

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE STYLE OF ERNEST TAYLOR PYLE
WITH EMPHASIS ON HIS WRITINGS DURING WORLD WAR II

by

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PREFACE

There may be some question as to the selection of this writer's thesis subject, concerning the style of the writings of Ernest Taylor Pyle, hereafter referred to as Ernie Pyle. As a speech major, it may appear somewhat incongruous to write about someone who was certainly not an orator. He was a man, rather, whose writing ability has become legendary.¹

However, the area of speech, along with journalism, radio, television, billboards and many other forms of the mass media, all fall under the broad category of communication. Most communicators agree that the many and varied forms of communication are interrelated and to exclude one at the expense of the other would be an unfortunate oversight.

An important element in the compilation of material for an effective oral presentation includes a sufficient amount of writing ability. It is fairly obvious, especially to those who are somewhat familiar with the work of Ernie Pyle, that he possessed this quality to an advanced degree.

Investigating the style of this prolific writer should reveal some useful insights into what makes a writer successful. Are the course of events more important than the

¹Lincoln Barnett, "Ernie Pyle," Life, XVIII (April 2, 1945), 95.

writer's ability? Does the writer's background or personality profoundly affect the proficiency in his chosen field? Why does a writer choose a particular style? Why is a particular style so popular? These are a few of the many questions this thesis intends to answer. As a result of this study, one should learn a great deal about several important aspects of the immensely complex world of communications.

Admittedly, the subject of this paper was not selected only for its communications value or because it seemed sufficiently appropriate to fulfill the requirements for a master's degree. More probably, it was because of Pyle's fine reputation as a writer, this author's first knowledge of his writing ability which came from discussions between members of my family and, an added interest generated through the preparation of a brief term paper on the correspondent which was completed during my initial semester at Kansas State University.

In addition, there are several aspects of Pyle's life that are similar to my own and make a study of the subject all the more enjoyable, interesting and worthwhile. Pyle's extensive travels throughout the United States are of particular interest to me since I have been in most of the fifty states personally. It was considerably helpful and enjoyable in reading Pyle's columns completed before the war, which were compiled in Home Country, to have been in most of the states that he wrote about in his articles.

His columns during the war, which have been published as his first four books, had special significance to me. Having served overseas as an enlisted man in the United States Army, I am able to identify with the common soldier, and although I served in peacetime, I participated in several mock military tactical maneuvers and feel I have some idea of the frustrations faced by the American enlisted man during wartime.

Finally, the fact that Pyle was editor of the Daily Student, the school paper at Indiana University, also has special meaning to me.² I served as sports editor of my high school paper and have some knowledge of the problems involved in publishing a small newspaper.

The above similarities are a few of the reasons for my selection of Ernie Pyle for my thesis. Having a great deal of interest in the subject one is researching, gives one an added incentive for a thorough investigation of the available material and, quite possibly, results in a greater understanding of significant aspects of the subject's contributions to his respective field.

The source material pertinent to this study of Pyle was found to be somewhat lacking, although a sufficient amount was available to make the project feasible. The Story of Ernie Pyle and An Ernie Pyle Album, both books written by Lee Graham

²Ernie Pyle, Last Chapter (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1946), p. 22.

Miller, served as primary sources of information, along with Pyle's five books and one letter received from a personal associate of the correspondent as the result of an inquiry by this writer in October, 1967.

Much of the secondary source material was included in approximately fifty periodicals, ranging from Time and New Yorker magazines to Science Digest and The New York Times. Although some of the reporters in these magazines did know Pyle personally, a majority of them did not and many of the articles were written by Pyle himself.

Several individuals were solicited by this writer for information on Pyle in attempting to gain greater insight into various aspects of the legendary writer's life. However, only Richard Tregaskis, a fellow World War II correspondent, had the courtesy to reply. Regretfully, several others were not so inclined. Some of those in the latter category include Walter Cronkite, Denver Pyle, Bill Mauldin and Hal Boyle.

One research problem was that several significant articles were missing from various periodicals in the campus library. However, most of the missing articles and pages were procured through the process of the interlibrary loan.

An important concern of this paper is to answer some of the previously proposed questions and primarily to gain some helpful insights into the style that made Pyle one of the most celebrated war correspondents of our time. However, in

discussing knowledge of his style, it should be obvious that some information on his background be presented to give a better understanding of the factors that influenced his rise to fame in journalistic endeavors. Some of these influencing factors might include his wife, Pyle's writing experiences before the war, his generally poor health and the effects of the war, all of which contributed not only to Pyle as a man, but to Pyle as a writer.

Thus, the forthcoming and initial chapter of this project will be devoted mainly to the life of Pyle. His childhood will be covered briefly as information regarding this part of his life is rather sketchy from the available material.

In Chapter II, a more detailed report will be given in regard to his varied experiences obtained during his professional career before the outbreak of the war. This chapter will also contain a discussion of Pyle's wife, as she played an important role in his work as a journalist. Pyle's work as a war correspondent will be related at some length and finally, a brief report of his books, awards and eventually, his death, will be included.

Chapter III will delve into the style of the war correspondent, revealing several examples of his work along with the techniques he employed in writing his columns. It will also include several assessments of his style by critics, fellow journalists and members of the military.

The final section, Chapter IV, will feature a summation and review of some of the conclusions already stated in the preceding material and any other final evaluations heretofore not included. Any personal conclusions will also be contained in this final section of the research paper.

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From An Ernie Pyle Album

Figure 1. Pyle as a Child.

CHAPTER I

PLYLE THE MAN

Ernie Pyle spent most of his first nineteen years on a farm a mile and a half south and a bit west of Dana, Indiana, approximately thirty miles south of Terre Haute. The population of Dana was reported to be around 850.¹ Pyle was born in a little white house on August 3, 1900, the only child of William and Maria Taylor Pyle,² considered to be simple farm people, devout Methodists and prohibitionists.³

Pyle lead the normal childhood life of a farm boy, engaging in a great many farming chores, such as driving a team of horses in his father's fields beginning with his ninth birthday.⁴ He also made an attempt at learning to play a musical instrument; possibly this was the result of his mother's interest in the violin. "She played the violin when she was younger, but she gave it up after I took one term of lessons. I gave it up too. You should have heard me."⁵

¹Lincoln Barnett, "Ernie Pyle," Life XVIII (April 2, 1945), p. 96.

²"Ernie Pyle is Killed on Ie Island; Foe Fired When All Seemed Safe," The New York Times, XCIV (April 19, 1945), 14.

³Ernie Pyle, Home Country (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1947), p. 6.

⁴Current Biography 1941, ed. Maxine Block (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1941), p. 686.

⁵Pyle, Home Country, p. 6.

Ernie described his mother as a hard worker who enjoyed farm life and had the reputation for having a quick temper. She wasn't afraid to speak her mind and always told him what was right and what was wrong and then left the rest up to Ernie. When he was caught smoking at sixteen, she accepted it philosophically, saying simply to Ernie, "I see you're smoking now."⁶

Pyle's father, on the other hand, was a very quiet man, never saying much to his son, although Ernie always felt they were good friends. For example, Ernie wrecked his Ford roadster, purchased for him by his father, just two weeks after he started driving it when he was about sixteen. His father never said a word.⁷

About his father, Ernie once said:

My father is now getting a little deaf. Mother says he can always hear what he isn't supposed to hear. If my father doesn't like people, he never says anything about it. If he does like people, he never says much about that either. . . . He doesn't swear or drink or smoke. He is honest, in letter and in spirit. He is a good man without being at all annoying about it. He used to smoke cigars, but he quit the Fourth of July that Johnson fought Jeffries in Reno--I think it was 1908. The event didn't have anything to do with it. His holiday cigar simply made him sicker than usual that day, so he quit.⁸

⁶Pyle, Home Country, pp. 5-6.

⁷Pyle, Home Country, p. 8.

⁸Pyle, Home Country, pp. 8-9.

One especially significant aspect of Ernie's childhood was the fact that he admitted to an inferior feeling when among the boys from the town or city. He later wrote:

. . . I never felt completely at ease in Dana. I suppose it was an inferiority hangover from my childhood; I was a farm boy, and town kids can make you feel awfully backward when you're young and a farm boy. I never got over it. I should have, of course, because all that was long ago. . . . But just the same I felt self-conscious whenever I walked down the street in Dana, imagining the town boys were making fun of me.⁹

This so-called inferiority complex was to play an important part in his later years.

He attended an elementary country school near Dana and became known for shyness because he sat apart from his classmates during games; this might have been a reflection of the feeling of inferiority he had since his early childhood.¹⁰ Later, in high school and in college, he habitually went off for long, lonely walks and occasionally stopped in the Book Nook, the Greek candy kitchen on the campus, but not often.¹¹ Even when some of his college friends, such as Stuart Gorrell and Paige Cavanaugh, accompanied him to the Book Nook to listen to Hoagy Carmichael play the piano, Ernie was likely to be found far off in some remote corner, smiling and affable, but

⁹Pyle, Home Country, p. 390.

¹⁰The New York Times, p. 14.

¹¹The New York Times, p. 14.

silent nonetheless.¹²

Ernie did not like farm life and when he left home to attend Indiana University at nineteen, he was quite uncertain as to what to do with his future. After deciding to major in journalism, he found this field extremely interesting and enjoyable and eventually became the editor of the school newspaper, the Daily Student.¹³

Pyle was an average student during his college days. He fidgeted in class for the three and a half years he was in attendance, cut numerous classes and did just enough work to fulfill the minimum requirements.¹⁴ He was manager of the football team in his senior year as well as being editor of the campus paper.

Two trips away from college, during his summer vacations, indicate that Pyle was the type of individual who was not afraid to take chances. One time, he and a friend went to Bowling Green, Kentucky and spent the summer working at odd jobs. The other time, when the university baseball team was invited to Japan, he and three fraternity brothers in Sigma Alpha Epsilon worked their way to the Orient on the

¹²The New York Times, p. 14.

¹³Pyle, Last Chapter, p. 22.

¹⁴Barnett, p. 96.

S. S. Keystone State.¹⁵

As indicated in the preface, his speech-making ability left something to be desired. He suffered a traumatic experience in this area during his college days and avoided making speeches after that occasion. It happened when, while addressing an undergraduate audience, he was struck speechless during an important part of his presentation and fled the stage with one arm frozen in mid-air.¹⁶ This is another example supporting Pyle's own assessment of himself as having an inferiority condition.

Years later, he wrote his wife from London:

I seem to be suffering more than ever from timidity and an inferiority complex. It's just a horror for me to go out and talk to people. I feel like I'm conspicuous and ignorant and have reached 40 years old with so little knowledge I can't even hold a conversation with 20 year-olds.¹⁷

He seemed haunted most of his life by an obsession. He said repeatedly, "I suffer agony in anticipation of meeting people for fear they won't like me."¹⁸

Pyle became restless during his senior year and dropped

¹⁵Frederick C. Painton, "The Hoosier Letter Writer," The Saturday Evening Post (October 2, 1943), 109.

