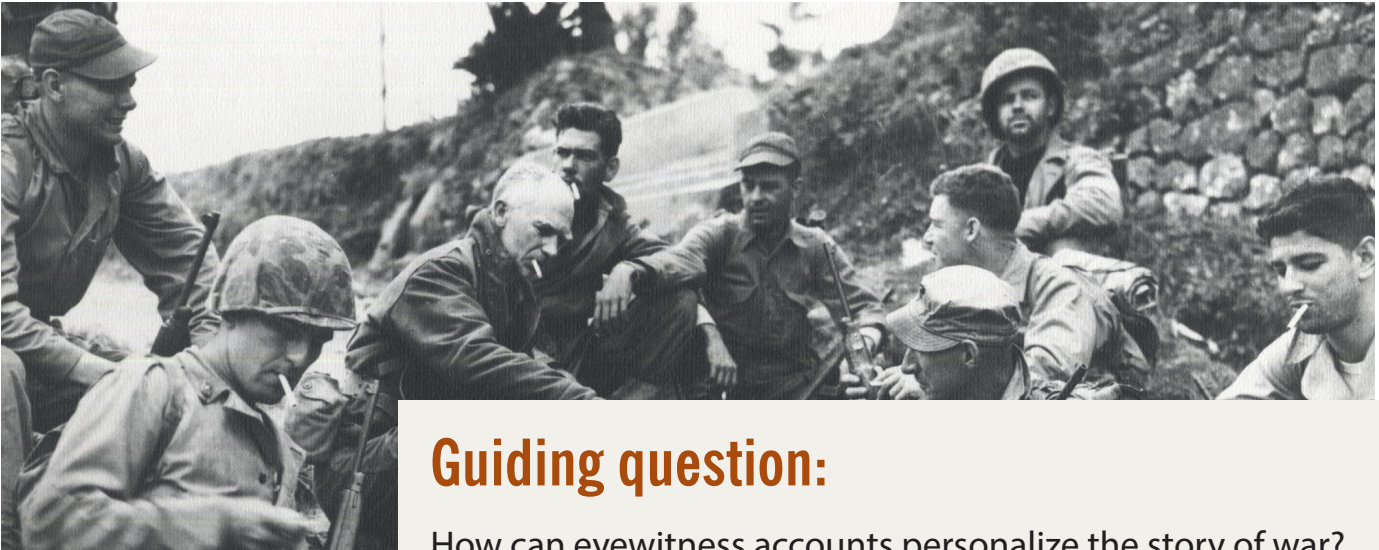




UNDERSTANDING
SACRIFICE

Activity: Words of War



Guiding question:

How can eyewitness accounts personalize the story of war?

DEVELOPED BY ERIN COGGINS

Grade Level(s): 9-12

Subject(s): English/Language Arts, Journalism,
Social Studies

Cemetery Connection: Florence American Cemetery,
Sicily-Rome American Cemetery

Fallen Hero Connection: Lieutenant Colonel Herman Ohme



NHD
NATIONAL
HISTORY DAY

Overview

Using columns written by Ernie Pyle, an article from the *Stars and Stripes*, and primary and secondary sources, students will create an eyewitness account to personalize the story of war.


Historical Context

The Battle of San Pietro was key in breaking through the Germans' Winter Line and eventually capturing Rome. World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle had just returned to the Italian front after a hiatus in the States. He felt that he was in a writer's slump and wanted to write what he felt he knew and that was the men of the American infantry. After returning from the San Pietro battlefield, Pyle locked himself in a hotel room to pour his heart into a personal piece on what he just witnessed. The result was "The Death of Captain Waskow." It won Pyle a Pulitzer and made him a household name.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Compare and contrast personalized accounts with a traditional news story;
- Understand the role of the Battle of San Pietro in the invasion of Italy; and
- Understand, interpret, and synthesize information about the role of journalism in World War II.



"I believe the impact of people in wartime is often overlooked to cover the battle strategies and details. Thousands of correspondents covered the war in Europe with a traditional news writing approach. However, World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle took a more personalized approach, often including himself in covering major battles. He became a household name because of the connection he made with the American GI and the American people."

