THE BOYHOOD INFLUENCES REFLECTED
IN ERNIE PYLE'S LIFE AND WRITING

by

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THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis of Sidney M. Silverman, Contribution of the Graduate Division, Indiana State Teachers College, Number 787, under the title The Boyhood Influences Reflected in Ernie Pyle's Life and Writing is hereby approved as counting toward the completion of the Master's Degree in the amount of 8 hours' credit.

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[Date]
Ernie Pyle appears as the subject of this thesis for a number of reasons. In the first place, I have admired his works for years. I especially was impressed during World War II with his blazoning enlisted men rather than high ranking officers. Geography, too, has played a part in the selection of the subject. I was reared in Clinton, Indiana, which is close to Dana, Indiana, Pyle's home town. The columnist estimated the distance as five miles, but it really is about twice that far. Moreover, my father admired Pyle's column and discussed it at home. Pyle seemed to be one of the family.

I appreciate the personal interviews and letters from Pyle's former friends and relatives, which made this work possible. Interviews were conducted with Aunt Mary Bales and Ward Beanblossom, both of Dana, Indiana; Edmon Goforth, Gary, Indiana; Mrs. June King and Edgar A. Stahl, both of Terre Haute, Indiana; Mrs. Florence Miller, St. Bernice, Indiana; Lieutenant John Santoro, Brooklyn, New York; and Sam Saxton, R.R. 1, Hillsdale, Indiana.

\[1^1\text{Ernie Pyle, Brave Men (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1944), p. 119.}\]
Letters were received from Miss Mary Kitsmiller of Kentland, Indiana, and John E. Stempel of Bloomington, Indiana.

I also am grateful to Herbert A. Donald of Clinton, Indiana, clerk of the Vermillion Circuit Court, for showing me a copy of Ernest T. Pyle's last will. Then I appreciate the information about the Ernie Pyle Recruit Company by Staff Sergeant Harold G. Davis of the Marine Recruiting Office, Federal Building, Terre Haute, Indiana.

In addition, I am grateful to Dr. James R. Bash, chairman of his thesis committee, for his critical advice and suggestions in the writing of this work. I appreciate the help given by other members of the committee: Mr. John A. Boyd and Dr. James F. Light. I also appreciate the advice offered by Dr. George E. Smock, Chairman of the English Department, and by Dr. Elmer J. Clark, Director of Graduate Studies.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Essentially, Ernie Pyle owed his popularity to World War II. In that period, during the last five years of his life, his literary career reached its peak. This is how his meteoric rise has been described:

Four years ago [1940] he was an obscure roving reporter whose syndicated column of trivial travelogues appeared in an unimpressive total of 40 newspapers. . . . Yet now, four years later, he is the most popular of them all. His column appears in 310 newspapers with a total circulation of 12,225,000.¹

That, of course, did not include the sale of his books and the box office receipts of the movie based on his war experiences.

Another factor contributing to his success is the boyhood influences that appear in his work. These include his homespun simplicity; his sense of humor, decency, and fair play; the loyalty he showed to his friends and family; his good taste; his sympathy for the underdog; and the kind of training he received at home. An attempt will be made, then, to show that the type of writing resulting from his youthful experiences is responsible to an extent for his popularity.

¹"Ernie Pyle's War," Time, July 17, 1944, p. 66.
It is coincidental that such a popular writer as Ernie Pyle was born and reared near a town called Dana. It was named for a famous newspaper man--Charles Dana, the former editor of the *New York Sun*.

With a population of some 850 inhabitants, Dana, Indiana, is a typical farming town in the Middlewest. Located about thirty miles north of Terre Haute, it is near the Illinois border. It consists of a small business district and comfortable homes with tree-shaded front yards.

"Dana is a pretty town," Pyle said. "Nearly every street is a cool, dark tunnel."

During World War II, Dana achieved nationwide prominence as the columnist's home town. A magazine sent a crew of photographers there to take pictures of the author's home place, and a long article was written about him, with his picture appearing on the cover.

Conflicting Views About Ernie Pyle

Even now, though he has been dead thirteen years, many of the residents appear proud of him. Some of them

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2 *Danville Commercial News*, June 25, 1944.


have placed on their automobiles nameplates that read: "DANA, HOME OF ERNIE PYLE." Then, too, a monument erected for the columnist stands a few miles southeast of the town in the Ernie Pyle Memorial Rest Park.

When I came to Dana, I found that the residents at first were somewhat reluctant to talk with a stranger, and they hesitated to give information about the columnist. But after learning the purpose of my visit, they talked rather freely. Most of them appeared to remember Pyle, but the recollections were rather vague. After all, many years had passed since he had lived there. Besides, after having left the family farm immediately following his graduation from high school, he did not return save for brief visits to his parents' home.

Only a small number of residents, in fact, seemed to remember him well. The others recalled having seen him when he was a boy, attending the show in Dana on Saturday night or at church on Sunday. They remembered his family well, though. Those who really knew him admitted that he was somewhat peculiar. He did not have much to say, and he was rather moody. His old teacher, Edgar A. Stahl, commented:

To some Dana residents, Ernie Pyle is regarded as a stranger, or even as a foreigner. He has been away so long that they do not consider him as part of the community. They go so far as to feel that he was overrated. Others even show jealousy and belittle him. Practically all of them are surprised that he turned out to be a successful writer.5

5Interview with Edgar A. Stahl, 2757 Cruft Street, Terre Haute, Indiana, July 2, 1958.
Childhood Influences

Some psychologists attribute a person's success or failure in life to his childhood experiences. Ernie Pyle seemed to have had a happy childhood. At least it appeared normal for a boy living on a farm. Even though he disliked horses, he helped his father with the chores. He progressed satisfactorily in school; he experienced no major emotional maladjustments, and he was witty and popular with his schoolmates. There is no record to show that he possessed any neurotic traits, except for his taciturnity and moodiness.

Later in life, however, he displayed peculiarities. At times he drank rather heavily. He also would withdraw into a shell and observe long periods of silence. But those characteristics probably resulted from the pressure of his work and worry over his wife's illness, his own failing health, and the strokes his mother suffered. Moreover, while overseas during World War II, he was faced with hardships and dangers incidental to combat, along with an ever-increasing premonition of death.

6 Lieutenant John Santoro, a public relations officer, told me that during World War II, he accompanied Pyle on a tour of battle sectors in Italy. The columnist would not speak to the officer for long periods, although the men lived together and seemingly got along well.
The correspondent displayed a number of paradoxes that included:

1. **He exhibited traits of both introversion and extroversion.**—As has been mentioned, he revealed streaks of taciturnity and moodiness. He refused to make speeches and went for long periods without talking to anyone. At the same time, he made friends easily. While attending Indiana University, too, he was popular and regarded as a "big man on the campus."

2. **He is either praised or disparaged.**—Some of his former acquaintances speak well of him. They even admire him to the extent of hero worship. Paradoxically others tend to belittle him.

3. **He displayed a repugnance for violence.**—He suffered a guilt complex for having killed a groundhog and could hardly look at the dead animal's body; yet during World War II, he witnessed mass killings and did not appear squeamish about watching the suffering of wounded men.

4. **He escaped action in one war to experience combat in another conflict.**—During World War I, as a boy just out of high school, he joined the Navy, but he saw no action. He reportedly was disgruntled because of that. But he made up for it in the next war when he was a middle-aged man. He then was regarded as a hero although he was not a member of the armed forces.
5. He showed a desire to overcome physical handicaps. As a boy he was small. He wanted to be an athlete, but he had to sit on the sidelines during games. This aspiration to participate in athletic competition was carried over to World War II. Actually, he was too small and frail to endure the hardships of combat, but he tried to keep up with the battle-hardened troops even though he was ill much of the time.
CHAPTER II

FAMILY BACKGROUND

The Grandparents

Ernie Pyle's wanderlust probably came from his grandfather, Samuel Pyle. As a baby Samuel was brought to Helt Township, Indiana, from Chillicothe, Ohio, but he did not remain there. He sailed around the Horn and worked for several years on his brother's ranch in California.

When he returned home, he married a neighbor, Nancy Hammond, who was seventeen years his junior. She was the granddaughter of Thomas Hood, a Virginia veteran of the War of 1812, believed to have been the first settler in the Dana area. Members of the Hood clan consider themselves descendants of Robin Hood.¹

The Parents

Sam Saxton, the columnist's cousin, described Pyle's parents as hard-working farmers, who were neither poor nor wealthy. They did not go beyond the eighth grade. They lived rather well, and they had plenty to eat. They also managed to send their son to college.²

Edmond Goforth, an old friend of the family who now owns the Pyle farm, said that the correspondent's parents were wonderful. The father was easy going, and the son took after him. His mother, however, was more ambitious, and she was a hard worker. This is how the columnist described his father:

He is a quiet man. He has never said a great deal to me all his life, and yet I feel that we have been very good friends. He never gave me much advice, or told me to do this or that, or not to... He didn't spare me either; I worked like a horse from the time I was nine.

The correspondent went on to tell about his father's characteristics:

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 is very even tempered. If he has an enemy in the whole country, I have yet to hear about it.

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 never shows much emotion, and he has never seen a big-league game. Yet my mother came home one afternoon during a World Series, and caught him sitting in front of the radio, all by himself, clapping and yelling for all he was worth.

Pyle's father never lived anywhere except on a farm, and yet:

I don't think he ever did like the farm very well. He has been happiest, I think, since he started renting out the farm. Ever since then he has been carpentering and handy-manning all about the neighborhood. He is a wizard with tools, where other people are clumsy. He is a carpenter at heart.

His father was a simple man. Unlike his son, he traveled little, yet he had an ambition to visit far away places.

The columnist disclosed:

Once when he was a young man, my father did start out to see the world. He went to Iowa to cut corn, but broke a leg and had to come home.4

Pyle appeared to regard his father in a humorous manner. The writer especially was amused by his father's adventures with cars, and he wrote:

We got our first automobile in 1914. We kept it up in the north end of the wagon shed, right behind the wagon. At the south end of the wagon shed there was a big gravel pit. One day we came home from town, my mother and I got out at the house, and father went to put the car away. We saw him make the circle in the barn lot, and then drive into the north end of the shed. The next instant, the south end of the shed simply burst open, a wagon came leaping out, and with one great bound was over the cliff and down in the gravel pit. My father said he never did know exactly what happened.

Again:

My father ... is the man who put oil on his brakes when they got to squeaking, then drove to Dana and ran over the curb and through a plate-glass window and right into a drygoods store.

His father even became involved in politics. He ran for township trustee and lost. Although he was the only Democrat in the county who was defeated, he was happy about it. Pyle explained:

He couldn't think of anything worse than being township trustee. The reason he lost was that all the people figured that if he was trustee he wouldn't have time to put roofs on their houses and paint their barns and paper their dining rooms and fix their chimneys, and

do a thousand and one other things. I guess when my father is gone that whole neighborhood will just sort of fall down."