¹⁶Barnett, p. 95.

¹⁷Lee Graham Miller, "The Story of Ernie Pyle," Reader's Digest, LVIII (January, 1951), 154.

¹⁸David Dempsy, "An Ernie Pyle Album," The New York Times, VII (December 8, 1946), 4.

out before graduation. One reported reason for his departure from school was that he quit after being turned down by a red-haired coed named Harriette for someone else.¹⁹

Pyle's physical make-up was of a slight nature and he appeared quite fragile, standing only five feet, eight inches tall and weighing a mere 112 pounds.²⁰ However, his small physique did not prevent him from taking an active part in various outdoor sports activities. Tennis, golf and fishing were his favorites and he enjoyed participating in these forms of recreation up until his assignment as a war correspondent.²¹

Throughout most of his life, he appeared troubled by health problems resulting from his rather anemic physical condition, although research material reveals some conflicting viewpoints on this matter. In The Story of Ernie Pyle, Lee Miller states:

Ernie's health was always somewhat frail. He was subject to heavy colds, upset stomach and exhaustion from tension. Early in 1940 (driving through the South) illness forced him into a clinic in Memphis. The tests showed low blood pressure, anemia and nervous stomach spasms.²²

¹⁹A. J. Liebling, "Books; Pyle Set the Style," New Yorker, XXVI (September 2, 1950), 69.

²⁰Barnett, p. 95.

²¹Lee Graham Miller, An Ernie Pyle Album (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1946), pp. 27, 35, 67.

²²Miller, p. 151.

In New Yorker, A. J. Liebling relates this account:

His constant illness now appears to have been largely hypochondria. . . . Ernie often had himself examined by doctors, and they never found anything much the matter. In short, his appearance of placid, pawky normality seems to have been as deceptive a dickey as ever covered a troubled breast and I like him a lot better for it, and for keeping his troubles to himself.²³

The former account is probably more credible as Lee Miller was a close associate and friend of Pyle's for many years.

Ernie frequently joked about his various illnesses in his daily columns. In one of his articles, he explained the unsanitary conditions in Africa and briefly described some of the resulting diseases that afflicted the American soldiers, concluding with the following, "The large and small diseases that infected the ragged carcass of this sad correspondent at all seasons and in all climes were known medically as 'Puny Pyle's Perpetual Pains.'"²⁴

Another time, he wrote one of his columns from a hospital bed and made these observations:

I'm going to quit my job. If I'm going to be sick all the time I might as well drop all outside interests and devote my career to being sick. Probably could be a lot sicker than this if I worked at it a while. Might study and learn and work long hours at being sick, and maybe in time I could become the sickest man in America.²⁵

²³Liebling, p. 72.

²⁴Ernie Pyle, Here Is Your War (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), p. 90.

²⁵Pyle, Home Country, pp. 157-158.

Generally, his health was stable enough to enable him to complete most of his commitments to his superiors and to withstand the many difficulties of daily living with the soldiers overseas during the war. However, his occasional excessive drinking and bouts with tuberculosis prevented him at times from completing an assignment.²⁶

Although brought up in an atmosphere of strict adherence to the Methodist religion by his parents, Pyle apparently became somewhat independent of any religious denomination in his later years. Shortly before his death, he wrote in a letter to his ailing wife:

You say you want to learn to pray. That has to be up to you, of course, but it is so different from anything you or I have ever felt. I want you to get well, but I wouldn't want you to get pious--for then you wouldn't be you. I don't think you can get well by any mystic device or even willing it so . . .²⁷

Pyle was considered to be an agnostic by many of his critics and friends.²⁸

²⁶Letter to James M. Reinhard from Richard Tregaskis, November 14, 1967.

²⁷Liebling, p. 72.

²⁸Liebling, p. 72.



From An Ernie Pyle Album

Figure 2. During His Years as a Roving Reporter.

CHAPTER II

PYLE THE WRITER

Following his withdrawal from Indiana University, Pyle accepted the position of reporter with the Herald-Argus of LaPorte, Indiana for twenty-five dollars a week. After several months, during which he learned some of the important fundamentals of the newspaper business, he accepted a job with the Daily News in Washington, D. C. with an increase in salary of five dollars a week. It was during this time that he met his future wife, Geraldine Siebolds, formerly of Minnesota, and his lifelong friend, Lee Graham Miller, who later referred to himself as "vice president in charge of Ernie Pyle."²⁹

Ernie first met Geraldine at a dinner given by a college friend in 1923, but it was a year before he saw her again. They were married in the Spring of 1925.³⁰ Following their marriage, they both remained employed on their respective jobs, she as a secretary for the Civil Service Commission³¹ and he as a reporter for the Daily News.

Approximately one year after their marriage, they decided to resign from their positions and travel around the country. Ernie drew out his savings account, bought a

²⁹"Ernie Pyle's War," Time, XLIV (July 17, 1944), 66.

³⁰Miller, p. 146.

³¹Barnett, p. 96.

Model-T Ford and took his wife on the first of their many trips together, leisurely driving around the United States.³²

They ended up nearly penniless in New York, where Ernie sold his car for \$150.00 and obtained a job as a copy-reader for the New York Evening World. Shortly thereafter, he accepted a job for a brief period with the New York Post. After spending a year in New York, he accepted an offer with his former employer in Washington, D. C. as telegraph editor for sixty dollars a week.³³

In 1928, Pyle initiated what may have been the first daily aviation column in the country.³⁴ He worked with this column for four years and in 1932 he was promoted to managing editor of the Daily News, a position he accepted against his better judgment as he found the duties of the assignment limited the use of his writing ability.

In December of 1934, Ernie came down with a severe case of the flu and was ordered by a physician to take a brief vacation. Following a short respite in California, he returned to work and filled in for vacationing columnist Heywood Broun, writing stories about his trip, which made him an instant hit with the readers.³⁵ His employer, G. B. Parker, editor-in-chief of the Scripps-Howard newspapers, felt that Ernie's

³²Block, p. 686.

³³Miller, p. 147.

³⁴Miller, pp. 147-148.

³⁵Miller, p. 148.

vacation articles had "a Mark Twain quality that knocked my eye out."³⁶

A few months later Pyle convinced Parker to assign him to a job as a roving reporter, and for the next five years Pyle covered some 200,000 miles in the Western Hemisphere, mostly with his wife, writing about almost anything that came to his mind. Pyle said of his travels:

. . . in our first five years of constant wandering . . . we have been at least three times into every state in the Union. We have been to every country in the Western Hemisphere except two. . . . We have stayed in more than eight hundred hotels, have crossed the continent exactly twenty times, flown on sixty-six airplanes, ridden on twenty-nine boats, walked two hundred miles, and put out approximately twenty-five hundred dollars in tips. We have worn out two cars, five sets of tires, three typewriters, and pretty soon I'll have to have a new pair of shoes. . . .

The reason we've done all this traveling is to make a living by writing a piece a day for the Scripps-Howard newspapers and some others. In five years these columns have stretched out to the horrifying equivalent of twenty full-length books.³⁷

As a roving reporter, Pyle was described as "an inconspicuous little man with thinning reddish hair and a shy, pixy face"³⁸ who had written about everything, from a Nebraska town on relief, zipper-pants difficulties, rain, old men with wooden legs to dogs, how to roll a cigarette, hotel

³⁶Miller, p. 148.

³⁷Pyle, Home Country, pp. 462-463.

³⁸Block, p. 685.

rooms and bellhops.³⁹ Westbrook Pegler, a noted columnist, once commented,

Ernie Pyle writes his way along, keeps out of New York and other big cities that are over covered by other reporters . . . knows more small-town and dirt-road Americans . . . and is better informed on the condition . . . of the small people than Mrs. Roosevelt herself.⁴⁰

A reading of his columns compiled in Home Country reveals a good change of pace; sometimes it was fairly straight reporting, other times it was personal musing or comedy and occasionally a piece of moving poignancy.⁴¹ It was during his years as a roving reporter that he began to develop his own particular reportorial capacities and style,⁴² elements which will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

The wife of any man is usually an influencing factor in the activities or accomplishments of her husband. Ernie's wife was no exception and the amount of her influence on the noted writer will never be accurately assessed.

For years his wife suffered from recurrent periods of melancholia.⁴³ Quite probably, this began when Pyle went on a roving assignment in the summer of 1936 to cover the drought in the Dakotas and for the first time without his wife.

³⁹Block, p. 685.

⁴¹Miller, p. 149.

⁴³Dempsy, p. 4.

⁴⁰Block, p. 685.

⁴²Barnett, p. 96.

Geraldine stayed with her mother in Minnesota during this time. Again, about a year later, Ernie went alone to Alaska for four months and shortly thereafter, his wife fell into deep depression.

It appeared she was developing an unconscious jealousy of Ernie's growing popularity,⁴⁴ which, along with other complications, led to her excessive drinking. She was slowly becoming despondent and irresponsible. However, when Pyle returned from Alaska, he found his wife in what appeared to be excellent health.

Drinking was not new to either of them, even in the earlier years of their marriage. Lee Miller observed shortly after their wedding, ". . . They cleaned the place once a week, on Saturday nights, kept pretty much to themselves and probably drank more than was good for them."⁴⁵

What went wrong with Geraldine during his trip to Alaska will probably never be known. Possibly it was related to her relationship with Ernie. Unfortunately, there was a time during their marriage which involved a nonphysical union, due primarily to a functional inadequacy on Ernie's part which was eventually redressed.⁴⁶

The situation regarding Geraldine most likely reached

⁴⁴Miller, p. 150.

⁴⁵Miller, p. 147.

⁴⁶Miller, p. 150.

its peak when Pyle returned to their home in Albuquerque, after covering the London bombing. As he later wrote his college roommate, Paige Cavanaugh, "Geraldine was drunk the afternoon I got home. From there she went on down. Went completely screwball. One night she tried the gas. Had to have a doctor."⁴⁷

Ernie had Geraldine admitted to a hospital in Denver for a complete physical and mental examination. After ten days she returned home, appearing to have regained most of her stability. Feeling relatively confident of her state of health, Ernie accepted an assignment which took him to several military airports in Canada. However, he became somewhat alarmed when he received only three letters from his wife in five weeks and asked a neighbor in Albuquerque, Liz Shaffer, to investigate the situation. This decision probably saved Geraldine's life as she was suffering from an unsuspected ulcer which had eaten into a blood vessel.⁴⁸

Pyle returned home depressed and upset and had his wife sent to nearby St. Joseph's Hospital, where she stayed for almost six weeks, and during this time made many friends among the Catholic sisters there.⁴⁹ On this occasion, Ernie related in a detailed letter to G. B. Parker and Lee Miller the

⁴⁷Miller, p. 154.

⁴⁸Miller, p. 154.

