the time nor the courage to justify my attitude. I enlist without the least enthusiasm - simply because it is an absolute necessity for me. I know that I leave everything I love: a salary which next year would be as high as that of a titular Councillor of State in Neuchâtel, a post which I don't have much chance of finding again. All that and more in order to join the army where I don't know anybody. It doesn't matter. I cannot work any longer. Sparing oneself for the future makes no sense if the future is to be dictated by the Nazis. It is not so much in order to defend my native land or my homeland that I do this. It is for a greater purpose. When the time comes I will explain it to my parents, and that will take some time. In short, I feel that it is morally impossible to continue being a spectator. One must act. At any price ---"**

In a letter to his parents from October 1943 Clerc writes:

**"--- You know that all the time since the beginning of the war I have been very preoccupied with events. The destiny of our country depends on the result of this war. The future of the country in which I count on settling down, is bound up with a lucky outcome of the war, and what is even more important is that the very foundation of Christian civilization is threatened, and thousands suffer from hunger and cold. I owe it to all you have given me of the noblest and most sacred that I should live intensely in the period we live though now. Instead of seeing this war as a struggle between the just and the unjust I have arrived at the conclusion that only those who have done their best to make justice win, can go on fighting for the good.**

**Since then this thought has been working in me incessantly, so much that the life I led lost its meaning. Why build for oneself with skill and enthusiasm when the very ground one builds on collapses? What is the purpose of such selfishness when sacrifice is on the agenda? Why educate an entire young generation which won't return from the battlefields in the Ruhr, in the Atlantic or in North Africa? What is economic policy in time of war? I have been thinking for a long time of all these questions ---"**