Pyle seemingly displayed more affection for his mother than for his father. His mother, the former Maria Taylor, was born in 1880 in neighboring Illinois. Her father, Lambert Taylor, was a native Hoosier, and in 1895 he moved his family back to Indiana. They occupied a one-story frame house about a mile east of the author's birthplace. When Will Pyle met her, Maria was in demand as a musician. She played the violin for square dances and schottisches at gatherings in the neighborhood. She was accompanied by another violinist, a pianist and a bass fiddler. The newspaperman reported that she gave up the violin after he had taken one term of lessons. Then he added: "I gave it up too. You should have heard me."7

The courtship of Pyle's parents was rather prosaic. Maria was twenty-five, Will twenty-eight, when the two met. He stood five feet, seven and one-half inches, but he was taller than she. He took her to church on their first date, but there was a drawback: She had a "fellow" in Illinois. A half century later Will Pyle confided: "I cut him out. It made him mad, too."8

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5 Ibid.
6 Lee Miller, op. cit., p. 4.
8 Lee Miller, op. cit., p. 5.
This is how Pyle described his parents' courtship:

He used to work as a hired hand way over on the other side of the Wabash River. When he was courting my mother, every Sunday he would drive a horse six miles to the river, row a boat across, and then ride a bicycle ten miles to my mother's house. At midnight he started to reverse the process. Mother figured he either loved her or else was foolish and needed somebody to look after him, so she married him. 9

The columnist was born August 3, 1900, in Sam Elder's two-story home, a mile and a half south and a little west of Dana. Will Pyle was then tenanting on Elder's west place. Maria Pyle was thirty years old, and since this was her first child, she had a hard time. They named the baby Ernest Taylor Pyle. Taylor, of course, was his mother's maiden name. His parents called him Ernest, and he was never Ernie to them, not even after "Ernie Pyle" had become a famous name. His mother exercised a strong influence on him. Lee G. Miller, the columnist's editorial supervisor and biographer, explained:

Maria was more articulate than Will, and perhaps more sensitive to Ernest's moods.... She had no intention of spoiling him just because he was her only child; she was tender to him, but there was little idle sentimentality about her; while she had a ready laugh, her tongue could be severe. 10

Pyle, agreeing with Miller about his mother's disposition, wrote:

My mother has quite a temper. I remember once when the liniment man came, and said we hadn't paid him for a bottle of liniment. My mother said we had. The man said we hadn't. So my mother went and got the money,

10 Miller, op. cit., pp. 3-6.
opened the screen door, and threw it in his face. He never came back.

She always tells people just what she thinks. A good many of our neighbors have deservedly felt the whip of her tongue, and they pout over it a while, but whenever they're in trouble they always thaw out and come asking for help. And of course get it. My mother is the one the neighbors always call on when somebody gets sick, or dies, or needs help of any kind. She has practically raised a couple kids besides myself. She has always been the confidante of the young people around there.

Pyle admired her very much. He said that she would rather drive a team of horses in the field than cook a dinner, and he added:

She has had only three real interests—my father, myself, and her farm work. Nothing else makes much difference to her. And yet, when I left home in my late teens, to be gone forever except for brief visits, she was content for me to go, because she knew I was not happy on the farm.

My mother is living proof that happiness is within yourself; for a whole lifetime she has done nothing but work too hard, and yet I'm sure she has been happy. She loves the farm there outside Dana, Indiana. . . . She is the best chicken raiser and cake baker in the neighborhood.

Pyle went on to say that his mother knew little about world affairs, yet she was broad-minded and liberal with her views. He explained:

I don't remember her ever telling me I couldn't do something. She always told me what she thought was right, and then it was up to me.

Then the columnist concluded:

My mother doesn't realize it, but her life has been the life of a real prairie pioneer. You could use her in a book, or paint her picture, as one of the sturdy stock of the ages who have always done the carrying-on when the going was tough.11

Mrs. June King, with whom Pyle had his first "date," was quite attached to his mother. Mrs. King related that Mrs. Pyle liked to invite the girls in the neighborhood to her home for Sunday dinner. There usually were about ten guests, and Mrs. King went on a number of occasions. Ernie was the only boy there, and the girls paid no attention to him. They kept up an endless line of chatter, punctuated by giggles and laughter. Becoming uncomfortable, Ernie would squirm and eat with his eyes focused on his plate. Mrs. Pyle enjoyed those affairs immensely.  

Years after he had left the farm, Pyle received a telegram that his mother had died. Grief-stricken, he wrote:

> It seemed to me that living is futile, and death the final indignity. ... Little pictures of my mother raced across the darkness before my eyes. Pictures of nearly a lifetime. Pictures of her at neighborhood square dances long, long ago, when she was young and I was a child. Pictures of her playing the violin. Pictures of her doctoring sick horses; of her carrying newborn lambs into the house on raw spring days. I could see her that far day in the past when she drove our first auto—all decorated and bespangled—in the Fourth of July parade. She was dressed up in frills and she won first prize in the parade and was awfully proud. ...  

> I could see her as she stood on the front porch, crying bravely, on that morning in 1918 when I, being youthful, said a tearless good-by and climbed into the neighbor's waiting buggy that was to take me out of her life.  

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12 Interview with Mrs. June King, 2348 North 11th Street, Terre Haute, Indiana, July 8, 1958.

The author's famous Aunt Mary is still alive. Although she was ninety-two years old last June 9, she remains young in her actions and outlook. She lives in a modest home in Dana, and pictures of her nephew are scattered about her house.

Aunt Mary is confined most of the time to her home. Occasionally she goes riding with friends to visit acquaintance and distant relatives out in the country. Ten years ago she fell and broke her hip, and now she walks only with difficulty. She is not discouraged, though.

"I am well blessed," she says. "I thank God for my health."

When she learned the purpose of my visit, she was delighted that a stranger had come to talk about her favorite nephew. It was not a new experience for her, however; she had given a number of interviews on the subject with magazine writers and newspapermen. She was perfectly at ease and answered my questions readily. In fact, quite proud of him, she related many episodes about Pyle without any prompting. His mother was her sister, and she had helped rear him. Even now she can hardly reconcile herself to his death.

"I still can't realize he's gone," she confided. "It seems the door will open any minute, and Ernest will come walking into the house."
Aunt Mary told me that she began looking after her nephew when he was eighteen months old. At that time she became ill, and the Pyles moved in with her to take care of the Taylor farm, located three miles southeast of Dana.

"At first we thought it would be only for a short time," she said. "But they stayed for good." 14

The affection she showed the columnist was returned while he was alive. More than twenty years ago he wrote:

My Aunt Mary was born thirty years too soon. Jim Williams should draw one of his "Out Our Way" cartoons about her. If she was forty, instead of seventy, I am sure she would be in Congress now. . . .

Aunt Mary was past forty when she married, and Pyle recounted this amusing incident that occurred at the wedding:

... There were a lot of people at our house that night. I was a little shaver, but I had sense enough to know that as soon as the knot was tied the kissing would start. So I hid behind the couch. Sure enough, as soon as the ceremony was over, Aunt Mary, crying as though she had just buried Uncle George instead of marrying him, wanted to kiss everybody in the place, especially me. And I couldn't be found. The search got so frantic I finally came out to get kissed and have it over with. 15

Pyle's writing about her made Aunt Mary famous. During World War II she received hundreds of letters from soldiers' families, asking how she canned chickens. They had read in one of his stories how much he liked the food.

14 Interview with Aunt Mary Bales of Dana, Indiana, June 3, 1958.

Now they wanted to send some of it to their boys.  

The Family Home

The Taylor household lacked plumbing and electric lighting, and there was a backhouse. Young Pyle took his baths in a washtub near the woodstove in the kitchen, and the water was carried from a deep well. The home did have a party-line telephone, though. But in those days Indiana farmers did not consider that it was a deprivation to do without modern conveniences. Shortly after Pyle left home in 1919, plumbing and electricity were installed.  

The farm where Ernie Pyle spent his boyhood days was sold at public auction October 18, 1952, to settle the estate of the columnist and his father after the place had been in the family more than fifty years. Edmon Goforth, a Gary school teacher and an old friend of the family, outbid several competitors to buy the home with 77.87 acres of land for $29,588.75.  

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17 Miller, op. cit., p. 5.

18 The Indianapolis Times, October 19, 1952.
CHAPTER III

YOUNG ERNIE PYLE

Appearance and Characteristics

Ernie Pyle's acquaintances say that as a boy he was small and slender with curly, golden-red hair. In high school he weighed only about 110 pounds, and he never got heavier. His voice was high-pitched, and it broke or squeaked when he became excited. His hair grew long until he was three or four years old. Will Bales, who lived down the road and whose widowed father presently married Aunt Mary Taylor, nicknamed him "Shag."¹

Mrs. June King, who was his first "date," described him in more glowing terms:

He had a clear complexion and a mop of beautiful, curly hair. It rippled in waves, and he wore it in a pompadour. After he had become famous, I was amazed to see his picture in a magazine. He had become bald, and I could hardly believe he had lost that gorgeous hair.

His former teacher, Edward A. Stahl, more jocular in his description, said: "I remember Ernie as a pint-sized, red-haired, freckled-faced boy. He looked like a clothespin on the big horse he rode to school."

Stahl, who served as assistant principal, taught young Pyle a variety of subjects from 1914 to 1917 at Helt

Township High School, a quarter of a mile east of Bono, Indiana. The building, which was constructed in 1907, was abandoned twenty years later. Moreover, shortly after Pyle was graduated from high school, his school records were destroyed by fire in the Vermillion County Courthouse at Newport, Indiana. Thus, there is no official record of the columnist's grades while in school.\(^2\) Stahl continued his description of the boy by saying:

Ernie was a retiring lad, taciturn and introverted. He seemed to be thinking things out. Keeping at a distance, he didn't let anybody get close to him, except his friend Thad Hooker. He stayed in a shell and was kind of an outsider. . . . Just the same, he wore good clothes and was well groomed.

Stahl revealed that young Pyle was too small to participate in sports, and he stayed on the sidelines. During school intermissions, the boys played shinny, but Pyle did not join in the fun. He is quoted as saying: "I always sat under a tree and ate my apple."\(^3\)

Mrs. King said that Pyle was kind and witty. Even though he was retiring and kept to himself, he was well liked by the other students. He did not go out much at night, and he read considerably. As a result, he had a large vocabulary.

Aunt Mary Bales revealed that neither sports nor hunting appealed to him, and she added:

\(^2\)Interview with Ward Beanblossom of Dana, Indiana, Vermillion County Superintendent of Schools, June 3, 1958.