⁴⁹Miller, p. 154.

problems with his wife and offered to resign from his column:

For more than ten years Jerry has been a psychopathic case. In the past few months it has reached an acute stage. She is a dual personality, you might say a triple personality--one side of utter charm and captivation for people she cares nothing about; one side of cruelty and dishonesty toward the few people she does care about; and another side of almost insane melancholy and futility and cynicism when she is alone, which is her true personality. She is a Jekyll and Hyde, and so adept at deceptiveness that only a few people (fortunately for me, her brother and sister are among them) know her state. . . .

I would be a sonovabitch to leave her now in the state she is in, and I have been so shattered by the awful strain of carrying on all summer, with this nightmare weighing me down, that I honestly believe I could not write a coherent column within two months.⁵⁰

Parker and Miller suggested he take some time off and not return to work until he felt the situation was satisfactory.

Ernie was encouraged following his wife's return from St. Joseph's hospital and left shortly thereafter on a roving assignment to Palm Springs, California. However, he soon became desolate and lonely and rather depressed upon learning Geraldine had started drinking again.

This time, when he returned home, he had Geraldine committed to a sanitarium at Pueblo, Colorado.⁵¹ Miller wrote in his book about Ernie:

. . . Ernie Pyle's fateful marriage, which proved to be a paradoxical heaven and hell, developed its most unbearable tensions, and reached its tragic climax, during the time when Ernie was making his reputation as the outstanding and best-loved correspondent of the war. It is a measure of his stature that neither the public nor

⁵⁰Miller, pp. 155-156.

⁵¹Miller, p. 158.

his fellow correspondents suspected the strain he labored under.⁵²

The mental strain on Ernie evolving from the problems associated with his wife's illness was further intensified when his mother suffered a stroke in 1936 and another in 1937, which left her semi-paralyzed and unable to function without help.⁵³ Fortunately, his mother accepted her handicap in good spirits and Ernie was relieved that she did not suffer from excessive depression.

Geraldine still appeared far from normal upon her return from the hospital and, in desperation and attempting to shock her out of her melancholia, Ernie suggested and later obtained a divorce in 1942.⁵⁴ However, they were re-married by proxy in 1943, while Ernie was still on assignment overseas.

In 1939, Pyle became concerned over the state of world affairs, although a pact had recently been signed between Russia and Germany. He detested the thought of war and strongly believed it would spread to the United States. Shortly after the war began, Ernie wrote Lee Miller, "I hope the office won't even suggest I do any military columns. If there is one thing I detest, it is writing about the Army."⁵⁵

⁵²Miller, p. 146.

⁵³Pyle, Home Country, p. 385.

⁵⁴Dempsey, p. 4.

⁵⁵Miller, p. 153.

The idea of serving as a war correspondent did not appeal to him as he knew little about the military, except what he had learned from a few months in the Navy during World War I. He had joined the Navy when he was eighteen and was sent to the University of Illinois for preliminary training, but the Armistice came soon afterward and he was put on inactive duty. Nevertheless, he sailed for London in 1940, to cover the war as a roving reporter as he had done in the United States for the past five years.

After three weeks in England, he found himself in the middle of the conflict as German bombers terrorized London with frequent strafings. Ernie filed the following story with Scripps-Howard:

Some day when peace has returned again to this odd world, I want to come to London again and . . . look down upon the peaceful silver curve of the Thames with its dark bridges. . . and . . . I want to tell somebody . . . how London looked on a certain night in the holiday season of the year 1940.

It was a night when London was ringed and stabbed with fire.

These things all went together to make the most hateful, most beautiful single scene I have ever known. ⁵⁶

Time called it "one of the most vivid, sorrowful dispatches of the war" and Pyle's wife told a friend that ". . . Ernie's column about the burning of London is the most terrible and

⁵⁶Ernie Pyle, Ernie Pyle in England (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1941), pp. 30-33.

beautiful I have ever read."⁵⁷

Pyle was deeply moved by the ordeal of the British people. His moving accounts of the demolished homes and debris-filled streets and Britain's civilian fire fighters and rescue squads doubled his 40 newspaper clients overnight.

During the initial stages of the war effort, Pyle was awed by the early accounts of the war correspondents overseas. When he was offered a chance to serve in such a capacity, he happily accepted although he felt somewhat incompetent for the task.

Pyle experienced some of his biggest problems during the first part of the war with the American soldiers. Not only did they steal some of his personal items, such as blankets, toothpaste and cigarettes, but they also harassed him by knocking off his helmet to expose the wad of toilet paper he kept there for any emergency that might require its use. Finally, they had a practice of pouncing on him in "howling droves" when he habitually went behind a bush to relieve himself.⁵⁸

Two possible reasons the soldiers picked on Ernie at first were his size and sloppy dress. His slight frame was mentioned earlier and although most of the correspondents

⁵⁷Miller, p. 153.

⁵⁸"Ernie Pyle's War," p. 68.

apparently kept themselves somewhat presentable at the front, Ernie admitted he didn't deserve any best-dressed awards:

I think it is not too far to say that I was the worst-looking one of the lot . . . in order to keep warm I dressed like a cross between Coxe's Army and the Ski Patrol. I wore army coveralls, enlisted man's mackinaw, knit cap, goggles and overshoes.⁵⁹

His careless attire was a carry-over from his civilian habits as he rarely owned more than one or two suits at anytime, even after he became financially successful.

As Ernie became more closely associated with the men, he soon gained their respect and acceptance and eventually was one of the more popular correspondents. He swore with the best of them, enjoyed telling and listening to dirty jokes and drank beer like everyone else when it was available.

Pyle had a good sense of humor and enjoyed pulling a practical joke on his fellow correspondents every now and then. He would sneak up on some sleeping reporters in the middle of the night and scare them out of their wits with a belch that has been favorably compared with the "bark of a French 75."⁶⁰ This was even more surprising in light of the fact that he was well known for his extreme shyness.

Once he became somewhat of a celebrity, it was not unusual to find him surrounded by soldiers seeking his

⁵⁹Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 221.

⁶⁰"Ernie Pyle's War," p. 68.

autograph. Many of the soldiers considered a mention in his column as good as a medal or decoration.⁶¹

Although it was difficult for Ernie to meet new people, he had the ability to put them at ease and get the most out of them, observing and remembering the many details and reporting his findings in a vivid and folksy manner. Mainly because of his shyness, he hated crowds and liked to be alone on many occasions.

"Ernie avoids important people," a friend once observed. "There's only about one in every hundred he likes."⁶² Actually Pyle was a democratic man who got along as well with generals and admirals as with soldiers and sailors. But his individuality as a war correspondent resulted from his identification with the ranks, particularly combat infantrymen.

Perhaps his wife, who always wanted to help Ernie and his career, did help him in a way which neither she nor Ernie would have chosen, for his inner personal despair and love made him quite sensitive to suffering wherever he met it. Even the affection of the various branches of the military, the press or his readers could not "make him anything but a sad little man who was alive to suffering and tender and

⁶¹An Ernie Pyle Album, p. 109.

⁶²Barnett, p. 95.

gentle with all sufferers."⁶³

At first, Pyle tried to be a conventional war correspondent, covering the war as others did. The change in his columns from the other reporters probably began one day in Africa when he was invited to meet and interview Admiral Darlan. He was running across an airfield to interview the Admiral when enemy bombs began to fall and bullets were splattering around him. He dived into a ditch behind a soldier and when the bombing ended, he tapped his companion on the shoulder and mentioned that it was a close call. The soldier didn't answer. He was dead.⁶⁴

Pyle interviewed the Admiral in a daze and then went back to his tent and brooded for hours. He decided not to write about Admiral Darlan and wrote instead about the unknown soldier who died in the ditch beside him. Ernie was first inspired about the soldier of war when he was employed at the Daily News after reading Kirke Simpson's news story on the burial of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery.⁶⁵

Partly because of this incident, he seldom wrote about anyone above the rank of captain. In Brave Men, he wrote, "I'm a rabid one-man movement bent on tracking down and

⁶³Gulielma F. Alsop, "The Story of Ernie Pyle," Review Survey, XXCVI (November, 1950), 513.

⁶⁴"Ernie Pyle's War," p. 68.

⁶⁵The New York Times, p. 14.

stamping out everybody in the world who doesn't fully appreciate the common front-line soldier."⁶⁶ He did not want the forgotten men of the war to remain forgotten.

Pyle came to know the combat soldier extremely well having shared many experiences with him and this was probably another reason why he resented somewhat the higher ranking military officials, who spent most of their time safely behind the lines. He actually did resent the times he had to leave a unit and return to the rear and write his stories. He preferred to keep going all day and everyday.⁶⁷

In noting his desire to be a member of the fighting units he did not mean to imply that he enjoyed this type of activity; rather the contrary, he hated it. In one of his columns, he wrote:

Of course I am very sick of the war and would like to leave it and get out, but I know I can't. I've been part of the misery and tragedy of it for so long that I've come to feel a responsibility to it or something. I don't know quite how to put it into words, but I feel if I left it it would be like a soldier deserting.⁶⁸

Although Pyle did prefer the enlisted men to the officers, he did like some of the higher ranking military officials. He said of one officer:

⁶⁶John Mason Brown, "Brave Men," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (April 28, 1945), 21.

⁶⁷Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 214.

⁶⁸"Ernie Pyle's War," p. 69.

Major General Terry Allen was one of my favorite people. Partly because he didn't give a damn for hell or high water; partly because he was more colorful than most; and partly because he was the only general outside the Air Forces I could call by his first name.⁶⁹

On another occasion, after having lunch with two generals in Africa, he related, "I tried to lunch with some general at least once a week to keep up my social standing and my dignity."⁷⁰

But in the final analysis, he was considerably biased in favor of the common soldier. One time in Okinawa he was invited to stay with some officers in their relatively comfortable quarters or to remain with two enlisted men in their makeshift facilities. He decided, "I chose the second of these two places, partly because it was warmer, and also because I wanted to be with the enlisted men."⁷¹

Pyle also shared the sense of fate of all infantrymen that their luck must eventually and inevitably run out. Parallel to this morose feeling of destiny, he had many premonitions of death and felt certain before most combat operations that it would be his last one.

Shortly before the landing on Okinawa, Pyle took a leave home to spend a few months with his wife in Albuquerque.

⁶⁹Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 187.

⁷⁰Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 42.

⁷¹Pyle, Last Chapter, p. 115.

The troops were glad to see him go as they all felt he had done more than his share. But even before he left, he knew he had to come back and share in the landing on Okinawa. He seemed to feel a sense of obligation to the men at war and an obligation to let the people back home know how the men were doing.

After only a few short weeks at home, he felt almost a spiritual need to be no better off than the coldest and unhappiest infantryman. He said, "I dread going back and I'd give anything if I didn't have to go, but I feel I have no choice."⁷² Then he sailed with the Navy for Okinawa.