— Erin Coggins

Coggins teaches at Sparkman High School in Harvest, Alabama.

Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

Primary Sources

Ernie Pyle, "The Death of Captain Waskow," January 10, 1944

Ernie Pyle Archive, The Media School, Indiana University

erniepyle.iu.edu/wartime-columns/captain-waskow.html

Photograph, Ernie Pyle

Ernie Pyle Archive, The Media School, Indiana University

Photograph, Herman Ohme, c. 1930

United States Military Academy at West Point

defender.west-point.org/service/display.mhtml?u=9019&i=1505

San Pietro

National Archives and Records Administration (111-CR-2)

archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.24349

"Winter Line's' Outskirts Now in Hands of Yank Infantry," December 21, 1943

Stars and Stripes

Secondary Sources

"The 88th Infantry Division in Italy"

National Museum of the United States Army

armyhistory.org/the-88th-infantry-division-in-italy/

"The Battles for San Pietro"

U.S. Army Center for Military History

history.army.mil/books/wwii/winterline/winter-II.htm

Florence American Cemetery ★

American Battle Monuments Commission

abmc.gov/Florence

Herman Ohme, Fallen Hero Profile ★

National History Day

nhsilentheroes.org/profiles/herman-william-ohme/

Michael S. Sweeney, "Appointment at Hill 1205: Ernie Pyle and Captain Henry T. Waskow."

Texas Military Forces Museum

texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org/36division/archives/waskow/sect1.htm

Materials

- Ernie Pyle Handout
- Henry Waskow Handout
- News Writing versus Feature Writing Handout
- Assessment Rubric
- Computer with internet and projection capability
- Highlighters or sticky notes

Lesson Preparation

- Make one copy of each of the following for each student:
 - "Winter Line's' Outskirts Now in Hands of Yank Infantry"
 - News Writing versus Feature Writing Handout
 - Ernie Pyle Handout
 - "The Death of Captain Waskow"
 - Henry Waskow Handout
- Print (or share digitally) the secondary sources:
 - Herman Ohme, Fallen Hero Profile
 - "The 88th Infantry Division in Italy"
- Set up classroom technology, if necessary.
- Test all online resources before class.

Procedure

Activity One: The Battle of San Pietro (40 minutes)

- Project the photograph of Herman Ohme from the ABMC Fallen Hero profile page.
 - Ask students, *What do you notice about this photograph?*
 - Play the eulogy for Herman Ohme from the ABMC Fallen Hero profile page.
 - Project the *Entering Italy Interactive Timeline*. Ask students to try to pinpoint the timeframe in which Ohme last fought. Click on “Oct. 9–15, 1943 Briefing” at the bottom of the interactive. Using the encyclopedia scroll on the right side, click on San Pietro, Italy. Read the text aloud to students.
- Point to the Battle of San Pietro, located halfway between Naples and Rome. Tell students the background of the Battle of San Pietro. The secondary source, “The Battles for San Pietro,” can provide background knowledge if needed.
- Show an excerpt from the film *San Pietro*. Play from 8:18 to 12:10.
 - Ask students to list with at least five facts about the Battle of San Pietro they learned from the film clip. Discuss these facts.
- Distribute the “‘Winter Line’s’ Outskirts Now in Hands of Yank Infantry.” Lead a small or large-group discussion with students using the following questions:
 - *What was in the Americans’ hands? What city had been captured?*
 - *Describe the terrain the Americans had to endure.*
 - *Describe the fighting the Americans had to endure.*
 - *Describe the German strongholds that the Americans had to break through at this time.*
 - *What is the Winter Line?*
 - *How would you describe the writing style of the author of this article?*
- Instruct students to look at the News Writing versus Feature Writing Handout. Ask them to read the hard news description and answer the first question.

Activity Two: The Death of Captain Waskow (40 minutes)

- Project the photograph of Ernie Pyle.
- Give background of Pyle’s travels through the Italian campaign.
- Distribute “The Death of Captain Waskow.” Instruct students to highlight or put sticky notes to denote emotional words as they listen to the column being played (audio recording available at the Indiana University website).
- Instruct students to view the feature writing characteristics on the News Writing versus Feature Writing Handout. Instruct them to answer questions two through four.
 - Discuss student responses.