He never had much to say, but he was good company. He was very witty, and had a sharp comeback. He also could tell funny jokes.

Edmon Goforth described him as a "typical American boy." He had a lot of fun, but he never was in trouble. He especially enjoyed the Model-T Ford his father gave him.

Goforth said:

He was very quiet and bashful with the common touch, and he never lost it. It is reflected in his writing. That's why he became so popular.

Goforth said that young Pyle loved food. He especially was fond of jelly and would eat a whole glass of it with a meal. He was considerate of others, too. For example, he regularly drove his former teacher, Mrs. Mable Aikman Campbell, to and from school in his father's storm buggy, hitched to the gray mare. Mrs. Campbell had taught him in the third, fourth, and fifth grades. She remembered him as an "apt student given to much reading, well behaved and liked by all the students."4 Another one of Pyle's former teachers, Miss Mary Kitsmiller, wrote:

He was very witty with an infectious little grin. He was always very kind and gentle, and he was thoughtful of others. He was a good boy.5

Young Pyle was moody, and he was left to himself much of the time. A friend revealed:

A recurring dream ... used to frighten him as a boy at night—a dream that the world was on a pinpoint,

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5Letter from Miss Mary Kitsmiller of Kentland, Indiana, July 5, 1958.
"way out somewhere," spinning around, and it would seem to him that at any moment it might let go. He would awaken terrified.

The boy was reared in a religious atmosphere. He was baptized in the Methodist faith and attended Sunday School regularly at the small Methodist Church in Bono, a couple miles from home. Blessings were always asked at the table in the Pyle home. 6

Pyle's first "girl" reportedly was Mrs. Florence Miller, who now teaches the third and fourth grades in Dana. Last year she was selected as the outstanding teacher in Indiana. They knew one another a long time, and he was a year ahead of her in school. They "kept company" from 1918 to 1919. When he was stationed with the Naval Reserve at Champaign, Illinois, during World War I, they carried on a correspondence, and he returned home occasionally to see her. Mrs. Miller regards the affair as personal and does not care to discuss it, but she did say:

He was an average boy. He was entertaining and lots of fun, and he was well liked by his classmates. He read a great deal, too. 7

Sam Saxton said that as a boy his cousin liked good books. He also was interested in magazines featuring articles about mechanics and science, but he would not read when he could play. He liked the outdoors, although he did not care to work in the field.

6 Miller, op. cit., pp. 5-7.
7 Interview with Mrs. Florence Miller of St. Bernice, Indiana, June 22, 1958.
Scholastic Ability

The consensus is that in school young Pyle was a good student, but he did not excel. Stahl classified him as an average student who was not outstanding in any subject. Another source, however, reports that the boy made high grades in English and Geography and 100 percent in deportment. 8

Mrs. King said that she was a year behind Pyle in school. There were twelve students in his graduating class and ten in hers. She related:

We didn't have many activities in high school. It was mostly hard work. We had what were called school wagons, which were similar to the school buses of today. They were wagons pulled by horses, and usually neighboring farmers drove them voluntarily. They picked us up early in the morning and took us back home immediately after school so that we would lose no time in doing the farm chores. Ernie did not ride in the school wagons; he drove his own horse.

Will Pyle put his son to work when the boy was nine. His father had him ride an Oliver sulky plow behind three horses. His mother was uneasy, but Mr. Pyle pointed out that he had learned to plow at that age, and on stumpy ground. 9 The columnist wrote the following account about the incident:

My mother had gone to a club meeting, but she came home in the middle of the afternoon and brought me a lunch of bread and butter and sugar out to the field.

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And also, I suppose, she wanted to make sure I hadn't been dragged to death under the harrow.¹⁰

Later, he wrote a school composition about horses. He said he liked horses for fun, but hated them for work. He concluded that he became tired "of plowing behind the south end of a horse going north."¹¹

In addition to plowing, Ernie Pyle fed the hogs and horses. But he was not adept at milking, and his father did that chore. The boy was proficient with tools and helped to build a corn crib. In the summer he was up at four, but he slept later during school months. Miller confided:

As a young man he was to look back on his farm days as a period of unusual hardship; he actually talked, in his early newspaper days, of writing a book about his rugged boyhood, when a funny kid did a man's work; but it is unlikely that he was pushed even as hard as custom warranted. He just didn't like farming.¹²

Stahl agreed with the statement that Pyle did not work to hard. The columnist's former teacher added that the boy's father was an easy-going type and did not do much work, either.

"Old Shep"

Like most farm boys, Ernie Pyle had a dog. It was a half-grown shepherd dog that Will Bales found wandering

about his place, and he gave it to young Pyle. When Pyle was managing editor of a newspaper, he paid this tribute to "Old Shep":

The most human of all dogs seems not to be a dog at all. At least not according to the American Kennel Club. The animal in question is the plain unadulterated American Shepherd, found on farms throughout the country. Probably the greatest Shepherd dog that ever lived was part of the household of an Indiana farm. If there is a human being in this world who is kindlier, more understanding, more faithful, or more intelligent than that dog, then the little boy who was then his master has spent twenty-five years in vain looking for him. The little boy had no brothers or sisters to play with. His dog was his constant companion. And in all that vast prairie there was no one who understood the child's mind better than did the dog Shep... When a little boy whose feelings were hurt would go out into the yard and lie down and cry, the dog would go and lie beside him, and lick his face and whine in the most complete and understanding sympathy.

When he was in the seventh grade, young Pyle got diphtheria, and he was quarantined in his room. For weeks, while the boy was bedfast, "Old Shep" stayed outside his bedroom door most of the time. It was then that Pyle's voice became squeaky. When he got better, his mother played the violin for him. His favorite piece was "On the Banks of the Wabash."

"Old Shep" died when his master was in high school. The boy said he wanted another dog, and Edmon Goforth gave him a pup. "He never forgot the gift," Goforth said. "He was always grateful to me for it."

13 Wilson, op. cit., p. 56.
14 Miller, op. cit., p. 9.
CHAPTER IV

BOYHOOD ADVENTURES

Aversion for Snakes

When Ernie Pyle was four or five years old, he received a whipping from his mother. He described the incident as follows:

My father was plowing at the far end of the farm... I was walking along behind the plow, barefooted, in the fresh soft furrow. ... Red wild roses were growing there. I asked my father for his pocketknife, so I could cut some of the roses to take back to the house. ... I sat down in the grass and started cutting off the roses.

Then the boy saw a blue racer slithering through the grass toward him. Screaming, he threw away the knife and fled. Soon, however, he returned to the plowed ground and recovered the knife. Then he gave it to his father and started back to the house. He stopped at an old garden covered with high weeds and shouted for his mother. Then:

When she came out of the house to see what I wanted, I asked her to come and get me. She said I should come on through by myself... I began to cry. She told me if I didn't stop crying and didn't come through, she would whip me. I couldn't stop, and I couldn't come through. So she... whipped me--one of the two times, I believe, that she ever whipped me.

That evening, when my father came in from the fields, she told him about the crazy boy who wouldn't walk through the weeds and had to be whipped. And then my father told her about the roses and the knife and the snake. It was the roses, I think, that hurt her so. My
mother cried for a long time that night after she went to bed.  

Pyle never was able to overcome his antipathy for snakes, not even as a grown man. In North Africa he was trying to write a dispatch during a lull in the fighting. Suddenly a German sniper fired on him, and he took cover.

This is how he recounted the experience:

I don't know which was the greater mental hazard—my writing, the bullets, or snakes. That rocky hill country was a reptilian paradise. After the machine gunner had made me flee in shame, I sat down in a foxhole and tried to write. If I had just kept my eyes on the paper it would have been all right, but for some perverse reason I happened to look down on the ground. There, alongside my leg in the bottom of the hole was one of our dear little slithery friends. A movie of me leaving that foxhole would look like a shell leaving a rifle.

When I finally crept back to peer into the hole, my new roommate turned out to be one of those mistakes of nature with which Africa abounds—something or other that is two thirds snake and one third lizard. It was a snake, except that it had two legs, side by side, about halfway down its body. Before we could exterminate this monstrosity, he wiggled back under a sunken rock which formed one end of my foxhole.

Corporal Richard Redman of Struthers, Ohio, occupied a shallow foxhole adjoining. An hour or so after my episode, Corporal Redman was catching some daytime sleep in his trench when I happened to walk by. There, within a foot of his head, was a real snake. That time I let out my special snake-fright whoop, which can be heard for miles.

Grabbing a shovel, the battalion surgeon killed the snake. He reported that it was an adder, and it was very poisonous. Later they killed another snake at the same spot.

Then Pyle concluded:

I thought I couldn't possibly lie down in my foxhole that night, with that lizard still there and snakes all around. Yet, when the time came, there was nothing else to do. So I made myself crawl in, and I slept soundly all night.2

Toward the end of the African campaign, he had another encounter with a snake. His reaction this time, however, was different. Revealing his humility, he wrote:

Yesterday a sand snake crawled by just outside my tent door, and for the first time in my life I looked upon a snake not with a creeping phobia but with a sudden and surprising feeling of compassion. Somehow I pitied him, because he was a snake instead of a man. And I don't know why I felt that way, for I feel pity for all men too, because they are men.3

The Fisherman

As a boy Pyle fished in the creek in "Mr. Webster's pasture." It was down the road half a mile from his father's farm, and he walked there barefooted. He wrote:

The creek never was very big . . . You could jump across it almost any place. It was muddy too, and grass had grown up all along the banks.

Even though he was young, he said he had no "feeling about hurting a worm. . . . When I was through I spit on the bait and threw the line in."4

The water in the creek was too shallow for swimming, but one day young Pyle decided to try another sport. Taking off his overalls, he went "mud-crawling." Inadvertently, he

3Ibid., p. 303.
caught his biggest fish, or rather it surrendered when it swam inside his loose underwear. He ate it for dinner. 

Sam Saxton reported that as a boy Pyle also frequented Redmon Pond, half a mile north of the Saxton place. The correspondent's cousin said:

The pond was really a mudhole. It was about ten feet deep with a log raft in the middle. No lifeguards were on duty, of course, and we fellows were lucky we didn't drown. Ernie was a fair swimmer. The fishing wasn't too good, though. About all we caught were small sunfish.

Off to School

In 1906, when he was six years old, the boy started to school at Dana. Will Pyle furnished a horse; a neighbor provided a buggy; and one of the teachers drove young Pyle and two other children to the schoolhouse and back. Later Pyle confessed:

I never felt completely at ease in Dana. I suppose it was an inferiority hangover from 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 felt self-conscious whenever I walked down the street in Dana, imagining the town boys were making fun of me.