When Pyle was asked about his premonitions of death, he answered:

It's not that I have a premonition that death's going to catch up with me. It's nothing more than any foot soldier in the lines feels. . . . You begin to feel that you can't go on forever without being hit. I feel that I have used up all my chances and I hate it . . . I don't want to be killed.⁷³

Shortly before his death, Pyle wrote and promised his wife that if he came through the Okinawa landing safely that he would never go on another one. However, after Okinawa, he decided to go on a sideline invasion on the ten mile square isle of Ie Jima (or Shima), three miles off Okinawa,

⁷²"I Have No Choice," Coronet, XXVII (April, 1950), 10.

⁷³"Ernie," Time, XCV (April 30, 1945), 61.

which turned out to be his final mission.

On April 18, 1945, on Ie Jima, Ernie went with Colonel Joseph B. Coolidge in a convoy to look at the situation at the front lines. During their trip they were ambushed by Japanese snipers and they immediately sought cover in nearby ditches. After things had quieted down, Colonel Coolidge and Ernie raised their heads to see whether they could locate the enemy's position. At that moment, a sniper's bullet caught Ernie in the temple, just below the helmet. He never knew what hit him.⁷⁴

Geraldine was grief-stricken and fell into deep melancholia following Ernie's death. She died seven months later of uremic poisoning.⁷⁵

Much of Pyle's work has been preserved in four books, Ernie Pyle in England, Here Is Your War, Brave Men and Last Chapter, all of which are primarily compilations of his columns written during his wartime service in Africa, Sicily, Italy and in the Pacific. The final book by Pyle, Home Country, contained some of the columns he had written during his years as a roving reporter and before he had become a celebrity.

These books provide easy and enjoyable reading. Some

⁷⁴Miller, Reader's Digest, p. 150.

⁷⁵"Obituary," Newsweek, XXVI (December 3, 1945), 80.

examples have been presented in the preceding pages; still others will be included in the following chapter.

To say that Pyle's columns were widely read is an understatement. At one time, his columns were printed in approximately 393 daily and 297 weekly newspapers with a circulation over 14 million.⁷⁶ Although the United Feature Syndicate had difficulty in selling his columns outside the Scripps-Howard chain before the war, there was no problem with this endeavor following his early war reporting when new clients started coming in at the rate of about one a week.⁷⁷

Ernie's writings not only affected the American people, but also influenced military leaders and legislators. Through his persistent and effective writing, the war department revived the practice of awarding a sleeve stripe for every six months of combat service and Congress passed the so-called "Ernie Pyle Bill" to raise G. I. pay ten dollars for combat service.⁷⁸

Pyle achieved considerable popularity shortly after his initial arrival and reporting during the London blitz. However, his celebrity status probably reached its peak between 1942 and 1945. Upon arriving in New York for a brief

⁷⁶"Ernie," p. 61.

⁷⁷Painton, p. 109.

⁷⁸"Ernie Pyle's War," p. 69.

visit in 1943, he was quickly approached by interviewers, photographers and newsmen desiring his time and attention. He was offered a \$1,500 contract by a broadcasting company and a lecture manager offered him a \$25,000 contract to speak on tour. He turned down both offers.

Eventually, he gave his permission to representatives of a Hollywood concern to do a movie revealing his wartime experiences, but only after the officials consented to his demands regarding the film. Ernie agreed to cooperate with Producer Lester Cowan under the following three conditions: (1) that the hero of the picture must be the infantry and not Pyle; (2) that no attempt be made to glorify him and; (3) that other correspondents be included in the story.⁷⁹ Cowan agreed and proceeded with the film, selecting Burgess Meredith as Pyle, along with Robert Mitchum as Captain Bonner.

The title of the motion picture was The Story of G. I. Joe and it attempted to show the American infantryman as war correspondent Ernie Pyle saw him. Critic C. A. Lejeune regarded it as a "magnificent film."⁸⁰ It was directed by William Wellman.

Pyle received numerous awards for his war reporting, most of them coming during 1944. In May of that year he won

⁷⁹Barnett, p. 96.

⁸⁰C. A. Lejeune, Chestnuts In Her Lap (London: Phoenix House Limited, 1947), p. 79.

the Pulitzer Prize for overseas reporting, followed by the Sigma Delta Chi R. Clapper Memorial Award, Sons of Indiana of New York Scroll as outstanding Hoosier of 1944 and honorary degrees from New Mexico University and Indiana University.⁸¹ Finally, various senators requested several posthumous honors and awards for the beloved correspondent.

Concerning Pyle's many awards, Lincoln Barnett observed, "He has always been self-effacing and finds himself uncomfortable in his current eminence as the nation's favorite war reporter, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of two best sellers."⁸² His two best sellers were Here Is Your War and Brave Men.

Two books written about Pyle, both by his longtime friend, Lee Miller, deserve mention at this time. In The Story of Ernie Pyle, the facts of Ernie's inner life are shown to us, some of which have been related previously in this paper. These facts are not happy, glittering, rich and glorious ones, rather they are pitiful, hurting and frustrating. His marriage with his young sweetheart, instead of furnishing him with the happiness and sustenance of a fulfilled love, soon became a thing of despair, because of her protracted mental illness.⁸³

⁸¹The New York Times, XIV (November 8, 1944), 8.

⁸²Barnett, p. 95.

⁸³Alsop, p. 513.

An Ernie Pyle Album by Miller was a pictorial review of the writer's life. Critic David Dempsey said in his review in The New York Times, An Ernie Pyle Album, although having many staged photographs, comprises an authentic record of a great newspaperman and are ably supported by Mr. Miller's affectionate captions."⁸⁴

It is estimated that between 1942 and 1944, Pyle's income came close to one-half million dollars. In spite of his financial success, he apparently had no feeling for luxury and maintained his philosophy that one or two suits are more than sufficient for one's wardrobe. Besides his unique ideas about wearing apparel, he had several other idiosyncrasies. He was left-handed in everything except writing, disliked horses and was absolutely horrified by snakes.⁸⁵

As a somewhat average man with a somewhat average mind, perhaps the writings of Ernie Pyle will not be extremely useful to some military historians. However, thousands of veterans, as long as they survive, will read and reread his books and writings because they are the stories of their war written by a gray, quiet little man who loved them and whom they loved back. Certainly they will agree that when they lost Ernie Pyle, they lost a friend.

⁸⁴Dempsey, p. 1.

⁸⁵Painton, p. 110.



From An Ernie Pyle Album

Figure 3. At Work behind the Lines.

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION OF STYLE

Certain critics feel that it is useless to attempt any elaborate analysis of Ernie Pyle's philosophy, viewpoint or style. Hal Borland, in reviewing Here Is Your War, makes this observation:

Sum it up this way and let it rest: Ernie Pyle is a bang-up reporter who writes about human beings and has an uncanny knack of nailing down significant details. His writing reads as though it simply spilled from his typewriter--some of it probably does, but the rest of it undoubtedly is sweated and groaned out. The sum of it has the flavor we always expect--and occasionally get--in those letters from home folks.⁸⁶

Regardless of the negative outlook on the part of some critics concerning an investigation of Pyle, it seems clear that a more extensive study of the famed correspondent might possibly yield some positive results.

In comparing Pyle's columns to personal letters, Borland states what is a common feeling among other students who have researched Pyle's efforts in journalism. Ernie effectively lessened the communication gap between the soldiers and their families with his smooth, friendly prose where written words had previously failed.⁸⁷

⁸⁶Hal Borland, "Here Is Your War," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVI (October 30, 1943), 37.

⁸⁷"Correspondent Prepares to Resume Travels," Life, XV (November 15, 1943), 57.

In other words, Pyle served as the articulate spokesman for the sometimes inarticulate American soldiers. Even if a soldier could express himself effectively, it was impossible to do so as frequently as did Pyle's almost daily columns.

Pyle's articles also served as an emotional bridge during the traumatic period of the war for the American people and the soldiers overseas.⁸⁸ Reading his columns provided a much needed relief for Americans, who desired information on the soldiers of war rather than the strategies or tactics, which were supplied by the other correspondents.

His reporting read like letters to people he knew and liked. Some of his readers called it "down to earth" and "folksy".⁸⁹ Even Ernie admitted, "That's what I did-- traveled for other people and wrote their letters home. I'm really a letter writer."⁹⁰ He felt a responsibility to this task and made every effort to make his articles not only interesting, but as accurate as possible.

His years as a roving reporter in the United States helped greatly to prepare him for his work as a war correspondent. The style of his writing following his entry into the war effort did not really undergo any significant changes.

⁸⁸Liebling, p. 69.

⁸⁹Painton, p. 110.

⁹⁰Painton, p. 110.

At first, as mentioned earlier, he was awed by the other correspondents, lacked confidence and was uncertain as to the direction which he should follow regarding his reporting.

However, after the success of his reports on the London bombings, his experience with Admiral Darlan and other similar episodes, he acquired the needed confidence to report in his own unique style. He discovered that there was no need to revise his techniques developed during his roving years. "His farmers, lumberjacks and bartenders had become privates, sergeants and lieutenants. And Phoenix, Des Moines and Main Street were Palermo, Naples and the Rue Micheler."⁹¹

As a result of his widely read wartime columns, he was deluged frequently with letters from the American people indicating a concern for his safety, relating their appreciation for his efforts and inquiring about a relative or friend. The bond between Pyle and his readers was further strengthened by the fact that he actually took time to write personal letters to many friends of the soldiers and also to their parents and wives.⁹²

His desire for accuracy deprived him of at least one ardent follower of his columns. It occurred during the Tunisian campaign. Ernie frequently used "damn" and "hell" in reporting as part of his informal style. One time he

⁹¹Barnett, p. 96.

⁹²Barnett, p. 96.

related a story about a sergeant and a chaplain during an air raid as they were racing for a slit trench.

The sergeant yelled, "Are you with me, chaplain?"

Came the reply, "Right behind you, sergeant."

Then they both plunged into an irrigation ditch and sank down in the mud. The sergeant shouted, "Are you with me, chaplain?"

The chaplain's muffled voice replied, "With you? Hell, I'm under you!"⁹³

The reader, a grandmother, wrote that she thought it was all right for Ernie to cuss a little, in fact, it was cute, but to have a chaplain cuss was going too far and she promised never to read his column again. Ernie said he simply printed the truth.

One day Mrs. Sara Harvey of Nashville, Tennessee, wrote a letter to Ernie asking him to look up her husband.⁹⁴ He received many such letters requesting that he contact some individual in the war zone he was working. It was a rare occasion that he did find a particular person, especially with the large number of scattered troops serving overseas. However, he did meet and talk with the lady's husband, Benson Harvey, and devoted many paragraphs in his column about his

⁹³Painton, p. 110.

⁹⁴Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 94.

visit with the sergeant.

Most of the letters Ernie received from the folks back home were from the mothers of sons serving overseas. Many told Pyle that, "Reading your column is like getting a letter from my beloved son."⁹⁵ Ernie takes this assessment seriously and regards himself as the amanuensis of the American soldiers. He went about his task, rarely taking a note, except for names and addresses and then returned to the rear and wrote until he exhausted his material and himself.

