

Ernie Pyle's war remembered 70 years later



Courtesy of U.S. Marine Corps.

Ernie Pyle, third from left, shares his cigarettes with Marines of the 1st Division at a rest stop along an Okinawa roadside. This photo was taken April 8, 1945, just days before Pyle was shot and killed. Photo courtesy of U.S. Marine Corps.

By Jordan Gass-Pooré, Shfwire
Published on: 4/10/2015

Armed with yard sticks and tape measures, Jerry and Shirley Maschino spent months in 2013 in dusty quarries around Sacramento, California, to find a rock befitting the memory of her rough-around-the-edges relative, famed World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle.

The Maschinos found and shipped to Honolulu a 1,000-pound pyramid of granite. For them it's almost as heavy as the anticipation of a ceremony Tuesday to mark the 70th anniversary of the death of the Scripps Howard columnist.

The Maschinos, members of the military and other Pyle relatives will gather near Pyle's grave at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu for speeches and military music.

Shirley Maschino, Pyle's first cousin once removed and a director of the Ernie Pyle Legacy Foundation, still has a letter that he sent her as a child, asking about her braces.

"His legacy should live on," Jerry Maschino, a foundation director, said.

On April 18, 1945, Pyle was riding in a Jeep on the Pacific island of Iejima, then known as Ie Shima, reporting on the battle between the Japanese and the Army's 77th Infantry Division when he was shot and killed.

The Pulitzer Prize-winner was buried there in a row of graves among the soldiers whose stories he chronicled in and out of foxholes in his newspaper column. His remains were moved after the war.

Soldiers' family members prayed for Pyle on the battlefield as they did for their own relatives, read one of his obituaries.

"No one has had the overall fame that Pyle did," Owen Johnson, retired Indiana University associate professor and Pyle scholar, said. Johnson will speak at the ceremony.

As time marches on, Maschino and Johnson fear Pyle will be forgotten. That's why the memorial event is important.

Pyle began his journalism career at Indiana University's student newspaper, The Indiana Daily Student.

He quit college in 1923, a few months before graduating, to work as a cub reporter for the LaPorte Herald, now the LaPorte Herald-Argus, in Indiana.

He moved 3 1/2 months later to write for Scripps Howard's Washington Daily News, where he became the country's first aviation columnist. Pyle was offered a national column for the Scripps Howard newspaper chain after three years as the paper's managing editor, a job he didn't like.

Inspired by former Associated Press reporter Kirke Simpson's story on the burial of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, Pyle wandered the country for six years, writing columns about American's daily lives. Some of these columns are compiled in the book "Home Country."

Pyle applied this intimate style of writing to combat reporting, generally writing his columns from the perspective of the soldier.

Johnson said soldiers wrote home to tell family members to read Pyle if they wanted to understand their experiences.

"Every mom would read the newspaper looking for their son's name," Jerry Maschino said.

Pyle's wartime writings are compiled in the books "Ernie Pyle in England," "Here Is Your War," "Brave Men" and "Last Chapter." Biographer James Tobin examines Pyle's life and work in the trenches in "Ernie Pyle's War: America's Eyewitness to WWII."

Although remembered as being patriotic, Pyle, much like the soldiers he wrote about, just wanted to win the war and get home, Johnson said.

"He was sensitive to his surroundings," Johnson said, adding that, despite rumors, Pyle was not depressed. "He sometimes cut through that, then the emotions soaked him up again."

After spending 29 months covering the war in Europe and a brief stint at home trying to shrug off his fame, Pyle somewhat reluctantly began covering the war in the Pacific – a decision that ultimately cost him his life.

In 2002, Hasbro recognized what some consider to be Pyle's heroism with a G.I. Joe D-Day Collection action figure, typewriter included. This may be a nod to the 1945 Academy Award-nominated film "The Story of G.I. Joe," about American World War II infantrymen told through Pyle's eyes. The movie premiered two months after Pyle's death.

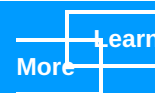
Pyle is also remembered through the annual Scripps Howard Award for human interest storytelling.

Johnson said there's no one quite like Pyle today because the nature of war reporting has changed.

"He was an icon for people who lived through World War II," Johnson said. "He would have hated the word hero."

Reach reporter Jordan Gass-Pooré at jordan.gass-pooré@scripps.com or 202-408-1490. SHFWire stories are free to any news organization that gives the reporter a byline and credits the SHFWire. Like the Scripps Howard Foundation Wire interns on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

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