The boy attended classes in Dana only a year. By 1907 the new consolidated school near Bono was finished, and he was transferred there. Young Pyle became acquainted

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6Ibid. 
8Miller, op. cit., p. 8.
with Mariam Bales at school. In fact, he pulled her pigs-tails.\(^9\) They stayed together in the same class until they were graduated from high school. Later she married Edmon Goforth, who was a year behind them.

Vagabond Experiences

Ernie Pyle started to travel early. When he was eight, he accompanied Aunt Mary Bales and some of the neighbors to the Ringling Brothers' circus at Terre Haute. About two years later his father drove him in a "rig" to another circus at Clinton. They were caught in a downpour and took shelter in a covered bridge, but the rain stopped in time for them to attend the circus.\(^10\)

When he was in the fourth grade, the boy went with his mother to Chicago during Easter vacation to visit Great-Aunt Nancy Miller, Grandpa Lambert Taylor's sister. While getting ready to leave, his mother asked him to copy the recipe for molasses cookies out of the cook book. He complied with her request in an unusual manner. He would copy a line of directions, then make up a rhyme to go with it. At length he composed a long poem, possibly his first literary effort. The boy and his mother took the C.& E.I. local to Chicago. The big city confused Ernie, and he was astonished to see so many people and tall buildings.

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In the morning some children in the neighborhood where they were staying came to play with him. At first he was afraid of them because they were city children. Then he discovered that they were as bashful as he was. They had homemade cars, and he accompanied them to Jackson Park, where they played Speedway. Each child pretended he was a race driver.\textsuperscript{11}

Perhaps that was the beginning of Pyle's craze for the 500-mile classic. Sam Saxton said that he became a rabid fan and tried not to miss a race. Saxton added: "He'd go to the Indianapolis Speedway any way he could. He'd even hitchhike. His big ambition was to be a race driver."

Young Pyle said: "I would rather win that race than anything in the world. I would rather be Ralph De Palma than President."

When the boy became older, he worked in the summer. One year he drove a team behind a slip-scaper, used in building a grade for a spur track to a coal mine. Will Pyle took over the job for a day so that his son could attend the 500-mile race.\textsuperscript{12}

As a grown man the columnist lost his desire for speed. His driving became slower and slower, until he cruised along on trips at an average of forty-eight miles per hour.

\textsuperscript{11} Wilson, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 99-122.
\textsuperscript{12} Miller, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 11.
per hour. He commented: "After all, why should I hurry? I ain't going no place especially. . . . And I've got all day to get there."\(^{13}\)

Thad Hooker

Ernie Pyle had a Damon and Pythias attachment. His best friend was Thad Hooker, who was a year older. The two boys practically were inseparable, and the correspondent wrote:

We thought the world would end if we didn't see each other every day. We went through the giggly stage. It got so we couldn't sit down at the table, either at his house or mine, without choking from the giggles. Our mothers would want to know what we were giggling about, and of course we weren't giggling about anything, and our mothers would get provoked and make us leave the table.\(^{14}\)

Pyle's former teacher, Edgar A. Stahl, said:

He didn't have much to do with anybody at school except Thad Hooker. The two were together most of the time. Thad also was small and not interested in sports. They were two peas in a pod.

Another one of his former teachers, Miss Mary Kismiller, wrote:

He adored his pal, Thad Hooker. When they got into mischief, Thad could assume a poker face, while Ernie sat and grinned and looked guilty.

The boys' favorite game was Knights of the Round Table. They played it with young Pyle riding one of his father's horses and Thad mounted on a Shetland pony. Using


\(^{14}\)Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
rugpole spears, daggers of lath, and wash-boiler lids for shields, they held tournaments.  

The boys also played Indians at a hill, covered with bushes and trees, near Pyle's home. They imagined that the place was an Indian mound, and they dug for arrows and tomahawks. One day they found a tomahawk blade there. They quarreled over it, and Thad left. After a while young Pyle went over to his friend's house and offered the weapon to him. Thad refused to take it. Then they agreed to share it.

**Smoking Incidents**

The two boys smoked together out in a field or up in an attic, at first trying cornsilk, then using tobacco in corncob pipes. They also smoked on their way home from school. Before reaching their destination, they hid their pipes either in a woodpecker hole or in a grass-covered rabbit hole. Young Pyle became careless, however, and was caught. This is how he tells the story:

> When I was about sixteen I forgot and left my corn-cob pipe lying on the window sill one day when I went to school. When I got home that night, she [his mother] handed me the pipe and said, "I see you're smoking now." I said, "Yes," And that was all there was to that.

Sam Saxton said that his cousin smoked with him, too, when they were boys. They would sneak off to a field

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15 Ibid.  
16 Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 62.  
17 Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 11.  
or to a wood. In place of tobacco they used cornsilk, grapevine, coffee, and mullein weed. Young Pyle also gave Sam licorice, which they chewed. When they spat it out, they pretended it was tobacco juice.

Saxton said that one day when his cousin came over to play with him and his brothers, they went out to a field to watch a crew lay railroad tracks. Young Pyle persuaded Paul Saxton to beg tobacco "makings" from the workmen so that the boys could roll cigarettes. Paul was successful in his mission. Sam Saxton added: "But you didn't catch Ernie going there himself. He was an instigator."

Saxton told another humorous story about their smoking. One Saturday night, when Pyle was about thirteen, he accompanied the Saxon boys to Dana. After attending a show, Pyle treated his companions to cigars. Saxton said:

They weren't ordinary cigars, but large, two-for-a-nickel ones. We walked through Main Street, big as you please, smoking them. Then Charlie Parker, the town marshall, came over and made us throw away the cigars. He said he'd run us in if he caught us smoking again.

The Saxton Boys

Sam Saxton had five brothers and sisters, and young Pyle played with them. They were his cousins, the children of Aunt Frankie and Uncle Oat, "the coon-hunter who had a laugh like a bell ringing."19 The columnist wrote:

The Saxton kids are cousins of mine, born in a log house about a mile and a half from our farm in western

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19 Miller, op. cit., p. 8.
Indiana. We were poor and they were poorer. I played with them all through my childhood. I always liked them, all six of them. We used to ride the running gears of an old buggy down the slope and through the creek, making a sputter with our lips and pretending we were race drivers at Indianapolis. And sometimes after special pleading at home, I could stay all night with them, and we'd sleep in the attic among the rafters of the log house, four or five of us in one bed. We had fun in those days.

Sam Saxton added that their sleep up in the attic would be interrupted by pillow fights and wrestling matches. He also said that the boys used the running gears of the old buggy to coast down a hill on State Road 36, which was not paved at that time. Their improvised sled carried them about three-fourths of a mile before sliding to a stop.

"We played together since we were small," Saxton said. "In fact, I used to ride his hobby horse."

Saxton described Pyle as "an all-around boy always on the go." Although he was quiet, he was rather mischievous, with a crotchety sense of humor and a liking for practical jokes. He and the Saxton brothers hunted rabbits together. They also set traps for muskrats alongside the creek in "Mr. Webster's pasture," but they caught more rabbits than muskrats. They even caught skunks and cats. Laughingly, Sam Saxton confided that they built deadfalls to trap animals. The use of deadfalls, he explained, is now against the law, although at that time it was legal.

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21 It was the same hobby horse on which he sat as a child in the popular picture that has appeared in books and magazines.
Young Pyle rode his father's horse "Old Bill" to the Saxton place. Several of the boys would mount him at the same time. Sam Saxton said: "He was an ornery horse, and would try to rub us off against the barn."

They also would climb to the top of a tall, slim hickory tree. Their weight caused it to bend to the ground. Fortunately, it did not break in mid-air and hurl the boys into space.

After Pyle had become a roving reporter, he looked up Paul Saxton at the Pacific Lumber Company in Scotia, California. It had been twenty years since the cousins had seen each other. Paul was then a "cat" driver dragging logs down from the woods.22

**Willie the Wanderer**

Another childhood experience concerned Pyle's encounter with a tramp, who came over to the boy while he was chopping wood. Ernie's father was out in the field plowing, and his mother was at the Ladies' Aid meeting. The tramp was a colorful figure, and the boy had never seen anybody like him. He introduced himself as Willie the Wanderer. Then he took the ax away from the boy and finished chopping the wood. Taking the stranger into the kitchen, the boy fed him. Then Willie the Wanderer began telling about his

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travels, and Ernie became absorbed with the stories. Soon Mrs. Pyle returned home and made the tramp leave. The boy followed him out of the house. But he could not find Willie the wanderer, although he looked everywhere for him. 23

Hallowe'en

Another tramp came to the farmhouse one raw October evening. In response to his knock, Mrs. Pyle opened the door. The tramp stood facing her on the back porch. He was in ragged clothes, and in a high squeaky voice he told her he was hungry. Mrs. Pyle replied that she had nothing to give him and he should leave. But, ignoring her, he ducked under her arm and darted into the kitchen. Then he told her: "I'm no stranger, ma'am. You ought to remember me." Mrs. Pyle laughed and said: "Ernest Taylor Pyle! You sure had me fooled for a minute. I forgot all about its being Hallowe'en."

His dress as a tramp was his costume for Mariam Bales's Hallowe'en party, but he was not enthusiastic about the affair. He told his mother he preferred to go to different homes to see what he could get to eat rather than to attend the event. It was given for the twelve students in his seventh grade class, which included only four boys. Pyle thought there would be too many girls there for him to have a good time.

23 Wilson, op. cit., pp. 87-98.
Leaving his house, he saw a white object, which resembled a ghost, in the grape arbor. It turned out to be Thad Hooker, draped in a sheet. A pillowcase with slits for eyes covered his head. The two boys went to the Bales' home. On the porch a carved pumpkin grinned at them. Looking through the window, they saw that the house was full of girls. Not a boy was there. Mariam, noticing them, cried: "A ghost. And a tramp. Looking in the window!"

The girls ran out of the house; the boys sprinted across the yard and hid behind a hedge. Soon two other boys appeared. They represented a scarecrow and an Indian, and one of them had a ticktack. The newcomers asked Ernie and Thad to visit homes with them in an effort to get handouts. But they refused the invitation and joined the party. They appeared to enjoy themselves, too; Ernie blindfolded a girl, put skinned grapes into her mouth, and told her she was eating cats' eyes. She screamed. Then Thad fed cold spaghetti to another girl and told her she was eating worms.24

First Date

Ernie Pyle had his first date when he was fourteen. He and Thad Hooker took June Westbrook25 and Marie Igo to church Sunday night. Thad made the arrangements. The columnist later revealed:


25 She is now Mrs. June King of 2348 North 11th Street, Terre Haute, Indiana, a saleslady in a department store.
They rode in a surrey pulled by Thad's small pony. The girls, Pyle said, "were as scared as we were." Then he added:

We took them rather formally to church . . . and got stuck in the mud, and had to get out and lift. When we got back to the girls' house we played "Authors" for a while. After that the whole thing sort of bogged down. We couldn't think of anything to say, and we wanted to go home but didn't know how to get started. 26

Mrs. King, taking up the story, said:

The room became awfully quiet, and everybody began to fidget. It was getting late, for those days, and we became mighty uncomfortable. I kept watching the boys, hoping they'd go home. Finally I left the room and came back with an alarm clock. I held it up before the boys. The hands pointed to ten.