Most of Pyle's stories were obtained by actually attaching himself to a particular unit of one of the service branches, such as artillery, bombing or engineering. By far his favorite was the infantry of the Army. Sometimes, during his writing marathons behind the front lines, he would write enough to put himself three weeks ahead of schedule with his columns. He was generally slow in writing and many times rewrote an article three or four times before he felt it was satisfactory. Usually easy going, he was known to be short-tempered if interrupted while writing his stories.

Pyle's columns were constantly filled with stories about his encounters with the servicemen overseas, primarily the enlisted men. Their names, addresses, comments and experiences dominate his articles. During a time when the

⁹⁵Painton, p. 110.

other correspondents concentrated their efforts on reporting the statistics, tactics and strategies of the war, Pyle was concerned with the human element, the tragedies, heroics and even the comedies of the conflict.⁹⁶

Charles Angoff, in writing about Brave Men, felt that Pyle's honest reporting had been absent from the reports of the other war correspondents. Angoff thought the other reporters felt it necessary to relate the personal histories and philosophize on world affairs rather than write simple, heart-felt accounts of how ordinary men and women manage to maintain their self-respect in the adversity of war.⁹⁷

Pyle knew the common soldier as no other correspondent had before or during his time. He realized their dreams and dreads, what made them laugh or grow somber. He was cognizant of what commanded their respectful silence or what to do to get a gag out of them. He could describe them fully in a few words, having a preference for short, colorful sentences.

He wrote in Brave Men, "The men of Oklahoma are drawling and soft-spoken. They are not smart-alecks. Something of the purity of the soil seems to be in them. Even their cussing is simpler and more profound than the torrential obscenities of Eastern city men." Sergeant Buck Eversole's

⁹⁶Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 102.

⁹⁷Charles Angoff, "Brave Men," American Mercury, LX (February, 1945), 246.

grammar "was the unschooled grammar of the plains and the soil. He used profanity, but never violently." Private First Class James McClory was so loyal to his commanding officer that when "Captain Kennedy's mother was very ill, McClory took the last money he had and telegraphed home to his own parish to have a Mass said for the Captain's mother."⁹⁸

Upon Ernie's arrival in North Africa, he more closely began to copy the methods he used as a civilian reporter. In other words, he still wrote about the people he met and the sights he witnessed, but now they were soldiers at war instead of civilians at work and the sights were the battlefields. He still wrote about himself, but since he lived like a soldier, and with them, he described how men fought and endured in battle.⁹⁹

One effective technique used by Pyle to bring to the American people a greater understanding and a more vivid account of the war effort was his use of comparison. Many times he would describe people, places and things overseas to similar people, places and things in the United States. His knowledge of America from his years as a roving reporter greatly assisted him in this effort.

In Here Is Your War, Pyle described the city of Sfax in Tunisia as having "something of Miami's Biscayne Boulevard

⁹⁸Angoff, p. 246.

⁹⁹Painton, p. 17.

in it, and a little of San Diego too."¹⁰⁰ He made these observations in Last Chapter:

You could come from a dozen different parts of America and still find scenery on Okinawa that looked like your country at home. Southern boys said the reddish clay and the pine trees reminded them of Georgia. Westerners saw California in the green rolling hills, partly wooded, partly patchworked with little green fields. And the farmed plains looked like our Midwest.¹⁰¹

Finally, in the same publication, he compared the 500 mile race at Indianapolis to the start of a B-29 mission in Tokyo.¹⁰²

Pyle's fine sense of humor could be found frequently in his daily columns. Such levity in his work was seemingly appropriate under the trying conditions of war and the readers appreciated his efforts in this respect. His humor was not only amusing at times, but bordered on being hilarious.

One humorous account concerned the surrender of a Japanese soldier to an American officer:

An American officer was idly sitting on an outdoor box toilet one evening after work, philosophically studying the ground, as men will do. Suddenly he was startled. . . . For there he was, caught with his pants down, so to speak, and in front of him stood a Jap with a rifle. But before anything could happen the Jap laid the rifle on the ground in front of him, and began salaaming up and down like a worshiper before an idol.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 224.

¹⁰¹Pyle, Last Chapter, p. 130.

¹⁰²Pyle, Last Chapter, p. 37.

¹⁰³Pyle, Last Chapter, p. 25.

The story about the stuck zipper on his pants, written before the war, was probably Pyle's most famous amusing article. It involved his purchase of a new suit, which included two pairs of pants, one with a zipper. The zipper never did work properly and it even required the help of a friend one time to get it open:

. . . he couldn't even get it started. He cut his thumb on the metal tab and got mad, and I got mad, and I don't know what might have happened if I hadn't thought of the hammer. I got the hammer and had him slip the claw over the tab, and then while I pulled at the pants with all my might, he pushed down on the hammer. . . . The zipper came open about half an inch at a time. . . . We got the zipper open in a little less than half an hour.¹⁰⁴

Another example of his humor was when he described the burro of Africa. He said, "I asked the burro if he knew the Americans had arrived and he shook his head and said he didn't care who was in charge as long as he got fed."¹⁰⁵

In describing some of the problems in learning the Arabic language, Ernie related how some of the words resembled the sound made when clearing one's throat. He went on to say, "If we were to sneeze, cough, whistle, choke and hiccup all at once, that would mean, 'I love you, baby, meet me in front of Walgreen's right after supper, and leave your veil

¹⁰⁴Pyle, Home Country, pp. 25-26.

¹⁰⁵Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 64.

at home.¹⁰⁶

Many of his more amusing articles concerned "That Girl", the term he gave to his wife, who accompanied him on most of his travels throughout the United States. A large number of readers wrote Pyle inquiring as to the identity of his traveling companion. Ernie jokingly answered them in his column:

She is a Russian princess, who escaped in 1917 with a pack of wolves behind her . . . the lead wolf got hold of the seat of her pants. But since the wolf was carrying a forged passport, he wasn't allowed to chase her after she crossed the border. . . .

Her first name is Anastasia Petrovich. . . . She is six feet eight and weighs forty-three pounds. She writes books under the nom de plume of Ernest Hemingway. She writes music under the name of Cab Calloway. . . . I can think of only one real idiosyncrasy she has. That is her refusal to distinguish between left and right. Also, she cannot tell daylight from dark, but I consider that more a matter of personal taste. . . . Her favorite baseball player is Eddie Rickenbacker.

I don't know whether this gives you a clear picture of her, but I've done the best I can.¹⁰⁷

Pyle simply applied the down to earth human style of reporting that he utilized in peacetime to his work as a war correspondent. The result was success. Although noted for his amusing stories, he was just as well known for his sensitivity in relating touching incidents that he experienced. The similarity to some of his articles written during his roving years was clearly evident in his moving accounts of

¹⁰⁶Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 61.

¹⁰⁷Pyle, Home Country, pp. 331-333.

the soldiers.

One of his more moving reports, during his civilian days, appeared in Home Country and was about his mother and his fear of snakes. Ernie was cutting some roses as a surprise for his mother one day when he was terrified by the appearance of a blue racer snake. He ran home and was afraid to enter because of his fear that snakes might be in the garden near the house. Ernie yelled for his mother to come and get him, she refused and spanked him for crying and for not coming into the house by himself. Later that evening, Pyle's father came home and explained to his wife what happened. Ernie remembers his mother crying for a long time after she retired that night. Pyle continued:

It has been more than thirty years since that happened, but to this day when I go home my mother sooner or later will . . . tell me the story, just as I have told it here, and along toward the end she always manages to get the hem of her apron up around her eyes, just in case she should need it, which she always does.¹⁰⁸

It was only the second time Ernie recalled being spanked by his mother. She died during his trip to England.¹⁰⁹

Very possibly his most famous wartime article, as far as poignancy is concerned, was his vivid account of the death of Captain Henry T. Waskow. The account told how Captain Waskow's body was transported down a mountain in

¹⁰⁸Pyle, Home Country, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁹Painton, p. 110.

Italy by mule train. Here are some of the reactions of the men paying their final respects:

One soldier came and looked down, and he said out loud: "God damn it!"

Another one came, and he said, "God damn it to hell anyway!" he looked down for a few last moments and then turned and left. . . .

Then the first man squatted down, and he reached down and took the Captain's hand, and he sat there for a full five minutes holding the dead hand in his own and looking intently into the dead face. And he never uttered a sound all the time he sat there.¹¹⁰

This type of writing not only brought the reader to the war, it made him part of it. Pyle received the Pulitzer Prize in journalism for this article in 1944. The entire text of this article is included in the Appendix.

Another moving story told about the miraculous return of a Flying Fortress, with ten men aboard, from a bombing mission. It is a lengthy article, but is included in the Appendix because of its powerful impact and moving realism.¹¹¹

In discussing Pyle's success, John Steinbeck described Pyle as being involved in his own private war, which concerned homesick, weary, violent, common men who washed their socks in their helmets, complained about the food and whistled at girls. The other war involved maps, logistics, campaigns and armies. Steinbeck observed:

¹¹⁰Ernie Pyle, The Washington Daily News, XXIII January 10, 1944, 1.

¹¹¹Pyle, Here Is Your War, pp. 125-130.

One reason . . . Pyle has been able to report this little man's war so successfully is that he loves people and . . . is at base a very average little man himself. He understands G. I. hopes and fears and gripes . . . because he shares with them as no exceptionally fearless or exceptionally brilliant man ever could.¹¹²

Possibly because Pyle was from a small town, he had a preference for writing about the soldiers who were also from sparsely populated communities. The people who lived near his hometown thought he was popular because he was so common, yet different from the other correspondents and that he came as close to writing like a man talking as anyone ever did.¹¹³

Brigadier General Donald Armstrong commented on Pyle's Brave Men in 1944:

He is unmatched in his capacity to see the infinite details of the daily struggles of the men in foxholes against the enemy and nature. He is inimitable in his dry humor, his unassuming simplicity, his straight-forward and unadorned style and his ability to tell a story and describe a scene.¹¹⁴

That same year, the above book was one of the monthly selections of the Book of the Month Club.

Pyle's humanization of the war effort, the highly personal approach of his columns, along with his other

¹¹²"Ernie Pyle's War," p. 72.

¹¹³"Dana Boy Makes Good," Time, XLIII (June 12, 1944), 68.

¹¹⁴Donald Armstrong, "The Boswell of the G. I.'s," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVII (November 25, 1944), 7.

techniques, resulted in his becoming overwhelmingly popular with his readers. He related:

. . . when the bolt of fame strikes, a guy better be mighty careful or he's going to wind up giving most of his time to his new career of being a celebrity. For one thing, it came a little late . . . I didn't plan it, and I didn't ask for this. I could have done without it, but now that it's here, I'm pretty sure I can take it. This is all kind of immodest. But it's all kind of true.¹¹⁵

Ernie had one notable advantage over a majority of the other war correspondents in that his superiors required no deadlines of him. Most of the war reporters were required to meet specific deadlines established by their home offices. However, Ernie was free to write whenever he pleased and send in his articles as he completed them.