- Project the photograph of Captain Henry Waskow. Read aloud to students the biography at the bottom of the Henry Waskow Handout.
 - Ask, *Was Pyle correct in his assessment of Captain Waskow?*
 - Instruct students to answer question five on the News Writing versus Feature Writing Handout.
 - Discuss student responses.

Assessment

- Students will use the following prompt to write a feature story using Ernie Pyle's personal touch.
- Prompt: *Using the information from the Herman Ohme Fallen Hero Profile and the "88th Infantry Division in Italy" secondary source, write a feature story like "The Death of Captain Waskow" about the reaction to Ohme's death on the battlefield.*
- The article can be assessed using the Assessment Rubric.

Methods for Extension

- Students with interest in Ernie Pyle's columns may read more columns and choose a battle from which Pyle reported to write their own version of the story. Pyle's "Omaha Beach after D-Day" is a great example.
- Teachers can show students a photograph of the makeshift memorial American GIs created at Pyle's gravesite. Instruct students to design their own memorial for Pyle. What would it say? What symbols would be used?
- Students could write a biographical sketch of Ernie Pyle to learn more about how he got started in the journalism business and his career before the war as a travel writer.
- The American Battle Monuments Commission maintains U.S. military cemeteries overseas. These cemeteries are permanent memorials to the fallen, but it is important that students know the stories of those who rest here. To learn more about the stories of Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice, visit abmc.gov/education and NHDSilentHeroes.org.
- Teachers can enhance students' interest in journalism and writing during World War II by exploring these related lesson plans:
 - [The Song of War: Poetry from the Pacific Theater](#)
 - [Writing Across Normandy: Operation Cobra and the Media](#)
 - [You've Got V-Mail! The Role of Letters and Communication in World War II](#)

Adaptations

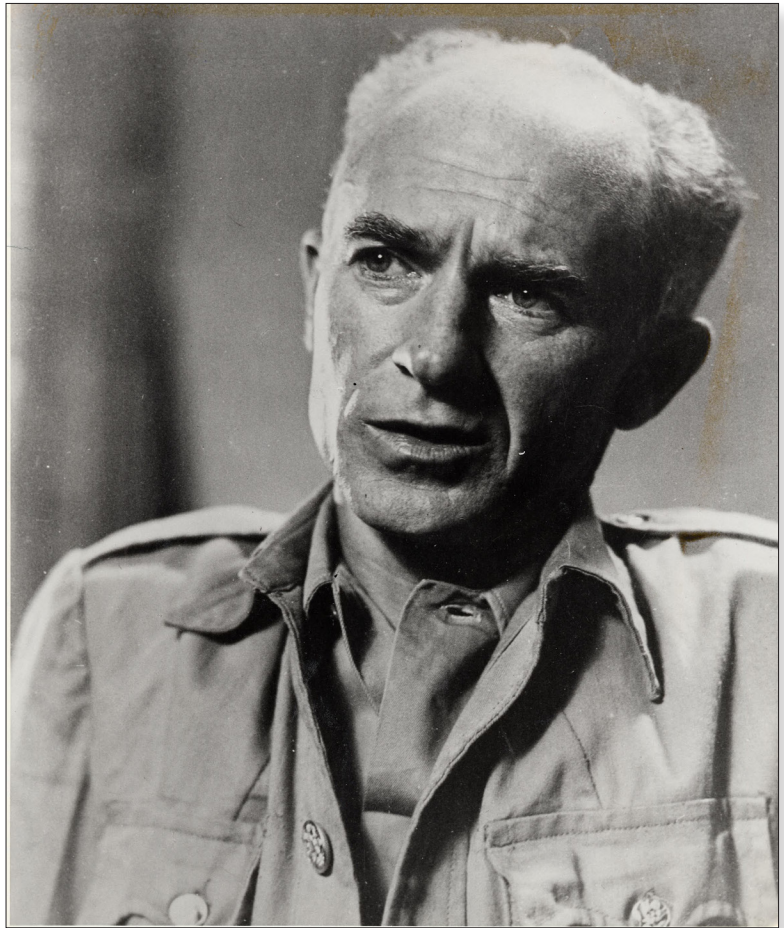
- Students who struggle with writing could outline their story or create a list of questions that would be asked to soldiers present at the Battle of San Pietro.

