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[Main page](#)
[Contents](#)
[Featured content](#)
[Current events](#)
[Random article](#)
[Donate to Wikipedia](#)
[Wikimedia Shop](#)

Interaction

[Help](#)
[About Wikipedia](#)
[Community portal](#)
[Recent changes](#)
[Contact page](#)

Tools

[What links here](#)
[Related changes](#)
[Upload file](#)
[Special pages](#)
[Permanent link](#)
[Page information](#)
[Data item](#)
[Cite this page](#)

Print/export

[Create a book](#)
[Download as PDF](#)
[Printable version](#)

Languages

[Español](#)
[Français](#)
[Italiano](#)
[עברית](#)
[Nederlands](#)

[Polski](#)
[Português](#)

[Edit links](#)

Article [Talk](#)

[Read](#) [Edit](#) [View history](#)

Ernie Pyle

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Ernest Taylor "Ernie" Pyle (August 3, 1900 – April 18, 1945) was an American journalist who was known for his columns as a roving correspondent from 1935 for the [Scripps Howard](#) newspaper chain, especially during [World War II](#), when he reported both from Europe and the Pacific, until his death in combat on a Pacific island. He won the [Pulitzer Prize](#) in 1944.

His travel articles, about the out-of-the-way places he visited and the people who lived there, were written in a folksy style, much like a personal letter to a friend; many were collected in *Home Country* (1947). By the war, he enjoyed a following in some 300 newspapers and was among the best-known American war correspondents in Europe.



Ernie Pyle in 1945

Contents [hide]

- Early life and World War I
- Marriage and family
- American road trip and columns
- World War II
 - European theater
 - Pacific theater
 - Death and burial
- Legacy and honors
 - B-29 Superfortress –*The Ernie Pyle*
- Quotations
- Notes
- References
- External links

Early life and World War I [edit]

Pyle was born to William Clyde Pyle and Maria Taylor near [Dana, Indiana](#) on August 3, 1900. After attending local schools, he joined the [United States Navy Reserve](#) at age 17. Pyle served three months active duty before World War I ended; he finished his reserve service with the rank of Seaman Third Class.

After the war, Pyle attended [Indiana University](#), traveled to the [Orient](#) with his fraternity brothers of [Sigma Alpha Epsilon](#), and edited [the Indiana Daily Student newspaper](#).^[1] He did not graduate; with only a semester left at Indiana, he accepted a job at a paper in [LaPorte, Indiana](#).

He worked there for three months before moving to [Washington, D.C.](#), where he worked for the [tabloid](#) newspaper, *The Washington Daily News*, as a reporter.^[2] All the editors were young, including Editor-in-Chief John M. Gleissner (one of [Warren G. Harding](#)'s drinking buddies); Lee G. Miller (later author of *An Ernie Pyle Album – Indiana to Ie Shima*); Charles M. Egan, Willis "June" Thornton; and Paul McCrea.^[3] Pyle was named managing editor of the *Washington Daily News* and served in the post for three years, all the while fretting that he was unable to do any writing.

Marriage and family [edit]

In Washington, he met Geraldine "Jerry" Siebolds and they married in 1925. He described her later as his "fearful and troubled wife."^[*citation needed*] They had a tempestuous relationship. Jerry suffered from intermittent bouts of mental illness and [alcoholism](#). Pyle described her as "desperate within herself since the day she was born".^[*citation needed*]

American road trip and columns [edit]

In 1926, Pyle tired of working at a desk and quit his job. He and his wife headed out on the road to see America in a Ford [roadster](#). The Pyles traveled more than 9,000 miles before Ernie returned to his job with the *Daily News*.^[2] In 1928, he became the country's first aviation columnist, a position he served for four years. The famed aviatrix [Amelia Earhart](#) summed it up: "Any aviator who didn't know Pyle was a nobody."^[4]

In 1932 Pyle became managing editor of the *Daily News*. Two years later, he spent time on a leisurely trip to California to recuperate from a severe bout of flu. Upon his return, the paper's journalists suggested that he write some columns about his trip to fill in for the vacationing syndicated columnist [Heywood Broun](#). The series of eleven columns was a hit.