Pyle concluded: "She didn't say a word, just sort of giggled. We said something about not knowing it was so late, and rushed out." 27

The Wreck

In 1914 or 1915, Will Pyle bought an automobile. It was an Overland, and his son learned to drive it. The following year the columnist's father bought a car for his son. It was a new Model-T runabout that cost about $400.

One night young Pyle started to drive to a skating rink. Accompanied by Thad Hooker and two other boys, he was

26 Miller, op. cit., p. 10.
27 Ibid.
involved in an accident when his car collided with a buggy, which was overturned. Aunt Mary Bales said that her nephew was driving to Clinton. The lights of the Ford went out before the mishap occurred, and the driver of the buggy was thrown onto the ground. Regaining his feet, he went over to Pyle with his fists clenched and invited him to fight. Aunt Mary recounted:

He was much bigger than Ernest, but he wasn't afraid of him. He stood his ground. But one of the boys with him wanted to run away. From then on Ernest never had any use for him.

While young Pyle and the driver of the buggy were discussing the possibility of a fight, a police officer appeared. He asked the boy what his name was, and the answer was "Hocus Pocus."

Aunt Mary laughed. "At first the officer was going to run Ernest in, but he talked him out of it." Shortly thereafter the boy wrote a poem entitled "Don't Drive Without Lights."

Years later Pyle's only comment about the affair was: "He [his father] bought me a Ford roadster when I was about sixteen, and when I wrecked it a couple weeks later he never said a word." 29
High School Commencement

A year before Ernie Pyle was graduated from high school the United States had declared war on Germany. The boys in Pyle's class discussed the situation in low voices, wondering what they should do; all over the country youths their own ages were volunteering for service. Then Pyle's close friend, Thad Hooker, joined the Army. Ernie also wanted to enlist, but his parents would not let him, urging him to finish school first. Aunt Mary Bales said:

His heart was broken, but his parents stood firm. And Ernest became more and more unhappy.

Will Pyle pointed out to his son that he could be just as patriotic by staying at home. He argued that farm work was important. Both food and farm labor were scarce. He told his son: "I need your help. You're doing something for the war just by working in the fields after school."

Mrs. Pyle wanted him to finish high school so that he could apply for a commission and become an officer. Her son snapped:

Officer! Who cares about being an officer? It's privates, doughboys, they need. If it weren't for them, there wouldn't be an army.30

Years later, during the second World War, he held the same opinion. Perhaps that accounted for his popularity with the millions of his readers, most of whom had sons or relatives who were enlisted men.

30Wilson, op. cit., p. 167.
Young Pyle, complying with his parents' wish, remained in school. But he continued to think about his best friend who was in service. Shortly before commencement he and Mariam Bales asked the principal to have Thad's chair up on the platform with the rest of the class at the graduation exercises. The principal replied that he would consider the request.

When Pyle was getting ready for the commencement, his mother told him: "You're the first one of the family to get a high school diploma. This is a big night for the Pyles." The boy put on his good suit, and he later confessed: "I could hardly bear to go to commencement, I was so ashamed I wasn't in the Army too." But everything turned out all right. There was an empty flag-draped chair on the stage for Thad Hooker.

A few weeks after graduation Pyle joined the Naval Reserve at Peoria, Illinois. Then he was sent for preliminary training to the University of Illinois at Champaign. He wrote home:

Another boy and I went up town this afternoon, and sat out in front of the depot, on a dray wagon, and watched the trains go by. He liked trains about as well as I do, and we sat and talked about how we would like to be on one of the engines firing.

When the Armistice was signed, he was ready to go to the Great Lakes Training Station. Aunt Mary Bales reported that he was disappointed because the war had ended

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31 Ibid.  
32 Miller, op. cit., p. 11.
so soon. He wanted to see action overseas. But years later, when Pyle was a middle-aged man, his desire to see action was realized belatedly. As a war correspondent he experienced some of the most bloody campaigns of World War II.
CHAPTER V

ABILITY IN THE EMBRYO

Boy Shows Creativeness

Ernie Pyle's literary ability was revealed at an early age. Edmon Goforth reported that while attending grammar school, Pyle displayed a talent for rhyming. He composed humorous poems about his acquaintances and members of his family. But some of his poetry, Goforth added, was too lewd to repeat. The boy liked stories, too, especially those his mother or Aunt Mary Bales read to him.¹ He was a born listener and enjoyed hearing the grownups talk, and he remembered their conversation.²

Personal Opinions

The majority of Pyle's former teachers and friends admitted they were surprised that he became a writer. Even Aunt Mary Bales said:

He never told me he wanted to be a newspaperman. I don't think he had that ambition, or he would have confided in me about it. He always did.

In fact, she did not believe that he knew what


²Time, July 17, 1944, p. 66.
he wanted to do. At least she had never heard him discuss a career.

His cousin, Sam Saxton, said that he seemed to be interested in mechanics; at first, as has already been mentioned, he aspired to be a race driver. He also wanted to be a railroad engineer; he even considered taking an engineering course at college.

Pyle's former teacher, Edgar A. Stahl, said that he showed no aptitude to be a newspaperman. Another former teacher, Miss Mary Kitsmiller, also was surprised that he became a newspaperman. She had taught him English for three or four years, and she wrote:

I can't say I noticed any unusual ability in his writing at that time. I remember he liked to use semicolons and would have four or five in a one page theme. I don't recall anything special about his reading. Of course, at that time the high school library was very small. We did have required readings and book reports.

Ernie never expressed a desire to be a newspaperman, either. He was just another high school student who had not decided what he wanted to do.

A former schoolmate, Mrs. Florence Miller, likewise was surprised that he became a writer.

Conversely, two of Pyle's former acquaintances said that he displayed a flair for writing. Clarence Campbell, former Republican Chairman of Vermillion County, was the first one to notice his aptitude. He said that Pyle expressed an ambition to be a news columnist when he was about fourteen. He then quoted passages from Ring Lardner's column.3

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The other person who realized he had a knack for writing was Mrs. June King. "His success didn't surprise me at all," she confided. "In fact, I rather expected he would become a writer." Her opinion resulted from an embarrassing experience. She sat behind him in study hall during his last year of high school while she was a junior, and he wrote her themes. She explained:

I didn't realize the consequence of what was happening. But writing came hard for me, and he enjoyed doing it. I made better grades in English, too. Even then Ernie was glib with words and had a large vocabulary.

But we were caught when he used French words in a theme. My English teacher, Ralph Shields, who also was principal of the school, asked me if I ever had studied French. I told him "No," and he expressed amazement that I could use French words. I then confessed that Ernie Pyle had written the theme for me. I think I cried, too. Mr. Shields smiled faintly, as though he had known all the time who the real author was.

Mrs. King believed, however, that although Pyle then liked to write, he did not consider it as a career. He was adept with words, of course, but he had not yet recognized his talent. She said: "I don't think he actually knew in high school what he wanted to do."

School Compositions

From the contents of the themes he wrote in his English classes, Ernie Pyle seemed at an early age to have a latent talent for writing. When he was ten years old, he related how he had caught his first fish. Instead of telling the theme in first person, however, he presented an unknown boy as the protagonist. He read to his class how the so-
called boy had taken off his overalls and stepped into the stream to go mud-crawling. And then:

All of a sudden he felt something tickle his stomach. It was inside his underwear.

Then he found he had caught a fish, after all. It wriggled in his ... er ... underwear. The boy grabbed it. It was the first fish he had ever caught. It was a catfish, eight inches long. He took it home and had it for supper. That was a proud moment for the young fisherman.

His classmates laughed. Then his teacher, Miss Campbell, looked at him and said:

Well, Ernest, your composition is certainly different! And I am inclined to think that it is one of your best. Sometimes it is good to write about things and people we know. You seem to know the boy pretty well.

Miss Campbell smiled and continued: "But I think you ought to keep a dictionary handy. Then you won't write such things as 'crick' and 'laid down'."

The boy then told himself: "Seems like it's all right, after all, to write about an ordinary person, instead of always writing about generals and such."

He applied that theory years later when he was a war correspondent. He then glorified enlisted men instead of high-ranking officers.

Even as a boy he showed a respect for facts. Once he was assigned to write a composition about a visit to the county courthouse at Newport, Indiana, and he related:

Many interesting statistics were brought out in the examination of the assessment sheets. It was found that

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Old Dobbin has completely succumbed to the invasion of the automobile. The total value of horses listed in the county is $279,096, while that of automobiles is $498,322. The average horse is worth a fraction less than $72 and the average auto is slightly above $330. Dobbin still has the advantage of numbers, however, as there are four horses to every automobile.5

Dislike for the Farm

Ernie Pyle's aversion to horses is believed to have been responsible for his deserting the farm. He had to ride three miles a day to school on the protruding spine of a narrow-backed nag. He also followed other horses behind the plow.6

When he was a roving correspondent, he explained that he preferred traveling to farming because he did not have to get up at four in the morning to milk cows.7 His family did not object to his wanting to leave the farm, either. In fact, his mother encouraged him to pioneer, and his father acquiesced in his son's wishes.8 Will Pyle explained:

He liked to ride horseback but he didn't like to work with them. Horses were too slow for Ernest. He always said the world was too big for him to be doing confining work here on the farm.9

5Time, July 17, 1944, p. 66.
9Time, July 17, 1944, p. 65.
After becoming a newspaperman, however, Pyle held no bitter memories for the farm. As a matter of fact, he seemed to regard the place with nostalgia. His "home life and his mother and father became background characters... in the column, and the farm probably the best known in America."\(^{10}\)

Pyle's going out into the world came as no surprise to Aunt Mary Bales. She said that her nephew had been born with a wanderlust.\(^{11}\)

Indiana University

When Ernie Pyle came to Bloomington, he did not know what to study at Indiana University. Seemingly, all he was interested in was to escape the farm. Then he met Paige Cavanaugh, a fellow freshman, who also was a war veteran, and they became life-long friends. Like Pyle, Cavanaugh could not think of a career to follow. But after making inquiries, he reached a decision and told Pyle, "Journalism is a breeze." The young men then walked over to the journalism building, and Pyle said, "We aspire to be journalists."\(^{12}\)

Later he admitted:

I took journalism at Indiana University because it was a cinch course and offered an escape from a farm

\(^{10}\)Painton, op. cit., p. 109.

