

Ernie Pyle



The quiet little man traveled half the world following GIs to war before a Jap bullet caught up with his luck on Ie Island.

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OKINAWA—Ernie Pyle covered Okinawa on D-Day with the Marines. Many of them did not recognize him at first and stared curiously at the small oldish-looking man with the stubby white whiskers and frayed woolen cap. When they did recognize him they said: "Hi, Ernie. What do you think of the war here in the Pacific?" And Pyle smiled and said a little wearily: "Oh, it's the same old stuff all over again. I am awful tired of it." The men watched him climb from the boat, his thin body bent under the weight of his field pack and draped in fatigue clothes that seemed too big for him and they said: "That guy is getting too old for this kind of stuff. He ought to go home."

Ie Shima, where Pyle died, is a small, obscure island off the western coast of Okinawa. The operation was on such a small scale that many correspondents didn't bother to go along. Pyle had been in the ship's sick bay for a week with one of his famous colds. The weather was perfect, with balmy air and bright sunshine. Pyle was ashore on D-plus-one. He stretched out on the sunny slope with Milton Chase, WLW radio correspondent, soaking up the sun and gazing at the picturesque landscape and gently rolling fields dotted with sagebrushlike bushes and clumps of low pine trees. The country, he said, was the way Italy must be in summertime. That was only a guess, he added, because he was in Italy in the middle of winter. Most of all, it reminded him of Albuquerque. "Lots of people don't like the country around Albuquerque," he said, "but it suits me fine. As soon as I finish this damned assignment I'm going back there and settle down for a long time."

A young officer came up to report that the Japs were blowing themselves up with grenades. "That's a sight worth seeing," he said. Chase asked Pyle what his reaction to the Jap dead was. Pyle said dead men were all alike to him, and it made him feel sick to look at one. A wounded soldier with a bloody bandage on his arm came



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up the slope and asked Pyle for his autograph. "Don't usually collect these things," he told Pyle sheepishly, "but I wanted yours. Thanks a lot."

The operation was going so well that most of the correspondents left that night. There had been hardly any casualties and only a very few of these were killed. Pyle was in the midst of preparing a story on a tank-destroyer team, so he stayed on. He was wearing green fatigues and a cap with a Marine emblem. He was with a few troops when he died, standing near Lt. Col. Joseph B. Coolidge of Helena, Mont. The Jap machine gun that got him took the group by surprise,

PYLE had proceeded to the front in a jeep with Col. Coolidge. As they reached a crossroads, still some distance from the front lines, the Jap machine gun, hidden in a patch of woods, suddenly opened up on them. The gun was a sleeper. Our troops had been moving up and down the road all morning and most of the day before. This was the first time it had revealed itself.

Pyle and the others jumped from the jeep and took cover in a ditch beside the road. The machine gun fired another long burst, and Pyle was dead. The rest withdrew. Several groups attempted to recover the body, once with the support of tanks, but each time they were driven back.

At 1500, Chaplain N. B. Saucier of Coffeeville, Miss., received permission to attempt to recover the body with litter-bearers. T-5 Paul Shapiro of Passaic, N. J., Sgt. Minter Moore of Elkins, W. Va., Cpl. Robert Toaz of Huntington, N. Y., and Sgt. Arthur Austin of Tekamah, Neb., volunteered to go with him. The crossroads lay in open country that offered no cover. The men crawled up the ditch, dragging the litter behind them. Army Signal Corps photographer Cpl. Alexander Roberts of New York City preceded them and was the first man to reach the body.

Pyle lay on his back in a normal resting position. His unmarked face had the look of a man sleeping peacefully. He had died instantly from a bullet that penetrated the left side of his helmet and entered the left temple. His hands folded across his chest still clutched his battered cap, said to be the same one he carried through his previous campaigns. The litter-bearers placed the body on the stretcher and worked their way slowly back along the ditch under sniper fire. The battle for Ie Shima still remained to be won.

The island probably will be remembered only as the place where America's most famous war correspondent met the death he had been expecting for so long.

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