G.B. ("Deac") Parker, editor-in-chief of the [Scripps-Howard](#) newspaper chain, said he had found in Pyle's vacation articles "a [Mark Twain](#) quality that knocked my eye out".^[*citation needed*] In 1935, the Scripps-Howard Alliance offered the chance to write a national column, and he gave up his tasks as managing editor. He wandered around the country and the Americas in his car, writing columns about the unusual places and people he met in his ramblings. Select columns were collected and published posthumously in *Home Country* (1947).

Never satisfied with his writing, Pyle suffered from bouts of deep [depression](#).^[5] He continued writing the daily column until 1942, after the United States' entry into [World War II](#).

World War II [edit]

European theater [edit]

Pyle became a [war correspondent](#) and applied his intimate style to war reporting. Instead of recounting the movements of armies or the activities of generals, Pyle generally wrote from the perspective of the common soldier. This approach gained him additional popularity and the [Pulitzer Prize](#) for journalism. Among his most widely read and reprinted columns is "The Death of [Captain Waskow](#)." His wartime writings are preserved in four books: *Ernie Pyle In England*, *Here Is Your War*, *Brave Men*, and *Last Chapter*.

After his return to the United States for a vacation, he wrote to his college roommate, Paige Cavanaugh: "Geraldine was drunk the afternoon I got home. From there she went on down. Went completely screwball. One night she tried the gas. Had to have a doctor."^[5] The two were divorced on April 14, 1942. They remarried by [proxy](#) while Pyle was in Africa on March 10, 1943.^[5]

In 1944, Pyle wrote a column urging that soldiers in combat get "fight pay" just as airmen were paid "flight pay." Congress passed a law authorizing \$10 a month extra pay for combat infantrymen. The legislation was called "The Ernie Pyle bill."

He reported from the United States, Europe, Africa, and the Pacific. He witnessed the liberation of [Paris](#) in August 1944.^[6]

He interrupted his reporting several times by leaves to return home to care for his wife Jerry while they were still married. He also had to recuperate from the stresses of combat; he was nearly killed in the accidental bombing by the [Army Air Forces](#) at the onset of [Operation Cobra](#) near [Saint-Lô](#) in [Normandy](#) in July 1944.^[7] Pyle publicly apologized to his readers in a column on September 5, 1944, that he had "lost track of the point of the war", and that another two weeks of coverage would have seen him hospitalized with [war neurosis](#). He hoped that a rest at his home in [New Mexico](#) would restore his vigor to go "warhorsing around the Pacific".^[8]



Ernie Pyle shares a cigarette with Marines on Okinawa.

Pacific theater [edit]

In planning to cover the US activities in the Pacific, Pyle butted heads with the [U.S. Navy](#); it had a policy forbidding the use of the names of sailors in reporting. He won an unsatisfying partial victory as the ban was lifted exclusively for him.^[9] His first cruise was aboard the aircraft carrier [USS Cabot](#). He thought the crew had an "easy life" in comparison to that of the infantry in Europe^[10] and he wrote several unflattering portraits of the Navy.^[11]

Fellow correspondents, newspaper editorials, and G.I.s criticized Pyle for giving apparent short shrift to the difficulties of the naval war in the Pacific.^[12] During the tiff, he admitted that his heart was with the infantrymen in Europe,^[9] but he persevered to report on the Navy's efforts during the [invasion of Okinawa](#). He was noted for having premonitions of his own death; he predicted before landing that he would not be alive a year hence.^[13]

Death and burial [edit]

On April 18, 1945, Pyle died on [Iejima](#) (then known as *Ie Shima*), an island northwest of [Okinawa Island](#), after being hit by Japanese machine-gun fire.^[14] He was traveling in a jeep with Lieutenant Colonel Joseph B. Coolidge (commanding officer of the 305th Infantry Regiment, [77th Infantry Division](#)) and three other men. The road, which ran parallel to the beach two or three hundred yards inland, had been cleared of mines, and hundreds of vehicles had driven over it. As the vehicle reached a road junction, Japanese troops began firing a machine gun located on a coral ridge about a third of a mile away. The men stopped their vehicle and jumped into a ditch. Pyle and Coolidge raised their heads to look around for the others; when they spotted them, Pyle smiled and asked Coolidge, "Are you all right?"^[*citation needed*]