\(^{11}\)Time, July 17, 1944, p. 65.

life and farm animals. But my mind was small, completely undeveloped—a kid off the farm who knew nothing, had been nowhere.13

At Indiana University, Ernie Pyle remained reticent and shy, but he was as well liked by his schoolmates as he had been in high school. In fact, he became one of the most popular men on the campus. He was student manager of the football team and a leading journalist. Starting out as a reporter for the Daily Student, the campus newspaper, he was promoted successively to summer editor, city editor, and editor-in-chief. He also was editor of Smoke-Up, another student publication.

When the baseball team went to Japan to play a series with Waseda University, he worked his way across the Pacific as a bellboy on the Keystone State to see the games.14

He took another trip to Bowling Green, Kentucky, with a fellow student to get a job in an oil field. The job failed to materialize, and they spent all their money. Although Pyle became hungry, he was too proud to send home for money. After missing meals for two days, he took a job unloading bricks from a freight car. Then he found another job erecting 500-gallon storage tanks, and he soon was made foreman of his gang.15

14The Indianapolis Times, November 26, 1943.
Aunt Mary Bailes reported that his car broke down one summer while he was taking another trip. He signaled with his thumb to a passing motorist. The driver stopped his automobile and gave Pyle a 500-mile lift back to Indiana.

To help raise funds for the band to go to Purdue University, Pyle organized an auto polo game. He rode with another student in an old car named Methuselah. The match was held on Jordan Field, and Pyle's team lost because of engine trouble. This incident seemed to be a throwback to his boyhood enthusiasm for automobile racing.

He was active in campus organizations. He belonged to Sigma Alpha Epsilon, social fraternity; Sigma Delta Chi, national professional journalistic fraternity; Boosters, student representative body; Sphinx, junior men's honorary organization; Cootie Club, composed of World War I veterans; Travelers' Club, a group whose parents were members of the Masonic order; and Aeons, leaders in scholarship and activities.

A poem appearing in the Indiana University yearbook described Pyle as follows:

This brilliant gem which blushed unseen in Dana,
Long since globe trotter, student Ed, Aeon and who-knows what,
Still wears the same old hat,
is still the same good fellow
Lo, this man's name heads all the lot.16

16 The Indianapolis Times, November 26, 1943.
Shortly before he was to graduate, Pyle left Indiana University to work on a newspaper in La Porte, Indiana. He apparently later regretted that move because he always intended to return to Bloomington to get his degree.\footnote{Painton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 109.}

Sam Saxton said Will Pyle told him that before his son was killed he had reimbursed him for the money spent on his education.
CHAPTER VI

ERNIE PYLE, THE WRITER

Appearance and Personality Traits

After Ernie Pyle had become a successful columnist, he resembled both in appearance and personality traits the boy who had been reared on an Indiana farm. Of course, he had lost most of his reddish hair on top, and what was left of it was sprinkled with gray.¹

The columnist displayed the same kind of modesty he showed as a boy. For example, Lester Cowan, the producer, was preparing to make a movie entitled The Story of GI Joe. He suggested that his narrative of soldiers in Tunisia and Italy be integrated around Pyle. The correspondent agreed with the proposal, but he made three stipulations: (1) that the Infantry and not Pyle be the hero of the picture, (2) that no attempt be made to glorify him, and (3) that other correspondents be included in the story. He also refused to play his own part in the movie.²

Another boyhood trait that Pyle revealed was his humility. In the fall of 1943, he returned home for a short

visit. Aunt Mary Bales inquired how he felt about being a celebrity. He answered that he did not feel any different.' Aunt Mary queried: "Well, don't you feel above the rest of us now?" Pyle retorted: "Why should I? You're all dear to me."3

Edgar A. Stahl Reported that Pyle's personality had changed little since he had been a boy. He remained common and unassuming, and he continued to make friends. He did not wear expensive clothes, either. He occasionally bought a forty-dollar suit, and he used a battered, old typewriter. Stahl also said that the columnist's home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was small and unpretentious, and he seldom stayed there.

Painton revealed that the correspondent had a passion for orderliness, and he said:

Though he may wear the most amazing collection of Army garments ever assembled on one spare frame, those clothes are neat and clean, and he somehow looks well tubbed even when miles from the nearest bath.4

His being well-groomed is another boyhood trait. A number of his former teachers and classmates reported that in school he always wore good clothes, and he was spotlessly clean.

Pyle also was brave, which is still another one of his boyhood traits. When he had been sixteen, as has already been related, he had been willing to fight a man

3"Dana Boy Makes Good," Time, June 12, 1944, p. 64.
4Painton, op. cit., p. 110.
with whom he had been involved in a wreck. As a war correspondent, he stayed for long periods under fire during military campaigns. In addition, he admitted that he felt no fear while he was visiting at the United States leper colony in the Hawaiian Islands.\(^5\)

No matter how much courage a man has, however, he occasionally shows fear. For instance, Pyle described the work of an officer who spent every day in landing craft checking ship cargoes in Anzio harbor. While he carried out his assignment, shells sprayed the area. The correspondent wrote: "I wouldn't have his job for a million dollars."

Then in the next paragraph he added: "I rode around with him one day."\(^6\)

A fellow war correspondent reported that in the fall of 1942 Pyle revealed the same temperament and disposition that he had shown in his boyhood. He was then as popular with his fellow newsmen and the military personnel as he had been with his classmates at high school and at Indiana University. The correspondent described him as follows:

He seemed jarringly like the character he had created for himself in his column, then only moderately successful. . . . Ernie in those days was abstinent and resolutely Philistine. . . . I took it for granted he was homesick. . . . He was quiet, friendly, and obliging in the small details of communal life in cramped quarters.


\(^6\)Graham B. Hovey, "This Is Ernie Pyle's War," *New Republic*, December 11, 1944, p. 804.
Then Pyle began to change, and the correspondent disclosed:

In Normandy, in 1944, he was at the height of his vogue. He was drinking more than a bit, and his nerves were not too good.

The correspondent theorized the reason for Pyle's change. With his readers clamoring for accounts of the gory side of war, the home office was needling him "into increasingly frequent trips into real danger." The correspondent added: "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." 7

Public Speaking

Pyle never lost his boyhood shyness. Aunt Mary Bales explained, that her nephew constantly was in demand as a speaker, but he refused all the invitations. She said:

He was afraid of crowds, it seemed. But he never was at a loss for words. You can tell that by his writing. It was a gift.

Ward Beanblossom disclosed that when he was principal of Dana High School, he occasionally met Pyle when he returned home for a visit. Beanblossom said:

He was very quiet, and he kept to himself, seldom leaving his parents' home. One day I invited him to address the student body of our school. I thought his talk would be inspiring. But he refused. He was nice about it, though, explaining that he didn't feel adequate for the occasion.

Beanblossom said that later he heard Pyle would not make a speech under any circumstance. Incidentally, a report has circulated that when the correspondent returned to Indiana University to attend a program presented in his honor, he was called on to address the gathering, and he refused. Investigation reveals, however, that the story lacks accuracy. The true version of the affair has been given by John E. Stempel, Chairman of the Department of Journalism at Indiana University, who reportedly worked with Pyle in the editorial department of the Daily Student during their undergraduate days.

Stempel explained that when Pyle returned to the Indiana University campus in 1944 to receive his honorary degree, he asked that he not be requested to speak at any public gathering. After the degree-conferring exercises, a luncheon was held in the correspondent's honor. He sat at a table with Stempel and several other persons who had been in school with him. Stempel concluded:

We talked quite informally, and he did visit around at some of the other tables, but he did not make a talk of any kind. He had told us that he tried when he was in England to talk over the radio and had frozen completely.  

Pyle is known to have made two speeches, though. One of them has been called the "shortest speech on record." It was delivered during a pep rally when he was a student at Indiana University. In response to the cheers of the audi-

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8Letter from John E. Stempel of Bloomington, Indiana, July 8, 1958.
ence, he ascended the speaker's platform and said: "Tomorrow I'll celebrate Indiana's victory. But tonight . . ." He paused. "But tonight I'm tongue-tied. I guess I was born that way. And so all I can say is . . ." His mind went blank, and he flung his arm straight out from his side. Not another word would come. "Never could make a speech," he muttered as he hurried from the platform, his arm still sticking straight out from his side.\(^9\)

The other speech was delivered in February, 1945, to an audience of one-thousand servicemen at San Francisco. The occasion signified his departure for the Pacific theatre of war.\(^10\)

Private Affairs

In the summer of 1926, Ernie Pyle married Geraldine Siebolds, a Minnesota girl who was a Civil Service clerk in Washington. She was a small, pert blond, and she became "that girl who rides beside me."\(^11\) They led a vagabond existence, which has been described by Pyle as follows:

Travel, they say, is educational. And so we have found it in our first five years of constant wandering.


\(^10\)Barnett, op. cit., p. 96.

We have traveled by practically all forms of locomotion, including piggyback. 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'm going to have to have a new pair of shoes.

We have not spent a Christmas at home in four years. I spent one Fourth of July in hip boots, sheepskin coat, mittens, and stocking cap. And we've celebrated New Year's three times in shirt sleeves.

In five years those columns have stretched out to the horrifying equivalent of twenty full-length books. .. In sending the columns to Washington from odd spots all the way from Nome to Asuncion, I haven't lost one. Once I went for five months without seeing my own column in print. Two men I interviewed have died before the columns about them were published. ..

The columnist continued that, although he and his wife had no home, they had made many intimate friends throughout the continent and corresponded with about three hundred people. He was not getting tired of traveling, either.12

Liebling reported that Pyle was a heavy drinker and in the twenties had mixed gin in the bathtub. He also was an agnostic. Liebling went on to say that Pyle was disturbed most of the time he was overseas. The columnist's wife had gone mad in 1941, and he added: "In the years since 1941 she had shuttled between institutions and the outside world." Then he quoted a passage of a letter that

12 Pyle, Home Country, pp. 262-68.
Pyle had written to a friend: "For more than ten years Jerry has been a psychopatic case. . . . She is a dual personality."\(^{13}\)

Mrs. June King said that her former schoolmate did not want his mother to learn about his unfortunate marriage. But she found out about it anyway, and in a letter she asked her son to give her particulars concerning the affair. Pyle, however, would not divulge that information. He told her that, although he was heartbroken, he did not wish to discuss the matter. In 1942, his wife was granted a divorce, but they were married by proxy the next year.

Overseas, Pyle was uncomfortable. For one thing, he could not stand the cold. But Sam Saxton reported that his cousin had disliked winter when he had been a boy. "He nearly froze then," Saxton said. Pyle also was too frail to undergo the rigors of combat, but he forced himself to share the soldiers' dangers. During his boyhood, he had been too frail to participate in school athletics, and he had been content to sit on the sidelines. But now he had changed. He wanted to take an active part in the war, regardless of his constitution. As a result, in 1944 he suffered a breakdown from exhaustion. Edgar A Stahl remarked:

He looked awfully bad. He practically was a living skeleton, and I wondered how he could keep going.