A. J. Liebling met Ernie at the height of his vogue, in Normandy, in 1944. He related that Pyle was drinking more than he should and his nerves were not too good. Liebling evolved a theory:

The success of his frontline series in Africa . . . had caused his home office to needle him into increasingly frequent trips into real danger . . . Ernie, under this pressure, I figured, had abandoned his Hoosier abstinence in order to keep up his nerve, and the remedy was not a complete success.¹¹⁶

In spite of this increased pressure and his habitual drinking, his columns maintained their high quality and

¹¹⁵ Miller, Reader's Digest, p. 166.

¹¹⁶ Liebling, p. 72.

continued to be well received by his public. If Ernie did one thing, it was to take his writing seriously, above everything else. He suffered acutely when he read clippings of his columns and noticed the editorial excision of a phrase.¹¹⁷ However, the censors rarely changed one word of his work, even though some felt his articles included several hints for newcomers at the front.¹¹⁸

Although Ernie was noted for his timidity, he managed to pull his stories out of the soldiers. However, there were many situations where the fighting men couldn't help but talk, in order to relieve themselves from their anxieties. Ernie related this experience while in Africa:

Every time I got within earshot of another officer or enlisted man he'd begin telling what had happened . . . Talk about having to pull stories out of people--I couldn't keep these guys from talking. There was something pathetic and terribly touching about it. Not one of them had ever thought he'd see the dawn, but he had seen it and his emotions had to pour out. And since I was the only newcomer to show up since their escape, I made a perfect sounding board.¹¹⁹

In spite of his shyness, Pyle seemed to possess more than his share of charm, which enabled people to find it easy to like and talk to him.

General Omar Bradley said of Pyle after his death,

¹¹⁷Liebling, p. 69.

¹¹⁸Painton, p. 110.

¹¹⁹Pyle, Here Is Your War, p. 166.

"I have known no finer man, no better soldier . . . the remembrance of his compassion for the lot of our soldiers will always fix him among the great and good men we have known."¹²⁰

Pyle's columns, done in foxholes, brought home all the hurt, horror, loneliness and homesickness that every soldier felt. They were the ideal supplement to the letters written by the soldiers. Although he wrote of his own feelings and his own emotions as he observed men being killed and wounded, he was merely interpreting the scene for the soldier.¹²¹

In his smooth, homespun, easy-to-read style, Pyle told his readers what the American soldier ate, how he dressed, if his socks were warm enough, how and when and where he slept, what he felt in battle, what he thought when he wasn't fighting, how he lived and how he died.¹²² Pyle was a good writer because of the human detail and the sensitivity of him to the things that happen to a man's heart.¹²³

The style used by the famed war correspondent was unquestionably unique to journalism during World War II. A

¹²⁰Miller, Reader's Digest, p. 164.

¹²¹The New York Times, XCIV, p. 14.

¹²²"Man About the World," Time, XLI (May 31, 1943), 44.

¹²³Borland, p. 37.

reading of his published works would not only result in a great deal of enjoyment, but perhaps an awareness of what factors contributed to the success of this gray haired little man who gave a damn about "G. I. Joe."

The Audience

Decisive battles of World War II took place in 1944, at the height of Pyle's successful war reporting. However, life continued in America--comedian Jimmy Durante had one of his best seasons in show business; Mel Ott of the New York Giants set a new big league record for runs scored; the song "Mairzy Doats" was sweeping the country; President Roosevelt was elected to an unprecedented fourth term; Frank Sinatra was a teen-age idol; shoes, groceries and gas were being rationed; and Betty Grable was the top motion picture attraction.¹²⁴

Although most Americans were aware of the above events, the country was primarily concerned with its involvement in the war effort. A nation on wartime production and rationing, with thousands of Americans serving overseas, could hardly forget the tragedies and difficulties imposed by this traumatic world conflict. People were hopeful and extremely anxious for a successful conclusion to the war and were

¹²⁴Time Capsule/1944, ed. Maitland A. Edey (New York: Time-Life Books, 1967), pp. 2, 72, 188, 190, 201, 231.

"hungry" for insightful and promising news reports through the media.

Newspapers and radio stations were both enjoying a great number of readers and listeners, as television did not make significant progress with the mass audience until the end of the war. The public not only desired information on the strategy and tactics of the allied forces, but on material that concerned the everyday activities of the American soldiers, which Pyle so effectively supplied.

America was becoming a nation with an increasingly high literacy rate. In 1930, 4.7 per cent of persons fourteen years old and older were illiterate, but by the middle forties, the proportion had fallen to 2.7 per cent. Enrollment in institutions of higher learning was leveling off because of the war effort, but it seemed clear that the attendance would increase sharply following the conclusion of World War II. The number of persons employed showed a downward trend from 1943 to the end of 1945, mainly because of the large number of individuals involved in the war effort.¹²⁵

Of course, the more devoted readers of Pyle's columns were those who had friends or relatives involved in the

¹²⁵Arnold W. Green, Sociology, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1956), pp. 298, 463, 467.

overseas conflict, especially those who had loved ones engaged in actual combat. However, war was on the minds of most Americans and many concerned citizens were interested in reading the many diversified accounts of the war correspondents.

In 1940, 38.1 per cent of the consumer expenditures among the mass media involved printed material, while 24.2 per cent concerned radio and television and 37.7 per cent went for admissions. The year 1945, saw printed media increase to 42.3 per cent, radio and television drop to 12.2 per cent and admissions advance to 45.5 per cent. In 1950, expenditures for printed media dropped to 33.6 per cent.¹²⁶ This information appears to indicate that World War II was a factor in developing the increased interest in printed matter, but following the end of the world conflict and the advent of television, the print media experienced a severe decline while it adjusted to its changing place in society.

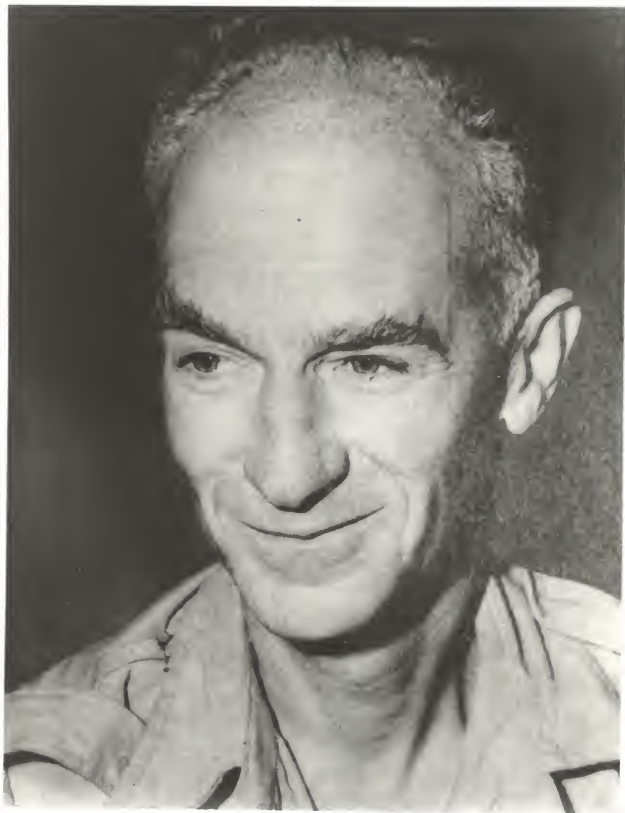
According to Wilbur Schramm and David M. White, it appears that a reader comes in later years to use a newspaper less for entertainment and more for information and serious viewpoints on public affairs. Editorials, near the bottom in the ten to twenty bracket, are second only to news pictures in the over-sixty category. Individuals at the top of the

¹²⁶ Mass Communications, ed. Wilbur Schramm (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), p. 293.

educational curve use newspapers less for entertainment and more for information on public affairs, while those persons with less education utilize newspapers for entertainment, sensational news and pictorial material. Finally, higher economic status usually indicates a greater concern with editorials and public affairs than with a reading of the comics. However, in this latter category, there appears to be no decline in picture and cartoon reading and there is a marked increase in the reading of sports and society news.¹²⁷

From the above information, it seems safe to conclude that Pyle's readers consisted primarily of middle-aged individuals with an above average education and middle class living standards. However, many exceptions could be found to this conclusion as few specific studies were made during the forties to determine accurately the audience make-up of the various war correspondents. Transcending any statistical information is the fact that, regardless of age, education or socio-economic status, Americans who had friends or relatives overseas during the war were extremely desirous of reading any material that might indicate how their loved ones were getting along under the trying conditions of war.

¹²⁷Schramm, pp. 440-441.



From An Ernie Pyle Album

Figure 4. Shortly before his Death.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The preceding material should give the reader sufficient knowledge of Pyle's background and writing techniques to better understand some of the conclusions presented in this last section. These final assessments of Pyle's work should answer some of the questions included in the Preface and clarify some of the conclusions indicated or implied in the ensuing sections.

It seems fairly clear that the course of events played a significant role in Pyle's success as a writer. In fact, without the advent of war, Pyle probably never would have attained the plateau of success that he did as a journalist. Although he did experience limited success during his years as a roving reporter in the Western hemisphere, it no where compared with the almost legendary fame acquired while he was reporting during the war. As mentioned earlier, United Feature Syndicate had difficulty in selling his columns outside the Scripps-Howard chain until he started writing about his experiences in the war effort.

One major reason for his success was that he filled essential needs of the American people and the soldiers overseas. The wartime readers did not necessarily read Pyle just because he was Pyle, but because they wanted to know about

their sons, relatives, friends or even daughters and how they were getting along under the adversity of war. His columns served the readers as if they were daily letters from their loved ones. They appreciated Pyle for his efforts and a deep affection evolved for the war correspondent among his growing number of followers.

However, even without the occurrence of World War II, it does seem certain that Pyle would have continued to be successful as a roving columnist, simply never to the degree that he was as a war reporter. The psychological impact and sociological effect of his work on the American people during the crisis of the war is beyond the scope of this paper and will not be discussed. Nevertheless, it is somewhat obvious that Pyle did help to bridge an emotional gap and a communication gap that existed between the Americans at home and the soldiers overseas.

Pyle's background and personality definitely affected the direction that his writing efforts followed. It was because of his background and personality that he found himself writing about the soldiers rather than the strategies, tactics and statistics of war. Likely, because of his farm background, inferiority complex or lack of confidence, his shyness and his liking for the underdog, he decided to write primarily about the enlisted man. There is a strong possibility he felt uncomfortable with the higher echelon of the military

and associated them with the city or townfolk he felt inferior to as a boy.

Another reason he might have avoided what the other correspondents wrote about was that he associated almost exclusively with the enlisted men. In this group, there was not much with regard to maps, campaigns, tactics, or strategies. They just did what they were told to do. So about all he had to write about, while living with these men, was people, their experiences, heartbreaks, trials and tribulations. It turned out that it happened to be just what a majority of Americans wanted to read.