Those were his last words. The machine gun began shooting again, and Pyle was struck in the left temple (the [Ernie Pyle State Historic Site](#) in Dana, Indiana, contains a telegram from the Government to Pyle's father stating Pyle was killed by a sniper). The colonel called for a medic, but none was present. It made no difference as Pyle had been killed instantly.^[*citation needed*] [Eleanor Roosevelt](#), who frequently quoted Pyle in her newspaper column, *My Day*, took note of his death.^[15]

He was buried with his helmet on, in a long row of graves among other soldiers, with an infantry private on one side and a combat engineer on the other. At the ten-minute service, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps were all represented.^[5] Americans erected a monument to him at the site. When Okinawa was returned to Japanese control after the war, the Ernie Pyle monument was one of three American memorials they allowed to remain in place.^[*clarification needed*]

Pyle's remains were later reinterred at the Army cemetery on [Okinawa](#). Lastly, they were reinterred at the [National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific](#) located in [Honolulu](#). Pyle was among the few American civilians killed during the war to be awarded the [Purple Heart](#), which is noted on his gravestone.



Funeral for Ernie Pyle.

Legacy and honors [*edit*]



The Ernie Pyle Library in Albuquerque

- In 2007 the [Ernie Pyle House/Library](#) was designated as a [National Historic Landmark](#).^[16]
- At [Indiana University](#), the School of Journalism is housed in "Ernie Pyle Hall." Scholarships, established soon after his death, are given to students with a military service record, an ability in journalism, and promise of future success.
- The producers of the film, *The Story of G.I. Joe*, which starred [Burgess Meredith](#) as Pyle, donated a major portion of the proceeds to the scholarships at Indiana.
- In 1947, Pyle's last home in [Albuquerque, New Mexico](#), was adapted as the first

branch library of the [Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Library System](#), named in his honor. The [Ernie Pyle Library](#) holds a small collection of adult and children's books, as well as Pyle memorabilia and archives.^[16]

- His papers and archives are held chiefly by the Lilly Library at [Indiana University](#); the [Ernie Pyle State Historic Site](#) at [Dana, Indiana](#); and the Wisconsin State Historical Society.
- The Ernie Pyle State Historic Site in Dana includes Pyle's boyhood farmhouse, fully restored. The site also features a World War II-era [Quonset hut](#) containing many of Pyle's army artifacts (including his Purple Heart), plus items donated by the people of the community.
- Pyle is buried at the [National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific](#) at Punchbowl on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. In 1970, a plaque was presented to the people of Hawaii to honor Pyle, by his nephew [Bruce L. Johnson](#), [Grand Master](#).^[17]
- A stone monument was erected on Ie Shima at the site where Pyle was killed. The monument has the form of a truncated pyramid, related to the insignia of the "[Statue of Liberty](#)" [Division](#), with engraved text below: "At this spot the 77th Infantry Division lost a buddy, Ernie Pyle, 18 April 1945."^[18]
- In 1971, Pyle was depicted on a 16-cent United States [postage stamp](#) issued in his honor.

^[19]

- Elementary schools near Pyle's hometown of Dana, Indiana,^[20] in Indianapolis, Indiana, and in Bellflower and Fresno, California, are named for him^[21] in addition to a middle school in Albuquerque, New Mexico.^[22]
- [US 36](#) in Indiana from Danville, IN to the Indiana/Illinois border is known as the Ernie Pyle Memorial Highway. There



The Ernie Pyle Memorial on the island of Iejima northwest of Okinawa Island.



Ernie Pyle's headstone at his final burial site in Oahu, Hawaii

- Tobin, James (1997). Ernie Pyle's War: America's Eyewitness to World War II. Free Press, ISBN 0-684-86469-X; Simon & Schuster (2000), ISBN 978068486693, p. 196.*

External links [edit]

- The Wartime Columns of Ernie Pyle , Indiana University School of Journalism
- The War Correspondent , The Ernie Pyle Center, Fort Totten, NY
- Ernie Pyle House/Library, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- Obituary: "Ernie Pyle Is Killed on le Island; Foe Fired When All Seemed Safe" , *New York Times*, 19 April 1945
- Interview with James Tobin on *Ernie Pyle's War: America's Eyewitness to World War II* , *Booknotes*, August 10, 1997
- "Ernie Pyle" , *American Writers: A Journey Through History*, C-SPAN
- "Ernie Pyle" . *Find a Grave*. Retrieved 2008-01-24.
- Photos of Ernie Pyle from *Story of G.I. Joe, 1944* by Ned Scott



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