Pyle's breakdown was described in more detail in a magazine article. In September, 1944, he returned home.

\(^{13}\)Liebling, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
after having served twenty-nine months overseas. Nearly a year of that time had been spent in the front lines. He admitted that he had all he could take "for a while." During the period he was overseas he had written 700,000 words about war. In his last column from France, he confided:

I do hate terribly to leave right now, but I have given out. My spirit is wobbly and my mind is confused. The hurt has finally become too great. All of a sudden it seemed to me that if I heard one more shot or saw one more dead man I would go off my nut.

His having to return to this country must have been distasteful for him, for he was a proud man. During his undergraduate days at Indiana University, it is recalled, he had gone hungry for two days on a trip rather than write to his parents for money. He went back to the United States on a hospital ship loaded with wounded Americans. The magazine article reported: "As usual he could sympathize with the sick because he himself had always been sick or worried about being sick."\(^{14}\)

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\(^{14}\)"Ernie Pyle Comes Home from the War," Life, October 2, 1944, p. 38.
CHAPTER VII

PYLE'S WRITING

Style

An article in a 1943 news magazine reported: "The timid, homespun qualities, which make Ernie more at home with little people than with big stuffy ones, date back to a farm boyhood near Dana, Ind."\(^1\) Mrs. Mary Alice Russell of Dana put it this way:

I think Ernest's fame was caused by the wonderful family background and training he had. . . . And when a boy has that instilled in him he never forgets it.\(^2\)

Pyle wrote in a simple, chatty style that resembled a letter to his readers. He explained: "I . . . traveled for other people and wrote their letters home. I'm really a letter writer."\(^3\) Coincidentally, Edgar A. Stahl pointed out that his former student wrote in "G.I. language," and he was able to report to the servicemen's parents and friends what went on overseas. Moreover, he made human beings more important than tanks, planes, and guns, and he maintained the

\(^1\)"Roverboy with Typewriter," *Newsweek*, February 15, 1943, p. 76.

\(^2\) *The Indianapolis Times*, October 19, 1952.

common touch he had revealed as a boy. His objectivity also contributed to his success. Both his friends and teachers, it is recalled, commented that in school he had been taciturn and retiring. As a result, he was introspective as a writer.

Pyle was not the conventional type of reporter, however, for he avoided the lead story. His copy did not contain official communiques, and he refrained from using Pentagon phraseology. Essentially, he was a feature writer, and he probably turned out the best feature stories of the war. His simplicity was real, and it apparently sprang from his boyhood background.

Ernie Pyle wrote mainly about the "little people," possibly because he himself came from humble origins. When he became a roving columnist, he told about barbers, bellhops, bartenders, and bums. When war came, he kept those characters and made them privates, sergeants, and lieutenants.

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Why Ernie Pyle became a war correspondent is puzzling. After all, he had been rather sensitive when he had lived on the farm, and he had disliked violence. He did not seem to have outgrown those boyhood traits either. Then, too, he was awed by the revelation of death, although he watched many men die in a shocking exhibition of mass destruction.

An example of his abhorrence of brutality is his account of his feelings after he shot a groundhog behind the barn in 1939 while he was visiting his parents on the farm. Then, displaying the sensitivity that mirrored his boyhood, he narrates:

That night just before bedtime I went outdoors. Our country is very quiet and very dark in the nighttime. I had a feeling of something up toward the barn. It sounds foolish. But there was a life less, and I had taken it. Sure, a groundhog is no good, and ought to be killed. But there was a home in the hillside without a tenant. Maybe a groundhog enjoys living, too.

I stood there in the dark for a long time thinking about it, out there under the maple trees, and I just felt like hell.8

Further evidence of Pyle's boyhood sensitivity is disclosed in his haunting description of the wind that blows across the Midwest flatlands in the summer. Moreover, it reveals his sympathy for the "little people" and the underdogs. He writes:

To me the summer wind in the Midwest is one of the most melancholy things in all life. It comes from so

far and blows so gently and yet so relentlessly; it rustles the leaves and branches of the maple trees in a sort of symphony of sadness, and it doesn't pass on and leave them still. . . . You could—and you do—wear out your lifetime on the dusty plains with that wind of futility blowing in your face. And when you are worn out and gone, the wind—still saying nothing, still so gentle and sad and timeless—is still blowing across the prairies, and will blow in the faces of the little men who follow you forever.

Then he paints a poignant word picture of himself when he was young.

One time . . . I became conscious of the wind and instantly I was back in character as an Indiana farm boy again. Like dreams came the memories the wind brought. I lay again on the ground under the shade trees at noon-time, with my half hour of rest before going back to the fields, and the wind and the sun and the hot country silence made me sleepy, and yet I couldn't sleep for the wind in the trees. The wind was like the afternoon ahead that would never end, and the days and the summers and even the lifetimes that would flow on forever, tiredly, patiently.

Admitting the prominent part that his boyhood played in the shaping of his life, he concludes:

It is just one of those small impressions that form in a child's mind, and grow and stay with him through a lifetime, even shaping a part of his character and manner of thinking, and he can never explain it.9

Personal Encounters

Although Ernie Pyle left his father's farm in his late teens, and did not intend to return, he occasionally expressed a nostalgia for his boyhood surroundings. For instance, while in St. Petersburg, Florida, he called on Oliver Staats from Dana, Indiana, whom he had not seen in

9Ibid., p. 3.
twenty years. The columnist reported the encounter as follows:

He lived a mile and a half east of us, and owned a big fruit farm. I used to pick strawberries down there for spending money. . . . He owned the first automobile in our part of the country, a one-cylinder Reo, and always wore a linen cap when he drove.

Pyle said that Staats would be ninety-three years old the following week. Then he continued his story.

He asked if I remembered when I was in high school and making things in the manual-training shop. I said sure. Then he said that one day I rode down to the fruit farm on my horse and brought him two little bookshelves on brackets that screwed into the wall. "They're still in the house right there today," he said. I couldn't remember those shelves at all at first, but after I'd thought a while I sort of remembered them. 10

In Algiers, Pyle visited Allied Headquarters to give General Dwight D. Eisenhower a copy of his book. He showed his credentials to a soldier behind a desk in the outer lobby. After making out an entry pass for him, the soldier said: "I'm almost from your home town," and explained that he had come from Montezuma, Indiana. The correspondent then concluded:

The soldier was Luther C. Manwaring . . . who hadn't been home in nearly two years. . . . I had been in Montezuma about a month before, so I was able to tell Private Manwaring that our respective home towns were still there and thriving and hardly missing him or me at all. 11

Another time Pyle mentioned that in the Mediterranean he talked with Lieutenant James F. Short of Clinton, Indiana,

10 Ibid., pp. 337-38.
and he explained: "The reason I picked Lieutenant Short out of all Hoosiers was that he was born and raised five miles from that proud metropolis from which I sprang--Dana, Indiana."\(^{12}\)

While the correspondent was talking with a group of soldiers overseas, Sergeant Dick Showalter of Muncie, Indiana, came up to him, introduced himself, and said that he had married a girl from Pyle's home town named Edna Kuhns. The columnist then narrated:

"Why," I said, "I was raised with the Kuhns kids. They lived just across the fence from our farm. I've known them all my life."

... Then we left and sat on the grass, leaning against a rock, and talked about Dana, Indiana, and Muncie and things.\(^{13}\)

Pyle also visited a Superfortress crew who were bombing Japan from the Marianas. He had come to the outfit to look up Lieutenant Jack Bales, "another farm boy from near Dana, Indiana." The columnist explained:

Jack is a sort of nephew of mine. ... I used to hold him on my knee and all that sort of thing. But now he was twenty-six, and starting to get bald like his "uncle." Jack's folks still live just a mile down the road from our farm.

Jack, who had studied law at the University of Illinois, was a radioman. Pyle stayed in a quonset hut with him and ten other fliers. The correspondent concluded his story:

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 119. \(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 235.
Jack had two jars of Indiana-fried chicken from my Aunt Mary. She cans it and seals it in Mason jars, and it's wonderful. She sent me some in France, but I'd left before it got there. Jack took some of his fried chicken in his lunch over Tokyo one day. We Hoosiers sure do get around, even the chickens.

While traveling on a ship, Pyle shared a cabin with Lieutenant Al Masters of Terre Haute, Indiana, "just a few miles from where I was born and raised."\textsuperscript{14} Then he met Lieutenant Howard Skidmore, a torpedo-bomber from Villa Grove, Illinois. Pyle thought that was where his mother had been born, but he was not sure. Just the same, Skidmore had lots of relatives in the vicinity of Dana and had visited them many times.\textsuperscript{15}

A fellow war correspondent related an amusing incident concerning Pyle. Once he came to an Arab farmhouse where some 5,000 Germans waited to be captured. Some of the Germans could speak English and asked many questions. Pyle hardly talked. Then he saw on the tail of a windmill the following inscription: FLINT & WALLING MANUFACTURING CO., KENDALLVILLE, IND. He exclaimed:

Why, that was made in my home state. Imagine finding an American windmill on an Arab farm that's chockful of Germans.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 88.

\textsuperscript{16}Painton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 17.
CHAPTER VIII

PYLE'S POPULARITY

Reason for His Success

There is a theory, contrary to Horatio Alger's teaching, that Ernie Pyle owed his fame to his lack of ambition. He had little use for money, and he reportedly gave substantial sums to his relatives, friends, soldiers, and anybody else he liked. He always had been free with his money, though, as was attested years before when he had bought cigars for the Saxton boys. His tastes, as a man, were plain just as they had been during his boyhood. He even rolled his own cigarettes,¹ as he had done out in the field or up in the attic when he had lived on the farm.

His old friends from the Dana area gave other explanations for his popularity. Sam Saxton, his cousin, said: "Ernie had a way of getting around and making people like him. His articles were down-to-earth like him, and he wrote for the common people." Edmon Goforth pointed out: "He was very quiet and bashful with a common touch. He always tried to avoid important people."

Another explanation was: "Ernie remained the small-

Measurement of His Popularity

Ernie Pyle began getting famous in 1941 when he went to England and covered the London air bombardment. Both readers and critics believed that he conducted the best column of the year. In 1941, too, his book, *Ernie Pyle in England*, was published.4

His collected G.I. columns, *Here Is Your War*, sold over a million copies.5 *Brave Men*, published in 1944, registered second in nonfiction sales that year. In 1945, it took first place. Holt, Grosset and Dunlap, and the Book-of-the-Month Club sold a total of 1,297,450 copies for the year.6 From the movie, Pyle earned a half-million dollars.

His sudden rise to fame, however, did not bring him happiness, and he said: "I feel sad, because it has given

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me the big things in life and taken away the precious little things. Obviously, he was referring to the simple values he had found on the farm during his boyhood.