In other words, his personality and background, perhaps inadvertently, directed him to the men who fought the war and not the individuals who planned and evaluated the conflict. Of course, serving as long as he did overseas, he could not help but meet and converse with a number of higher ranking military officials, so some of his columns concern these men too, but not many.

Some of the adjectives and phrases used to describe Pyle's work, which were included throughout this paper, are the following: attention to detail; accuracy; compassion; sensitivity; humor; poignancy; easy-to-read style; folksy; short, colorful, sentences; vividness; honesty; humaneness; straightforwardness; personal approach; simplicity; smoothness; ignored obvious and wrote about ignored; and moving

realism. It seems that although he did not introduce any new elements into the writing field, he apparently did possess the right combination at the right time. Maybe he was not a great writer, but he gave the American people what they so badly needed and wanted, although this was not his original intention nor did he realize what heights he would achieve from his efforts.

Somewhat like the late John Kennedy, Pyle was killed at the height of his career, which resulted in his almost legendary reputation. There has also been a great deal of speculation as to whether or not he would have been held in such high esteem if he had lived a full life. That is a question that will never be answered.

Naturally, his death occasioned a good deal of exploitation of his celebrity status, as did Kennedy's assassination. His book, Home Country, a compilation of his columns before the war, was not published until after his death and was preceded by his four other books, which contained his wartime columns. His home was also transformed into a museum as well as a library.¹²⁸

The influence of Pyle's wife and the effect of her protracted mental illness on his work is difficult to ascertain.

¹²⁸Dorothy L. Pillsbury, "A Little White House on a Hilltop Where People Stop a While," Christian Science Monitor Magazine (November 26, 1949), 16.

Certainly, he went through a great deal of mental anguish as a result of her frequent and problematic mental disturbances, as most any loving husband would. In fact, he attempted to resign from one job and did stop writing completely for nearly three months. However, the quality of his work did not suffer because of his personal problems and, very possibly, the distressing situation led him to write about the sufferings of humanity in wartime. Many people have been known to attain even greater heights in the face of adversity.

Not even the pressure of his publishers, his occasional excessive drinking, his health or the circumstances of war prevented him from performing his job in a competent, effective manner. He deserves more credit for the fact that he rarely mentioned any of his problems to anyone and continued to persevere under the most difficult conditions.

Again, his personality was an important factor in his successful columns. Although timid, he had sufficient charm, a good sense of humor and such a likeable personality that he was able to obtain the necessary information to write his columns as he did. Also, from living with the soldiers under such trying conditions, he became completely involved and identified with them. Perhaps he saw himself in them. Whatever, he knew them so well he wrote and talked as they did. It is not difficult to understand why he was considered the articulate spokesman of the enlisted man.

His personality more closely resembled that of his father, who was also quiet and seemingly shy. His mother's temper could be seen occasionally when he was interrupted while writing; otherwise he was easy going and affable.

It is useless to speculate on what would have happened to Pyle had he lived beyond the war years. Before he died, he expressed a desire to stay with the war effort until the Spring of 1946 and then return home for the last time. He also indicated that he would like to return to his work as a roving reporter.¹²⁹ Unfortunately, no one will ever know what might have occurred with Pyle's career following his departure from the war scene.

One has a great deal to learn from a study of this extremely successful war correspondent. This applies not only to students of journalism, but to those involved in the field of communications.

At this point, it may be appropriate to relate a statement made by Walker Stone, editor-in-chief of Scripps-Howard, in marking the twentieth anniversary of Pyle's death in 1965. He said that there are probably many people who have never even heard of Ernie Pyle, but then, there are those who will remember.¹³⁰ It would be to one's benefit to be included among the latter group.

¹²⁹The New York Times, XCIV, p. 14.

¹³⁰Newsweek, LXVI (August 2, 1945), 47.

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The News

7th Year—No. 32
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 MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 1914

Weather	Final Name Edition
Partly cloudy Temperature High 45 Low 25	Final Name Edition

Page One is different today because we know that Ernie Pyle's story would tell you more about the war than headlines that Russians are 25 miles inside Poland, or that Tank Hfers are backing up Yagostacs.

By ERNIE PYLE

AT THE FRONT LINES IN ITALY, Jan. 10 (By Wireless)—In this war I have known a lot of officers who were loved and respected by the soldiers under them. But never have I crossed the trail of any man as beloved as Capt. Henry T. Waskow of Belton, Tex. Capt. Waskow was a company commander in the 35th Division. He had been in this company since long before he left the States. He was very young, only in his middle twenties, but he carried in him a sincerity and gentleness that made people want to be guided by him.

"After my own father, he comes next," a sergeant told me.

"He always looked after us," a soldier said. "He'd go to bat for us every time."

"I've never known him to do anything unkind," another one said.

I WAS at the foot of the mule trail the night they brought Capt. Waskow down. The moon was nearly full, and you could see far up the trail, and even part way across the valley. Soldiers made shadows as they walked.

Dead men had been coming down the mountains all evening, lashed onto the backs of mules. They came lying belly down across the wooden pack-saddle, their heads hanging down on the left side of the mule, their stiffened legs sticking awkwardly from the other side, bobbing up and down as the mule walked.

The Italian mule skinner were afraid to walk beside dead men, so Americans had to lead the mules down that night. Even the Americans were reluctant to unlash and lift off the bodies, when they got to the bottom, so an officer had to do it himself and ask others to help.

The first one came early in the morning. They slid him down from the mule, and stood him on his feet for a moment. In the half light he might have been merely a sick man standing there leaning on the other. Then they laid him on the ground in the shadow of the stone wall alongside the road.

I don't know who that first one was. You feel small in the presence of dead men, and you don't ask silly questions. . . .

We left him there beside the road, that first one, and we all went back into the cowshed and sat on watercans or lay on the straw, waiting for the next batch of mules.

Somebody said the dead soldier had been dead for four days, and then nobody said anything more about him. We talked for an hour or more; the dead man lay all alone, outside in the shadow of the wall.

WHEN a soldier came into the cowshed and said there were some more bodies outside. We went out into the road. Four mules stood there in the moonlight, in the road where the trail came down off the mountain. The soldiers who led them stood there waiting.

"This one is Capt. Waskow," one of them said quickly.

Two men unlashed his body from the mule and lifted it off and laid it in the shadow beside the stone wall. Other men took the other bodies off. Finally, there were five lying end to end in a long row. You don't cover up dead men in the combat zones. They just lie there in the shadows until somebody else comes after them.

The uncertain mules moved off to their olive groves. The men in the road seemed reluctant to leave. They stood around, and gradually I could sense them moving, one by one, close to Capt. Waskow's body. Not so much to look, I think, as to say something in finality to him and to themselves. I stood close by and I could hear.

One soldier came and looked down, and he said out loud:

"God damn it!"

Another one came, and he said, "God damn it to hell anyway!" He looked down for a few last moments and then turned and left.

Another man came. I think he was an officer. It was hard to tell officers from men in the dim light, for everybody was grimy and dirty. The man looked down into the dead captain's face and then spoke directly to him, as tho he were alive:

"I'm sorry, old man."

Then a soldier came and stood beside the officer and bent over, and he too spoke to his dead captain, not in a whisper but awfully tender, and he said:

"I sure am sorry, sir."

Then the first man squatted down, and he reached down and took the Captain's hand, and he sat there for a full five minutes holding the dead hand in his own and looking intently into the dead face. And he never uttered a sound all the time he sat there.

Finally he put the hand down. He reached up and gently straightened the points of the Captain's shirt collar, and then he sort of rearranged the tattered edges of his uniform around the wound, and then he got up and walked away down the road in the moonlight, all alone.

The rest of us went back into the cowshed, leaving the five dead men lying in a line, end to end, in the shadow of the low stone wall. We lay down on the straw in the cowshed, and pretty soon we were all asleep.

It was late afternoon at our desert airdrome. The sun was lazy, the air was warm, and a faint haze of propeller dust hung over the field, giving it softness. It was time for the planes to start coming back from their mission, and one by one they did come—big Flying Fortresses and fiery little Lightnings. Nobody paid a great deal of attention, for this returning was a daily routine thing.

Finally they were all in—all, that is, except one. Operations reported a Fortress missing. Returning pilots said it had lagged behind and lost altitude just after leaving the target. The last report said the Fortress couldn't stay in the air more than five minutes. Hours had passed since then. So it was gone.

Ten men were in that plane. The day's accomplishments had been great, but the thought of ten lost friends cast a pall over us. We had already seen death that afternoon. One of the returning Fortresses had released a red flare over the field, and I had stood with others beneath the great plane as they handed its dead pilot, head downward, through the escape hatch onto a stretcher.

The faces of his crew were grave, and nobody talked very loud. One man clutched a leather cap with blood on it. The pilot's hands were very white. Everybody knew the pilot. He was so young, a couple of hours before. The war came inside us then, and we felt it deeply.

After the last report, half a dozen of us went to the high control tower. We went there every evening, for two things—to watch the sunset, and to get word on the progress of the German bombers that frequently came just after dusk to blast our airdrome.

The sunsets in the desert are truly things with souls. The

violence of their color is incredible. They splatter the sky and the clouds with a surging beauty. The mountains stand dark against the horizon, and palm trees silhouette themselves dramatically against the fiery west.

As we stood on the tower looking down over this scene, the day began folding itself up. Fighter planes, which had patrolled the field all day, were coming in. All the soldiers in the tent camps had finished supper. That noiseless peace that sometimes comes just before dusk hung over the air-drome. Men talked in low tones about the dead pilot and the lost Fortress. We thought we would wait a few minutes more to see if the Germans were coming over. And then an electric thing happened. Far off in the dusk a red flare shot into the sky. It made an arc against the dark background of the mountains and fell to the earth. It couldn't be anything else. It had to be. The ten dead men were coming home!

"Where's the flare gun? Gimme a green flare!" yelled an officer.

He ran to the edge of the tower, shouted, "Look out below!" and fired a green rocket into the air. Then we saw the plane—just a tiny black speck. It seemed almost on the ground, it was so low, and in the first glance we could sense that it was barely moving, barely staying in the air. Crippled and alone, two hours behind all the rest, it was dragging itself home.

I was a layman, and no longer of the fraternity that flies, but I could feel. And at that moment I felt something close to human love for that faithful, battered machine, that far dark speck struggling toward us with such pathetic slowness.

All of us stood tense, hardly remembering anyone else was there. With all our nerves we seemed to pull the plane toward us. I suspect a photograph would have shown us all leaning slightly to the left. Not one of us thought the plane would ever make the field, but on it came—so slowly that it was cruel to watch.

It reached the far end of the air-drome, still holding its pathetic little altitude. It skimmed over the tops of parked planes, and kept on, actually reaching out—it seemed to us—for the runway. A few hundred yards more now. Could it? Would it? Was it truly possible?