Two more of his books were published posthumously in 1946—Last Chapter and Home Country—which contained his pre-war writing. A news magazine called Pyle the "most widely read (11,500,000) and most endearing of U.S. war correspondents." In addition, the columnist made good in his home town. The weekly News of Dana (circulation 600) published a weekly condensation of his column.

Praise and Honors

Although Ernie Pyle died at a comparatively early age, he received more than his share of honors and tributes. In 1944, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished correspondence, and he was voted the "outstanding Hoosier" of the year by the Sons of Indiana in New York. In 1944, too, he received honorary degrees of Litt. D. from the University of New Mexico and L.H.D. from Indiana University, along with the Raymond Clapper memorial award for war correspondents from Sigma Delta Chi fraternity. He also was presented the Headliners Club award in both 1943 and 1944. Then the New Mexico legislature designated his birthday as "Ernie Pyle Day." His death prevented the conferring of an

7Time, April 30, 1945, p. 61.
8Time, June 12, 1944, pp. 64-65.
honorary M.A. degree by Harvard University. Moreover, he received the Purple Heart for wounds suffered in the Anzio Beachhead landing. Pyle was instrumental, too, in getting Congress to revive the awarding of sleeve stripes for each six months of overseas service. In addition, Congress passed the "Ernie Pyle Bill" to increase soldiers' pay ten dollars for combat service.

During World War II, Pyle received about 5,000 letters a year, including some from General Dwight D. Eisenhower and General Omar Bradley. An aide also wrote him that President Franklin D. Roosevelt enjoyed his newspaper column and invited the correspondent to call at the White House when he returned to the United States. The columnist grinned. "I'd like to meet the President, but I wouldn't know what to say. I'd be tongue-tied for sure." Other letters came from his childhood friends. Mariam and Edmon Goforth wrote from their farm in Indiana. Thad Hooker reported from Florida that the fish there were bigger than the ones in Mr. Webster's Creek.

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9 The National Cyclopedia of American Biography, XXXIII, 22.

10 Publishers' Weekly, April 21, 1945, p. 1665.

11 Time, July 17, 1944, p. 65.

CHAPTER IX

LAST CHAPTER

Pyle's Death

After the Normandy invasion, Ernie Pyle became haunted by a premonition of death. He told fellow newsmen:

I feel that I have used up all my chances. And I hate it. ... I don't want to be killed.1

His fears were realized in 1945, and the following item tells the tragedy:

At a Command Post, Ie Shima, Ryukyus Islands, April 18 (AP).--Ernie Pyle, war correspondent, beloved by his co-workers, G.I.'s and generals alike, was killed by a Japanese machine-gun bullet through his left temple this morning.

The famed columnist, who had reported the wars from Africa to Okinawa, met his death at 10:15 a.m. (9:15 p.m. Tuesday, Eastern War Time) about a mile forward of this command post.2

He was killed in action by a burst of machine gun fire two days after he had arrived at Ie Shima. Under heavy fire, infantrymen removed his body from a ditch in which he had taken cover.3 And then:

G.I.'s he wrote about paid their respects.... Corporal Landon Seidler fashioned a handmade wooden

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1Time, April 30, 1945, p. 61.
2Associated Press Dispatch, April 18, 1945.
3Newsweek, April 30, 1945, pp. 78 ff.
casket for him. Soldiers nailed Pyle's dogtags on the top, and buried him on Ie beside the G.I. dead.\textsuperscript{4}

Eulogies and Posthumous Awards

Ernie Pyle was killed six days after President Roosevelt had died. President Harry S. Truman said:

The nation is quickly saddened again by the death of Ernie Pyle. No man in this war has so well told the story of the American fighting man as American fighting men wanted it told. He deserves the gratitude of all his countrymen.

In Europe, General Bradley put his head in his hands when he heard the news. He could say nothing. General Eisenhower remarked: "The GI's in Europe--and that means all of us here--have lost one of our best and most understanding friends.\textsuperscript{5}

At the site of the correspondent's death a crude marker was erected. This was subsequently replaced by a monument. After the war the body was moved, first to an Army cemetery at Okinawa, then to the new National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Punchbowl Crater, near Honolulu.\textsuperscript{6} Pyle was awarded posthumously the United States Medal of Merit. His name also was given to a liberty ship, a B-29 Superfortress, and a large theatre in Tokyo.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{4}Time, April 30, 1945, p. 61.


\textsuperscript{6}Ibid.

Ernie Pyle Memorial Rest Park

Shortly after the correspondent's death, friends and neighbors proposed the erection of a memorial library at Dana, Indiana, at a cost of $35,000. But servicemen and civilians all over the world started an avalanche of contributions so that something larger in scope appeared in the offing. Then the establishment of a 120-acre park in Dana as his final resting place was considered. But the columnist's widow opposed the project because, she explained, a pretentious park and cemetery would be "entirely out of keeping with everything that Ernie did, or said, or thought, or was."8

Finally, perhaps as a compromise, the Ernie Pyle Memorial Rest Park was established on Highway 36, a mile and a half southwest of his boyhood home. A marker, which is a replica of the original built at Ie Shima by the 1118 Engineer Combat Group, reads:

At this spot the 77th Infantry Division lost a buddy
Ernie Pyle
18 April 1945

Indiana University Perpetuates His Memory

Indiana University honored its famed alumnus in various ways. The journalism building there was named after him—Ernie Pyle Hall. In 1945, too, the Ernie Pyle Fund

was set up from proceeds of the premier showing of The Story of G.I. Joe at Indianapolis, along with donations from various newspapers and many individuals. This fund, which now exceeds $50,000, covers five Ernie Pyle Scholarships that are awarded to upperclassmen each year, together with a freshman Ernie Pyle scholarship to an outstanding high school editor in the university's High School Journalism Institute. The fund also is used to provide an annual lectureship which brings to the campus an outstanding reporter to visit with students and discuss problems with them.\textsuperscript{9}

In addition the Marines have an Ernie Pyle Recruit Company with a strength of 187 officers and men. Members of the unit come from Indiana, and they receive advanced training at San Diego, California. Then they are assigned to other units.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{9}Letter from John E. Stempel, chairman of the Department of Journalism at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, July 8, 1958.

\textsuperscript{10}Interview with Staff Sergeant Harold G. Davis of the United States Marines' Recruiting Office, Federal Building, Terre Haute, Indiana, July 29, 1958.
CHAPTER X

PERSONAL COMMENT

Last Will and Testament

Possibly Ernie Pyle's will throws some light on his private affairs. At least it reveals his regard for his friends and members of his family from the standpoint of how he disposed of his money.

The bulk of his estate went to his wife, Geraldine Siebolds Pyle. He authorized the establishment of a trust fund from which she would receive $100 per week. The fact that he did not leave her the money in a lump sum may indicate that he regarded her as incompetent.

Surprisingly, he did not provide too generously for his immediate family. He left his father and his aunt, Mrs. Mary Bales, only $5,000 each, providing that the trustee of the estate and Pyle's widow mutually agreed to pay that amount.

In the event that his wife died, however, he requested that the estate be divided about equally between his relatives and members of his wife's family. He authorized that his father and his aunt, Mrs. Mary E. Bales, would each receive ten per cent.

Pyle also left ten per cent of his estate to Paige Cavanaugh of Inglewood, California, in the event of his
wife's death. As has been mentioned, Cavanaugh was his lifelong friend whom he had met as a freshman at Indiana University. He apparently was not too successful and did not hold jobs very long; yet Pyle regarded him highly and had him supervise the production of the movie based on his war experiences.

He also left Lee Miller of Washington, D.C., ten per cent in the event of Mrs. Pyle's death. Miller, it will be recalled, was his editorial supervisor and the author of his biography, The Story of Ernie Pyle, which has been quoted in part in this thesis. Incidentally, some of the columnist's relatives and friends, including Aunt Mary Bales, objected to certain passages of the book, especially those that referred to his drinking and his neurotic traits. In addition, Pyle left his secretary, Miss Rosamond Goodman of Washington, D.C., the same amount, along with five per cent to the National War Fund.¹

One is inclined to wonder why the correspondent omitted his old boyhood friend, Thad Hooker, from his will. Significantly, after Hooker joined the Army in their last year of high school, they probably saw no more of each other. I could find no mention in Pyle's writing, either, of Hooker as an adult. In addition, the columnist wrote a series of articles about Florida, but seemingly he did not look up

¹Last will and testament of Ernest T. Pyle, No. 133, Probate filed March 27, 1952, office of the Clerk of Vermillion Circuit Court, Courthouse, Newport, Indiana.
Hooker there. The only reference to Pyle's boyhood friend after he left Dana was made by Wilson in Ernie Pyle: Boy from Back Home. She reported that when Pyle was overseas Hooker wrote to him from Florida.

Literary Evaluation

During the latter stage of Ernie Pyle's life, especially the period of World War II, he was successful, as far as can be measured in terms of the millions of readers his newspaper columns attracted and the number of copies his books sold. But now the situation has changed. Following his death in 1945, his popularity gradually has been declining. Apparently his books now have a small sale, and in late years hardly any articles about him have appeared in newspapers and magazines.

The question, then, arises whether his writing will lapse into complete obscurity or whether there will be a revival of interest in Pyle. The possibility of a revival, however, seems remote. In the first place, readers appear to be tired of war material.

Then with the advent of guided missiles, hydrogen bombs, and atomic warheads for artillery, the hand-to-hand type of fighting Pyle reported appears to be outdated. Many military experts believe that there will be no more weary foot-soldiers slogging through the mud and fighting from foxholes. Even now those troops are being replaced by push-button scientists and technicians.
Thus, Ernie Pyle's type of reporting seems to belong to the past, and whether he could chronicle the "sputnik age" if he were alive today is problematical. Then perhaps the newsmen of tomorrow will have a different background from Pyle. They may be scientists, too, or at least writers with sufficient scientific knowledge to interpret intelligently the atomic civilization that appears in the offing with its sinister type of warfare. In addition, there is a possibility that the common people whom Pyle extolled will be eclipsed by modern innovations.

There also is another factor to consider. If Pyle were a boy today, he might be content to stay on his father's farm instead of becoming a newspaper man. After all, he explained that he left the farm because he disliked horses. Today the tractor has replaced the horse.

Regardless, however, of how Ernie Pyle will be rated by critics years from now, he still is regarded highly by many of his former readers, especially World War II veterans. They contend that his writing was accurate and portrayed the war graphically.

In addition, as has already been pointed out, he died at a comparatively early age--forty-four. Sam Saxton felt that his cousin had not reached his peak before he was killed. Saxton believed that if the columnist had lived, he would have produced better works. For that matter, he added, some of Pyle's works already are good enough to survive the ravages of time.
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