They cleared the last plane, they were over the runway. They settled slowly. The wheels touched softly. And as the plane rolled

on down the runway the thousands of men around that vast field suddenly realized that they were weak and that they could hear their hearts pounding.

The last of the sunset died, and the sky turned into blackness, which would help the Germans if they came on schedule with their bombs. But nobody cared. Our ten dead men were miraculously back from the grave.

And what a story they had to tell! Nothing quite like it had happened before in this war.

The Tripoli air-drome, which was their target, was heavily defended, by both fighter planes and anti-aircraft guns. Flying into that hailstorm, as one pilot said, was like a mouse attacking a dozen cats.

The Thunderbird—for that was the name of their Fortress—was first hit just as it dropped its bomb load. One engine went out. Then a few moments later the other engine on the same side went. When both engines went out on the same side it was usually fatal. And therein lay the difference of that feat from other instances of bringing damaged bombers home.

The Thunderbird was forced to drop below the other Fortresses. And the moment a Fortress dropped down or lagged behind, German fighters were on it like vultures. The boys didn't know how many Germans were in the air, but they thought there must have been thirty.

Our Lightning fighters, escorting the Fortresses, stuck by the Thunderbird and fought as long as they could, but finally they had to leave or they wouldn't have had enough fuel to make it home.

The last fighter left the crippled Fortress about forty miles from Tripoli. Fortunately, the swarm of German fighters started home at the same time, for their gas was low too.

The Thunderbird flew on another twenty miles. Then a single German fighter appeared, and dived at them. Its guns did great damage to the already crippled plane, but simply couldn't knock it out of the air.

Finally the fighter ran out of ammunition, and left. Our boys were alone with their grave troubles. Two engines were gone,

IN THE AIR

most of the guns were out of commission, and they were still more than four hundred miles from home. The radio was out. They were losing altitude, five hundred feet a minute—and then they were down to two thousand.

The pilot called up his crew and held a consultation. Did they want to jump? They all said they would ride the plane as long as it was in the air. He decided to keep going.

The ship was completely out of trim, cocked over at a terrible angle. But they gradually got it trimmed so that it stopped losing altitude.

By then they were down to nine hundred feet, and a solid wall of mountains ahead barred the way homeward. They flew along parallel to those mountains for a long time, but they were then miraculously gaining some altitude. Finally they got the thing to fifteen hundred feet.

The lowest pass was sixteen hundred feet, but they came across it fifteen hundred. Explain that if you can! Maybe it was as the pilot said: "We didn't come over the mountains, we came through them."

The copilot said, "I was blowing on the windshield trying to push her along. Once I almost wanted to reach a foot down and sort of walk us along over the pass."

And the navigator said, "If I had been on the wingtip, I could have touched the ground with my hand when we went through the pass."

The air currents were bad. One wing was cocked away down. It was hard to hold. The pilots had a horrible fear that the low wing would drop clear down and they'd roll over and go into a spin. But they didn't.

The navigator came into the cockpit, and he and the pilots navigated the plane home. Never for a second could they feel any real assurance of making it. They were practically rigid, but they talked a blue streak all the time, and cursed—as airmen do.

Everything seemed against them. The gas consumption doubled, squandering their precious supply. To top off their misery, they had a bad headwind. The gas gauge went down and down.

At last the navigator said they were only forty miles from home, but those forty miles passed as though they were driving a horse

IN THE AIR

and buggy. Dusk, coming down on the sandy haze, made the vast flat desert an indefinite thing. One oasis looked exactly like another. But they knew when they were near home. Then they shot their red flare and waited for the green flare from our control tower. A minute later it came—the most beautiful sight that crew had ever seen.

When the plane touched the ground they cut the switches and let it roll. For it had no brakes. At the end of the roll the big Fortress veered off the side of the runway. It climaxed its historic homecoming by spinning madly around five times and then running backwards for fifty yards before it stopped. When they checked the gas gauges, they found one tank dry and the other down to twenty gallons.

Deep dusk enveloped the field. Five more minutes and they never would have found it. The weary, crippled Fortress had flown for the incredible time of four and one-half hours on one pair of motors. Any pilot will tell you it's impossible.

That night, with the pilot and some of the crew, we drank a toast. One visitor raised his glass: "Here's to your safe return."

But the pilot raised his own glass and said instead, "Here's to a God-damned good airplane!"

And the others of the crew raised their glasses and repeated, "Here's to a God-damned good airplane!"

Perhaps the real climax was that during the agonizing home-ward crawl that one crippled plane shot down the fantastic total of six German fighters. The score was officially confirmed.

The Fortress crew was composed of men who were already veterans of the war in the air. They had been decorated for missions over Europe. They already had two official kills and several probabilities to their credit. The Tripoli mission, which only by a miracle was not their last, was their twenty-second.

The skipper of the prize crew was 23-year-old Lieutenant John L. Cronkhite, of St. Petersburg, Florida. They called him Cronk. He was short, with a faint blond mustache and a very wide mouth, from which the words came in a slow drawl. His shoulders were broad, his arms husky. Usually he didn't wear a tie. He said he wasn't married because nobody would have him.

When the Fortress finally reached home, Cronkhite decided to

go through the copilot's window onto the wing. As he stepped onto the wing his feet hit some oil and flew out from under him, and he went plummeting off the high wing onto the hard ground. The doctors thought he had been wounded, and picked him up and put him into an ambulance.

Cronkhite didn't want to be picked up. "I wouldn't have given a damn if I had broken a leg when I fell off the wing. I was so glad to be on the ground again. I just felt like lying there forever."

Cronk's father was a St. Petersburg florist. He had three pictures of his mother and father in his room. I spent the evening with Cronk and his copilot and navigator after their return from the dead. When he walked into the room Cronk picked up something from the bed.

"Hell, I can't be dead," he said. "Here are my dog tags. I forgot to take them with me. I can't be dead, for they wouldn't know who I was."

He and his copilot were bound by an unbreakable tie then, for together they had pulled themselves away from death.

The copilot was Lieutenant Dana F. Dudley, of Mapleton, Maine. This is a little town of eight hundred, and Dud said he was the only pilot who ever came from there. He was a tall and friendly fellow, who got married just before coming overseas. His wife was in Sarasota, Florida. Dud said one of the German fighters dived toward his side of the plane, and came on with bullets streaming until it was only a hundred feet away. At that moment, what might have been his last thought passed through Dud's head: Gee, I'm glad I sent my wife that \$225 this morning.

The navigator was Lieutenant Davey Williams, 3305 Miller Street, Fort Worth, Texas. He too had been recently married. The pilots gave Davey all the credit for getting them home. He was about the busiest man on the trip, navigating with one hand and managing two machine guns with the other. When they thought they were done for, Davey said to the pilots, "I'll bet those guys back home have got our stuff divided up already."

He said he thought mainly about how he was going to get word to his family that he was a German prisoner, and he felt sore that friends of his would soon get to go home to America while he'd have to spend the rest of the war in a prison camp.

November 14th, 1967

RICHARD TREGASKIS
2163 Lauula Street
Penthouse
Honolulu, Hawaii 96815

Mr. James M. Reinhard
Department of Speech
Eisenhower Hall
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Dear Mr. Reinhard:

Yes, I did know Ernie Pyle and had great respect for him. Ernie also did a story about me which is in his collection called Brave Men.

Ernie was shy, gentle and kindly -- and very sensitive. Not well either -- as you know he had bouts with tuberculosis and sometimes he drank too much.

I think Ernie's talents were very well meshed to the needs of his day. Like John F. Kennedy, he had the good fortune to die at the maximum of his powers and influence.

He had frequent presentiments of doom. Every amphibious landing he went on he felt would be his last. He was fortunately always wrong until that ~~last~~ day at Ie Shima.

His method was to go out with one body of troops -- say an artillery, bombing, infantry or engineering outfit -- and stay with them long enough to get material for a group of stories. He got the stories mostly by talking to the people.

I think he was the greatest journalistic talent to come out of World War II.

He had ~~written~~ written a travel column before the war. When it broke, he fell right into stride with his "long letters home" to all Americans.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Tregaskis

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE STYLE OF ERNEST TAYLOR PYLE
WITH EMPHASIS ON HIS WRITINGS DURING WORLD WAR II

by

JAMES MITCHELL REINHARD

B.A., Michigan State University, 1961

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Speech

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1969

A primary objective of this paper was to gain some helpful insights into the style that made Ernie Pyle one of the most celebrated war correspondents of our time. In accomplishing this goal, information was given on his life and many examples of his work before and during the war were presented.

All available material on the noted columnist was investigated in completing the project. His five books, containing most of his columns, were thoroughly researched, along with the two books written about him by Lee Graham Miller. Additional information was obtained from periodicals and newspapers. Many letters, inquiring information on Pyle, were written by this author to various individuals who reportedly knew him personally, but only Richard Tregaskis responded.

Chapter I was chiefly concerned with the early years of Pyle's life and presented a somewhat vivid description of his personality and physical characteristics. The following chapter involved material on his initial years in the newspaper business, as a roving reporter, a war correspondent, Pyle's wife, a report of his books, awards and finally, his death. In Chapter III, a discussion of his style was presented, along with examples of his work. The final segment of the report involved conclusions deducted from the preceding three chapters.

The investigation revealed that Pyle's success was due largely to the course of events which took place during his lifetime, namely, World War II. Although Pyle experienced a good deal of success prior to his entry into the war effort, it was nothing like the near celebrity status he attained by his work as a war correspondent.

A major reason for Pyle's success was that he fulfilled essential needs of the American people and the soldiers overseas. His columns served the readers as if they were daily letters from their loved ones and he was considered the articulate spokesman for the American soldiers.

Pyle's background and personality definitely affected the direction that his writing efforts followed. It was because of his background and personality that he found himself writing about the soldiers of war rather than the strategies and tactics of the conflict. Primarily because of his farm background, inferiority complex, shyness and liking for the underdog, he decided to write mostly about the enlisted men rather than the higher ranking military officials.

Some descriptive adjectives and phrases used to describe Pyle's work include the following: accuracy; compassion; sensitivity; humor; poignancy; easy-to-read style; folksy; short, colorful, sentences; vividness; honesty; humanness; straightforwardness; simplicity; smoothness; and moving realism. Although Pyle did not introduce any new

elements into the writing field, he did seem to possess the right combination at the right time.

The protracted mental illness of Pyle's wife did not adversely affect the quality of his work, although he did experience a great deal of mental anguish. Very possibly, the distressing situation was a major reason for his writing about the sufferings of wartime.

Although timid, Pyle had sufficient charm, a good sense of humor and such a likeable personality that he was able to obtain the necessary information to write his columns as he did. Also, from living with the soldiers under such trying conditions, he became completely involved and identified with them. He came to know them so well that he wrote and talked like they did.

One has a great deal to learn from a study of this highly successful war correspondent. An investigation of his style provides some useful insights into the journalism field as well as the area of communications.