Ernie Pyle Handout

Indiana native Ernie Pyle was a World War II correspondent. He reported to Europe in December 1940 to cover the impact of German bombardment of London on ordinary citizens. His columns soon began running in the *Stars and Stripes*, the daily newspaper for U.S. personnel.

After a stint back in the U.S. to handle personal business, Pyle shipped to North Africa to report from the front. He reported from this area and from the Italian campaign until 1943. Here Pyle covered the sickening carnage and the amorality of wartime killing. It was also during the Italian campaign that Pyle would win a Pulitzer Prize for his wartime column, "The Death of Captain Waskow." Pyle became a household name in the U.S. due to his extremely personal and sometimes humorous stories of the American GI. Americans on the home-front were eager to read Pyle's columns, hoping for a glimpse of their loved one's name.

Pyle reported to England in spring 1944 and covered the Normandy landings in June 1944. Pyle headed to the Pacific Theater of operations in early 1945, eventually reaching Okinawa and his beloved Marines. Pyle was on the small island of Ie Shima when a bullet from a Japanese sniper pierced his temple, killing him instantly. He is buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.



Ernie Pyle. Courtesy of Ernie Pyle Archive, The Media School, Indiana University

** One of the Foundation's objectives is to keep alive the legacy of Ernie Pyle and his writings. The Foundation is, in fact, the assignee of rights in various of Pyle's columns. However, the copyright ownership of Pyle's works is not always entirely clear (with rights in certain of Pyle's writings held by the Foundation, by various publishers, and by various other parties). Accordingly, the Foundation hereby grants you the requested permission, but makes no warranties, express or implied, with respect to its ownership of the Pyle materials in question or that it possesses the rights in the Pyle materials for which you have requested permission.*

Henry Waskow Handout

Henry T. Waskow graduated from Belton High School in Texas in 1935. He was the student council president and had the highest grade point average of any male graduate from his class. He attended Temple Junior College through 1937 and graduated from Trinity University with a bachelor's degree in English in 1939.

Waskow joined Company I of the Texas National Guard along with his two brothers, August and John Otto. It was tough times financial , and the three brothers joined to help support their family.

Waskow was a natural born leader. He was promoted to corporal before the company was activated to report to Camp Bowie, Texas, for further training. He rose to lieutenant at Camp Bowie and was chosen to participate in officer's training which sent him to Fort Benning, Georgia.



Captain Henry Waskow, Courtesy of Erin Coggins

When he reported to the Mediterranean in September of 1942, Henry was captain of Company B of the 36th Texas Division. This division ultimately succeeded in driving the Germans off the mountains surrounding the tiny village of San Pietro, Italy. This battle lasted from December 8–17, 1943. This success came at the cost of 80 percent of Waskow's company losing their lives in battle.

Captain Henry Waskow lost his life on December 14, 1943, and was immortalized in Ernie Pyle's column, "The Death of Captain Waskow." Waskow is buried in the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Nettuno, Italy.

News Writing versus Feature Writing Handout

Hard News: Hard news stories move briskly through the five W's (who, what, where, when, and why) and the H (how), packing in just the facts that will give readers a clear picture of the news. Bare facts are everything in hard news, and even quotes should be focused on the facts of the story.

Feature Story: Reader interest is the primary focus of feature stories. Facts are still included but are surrounded by emotion, mood, irony, humor, and detailed description. Personal observation is vital in a feature story. Quotes must say or show something. A feature story communicates the truth (like a news story) but in a different way than hard news.

Questions:

1. "Winter Line's Outskirts Now in Hands of Yank Infantry" is a hard news story. What qualities does the article have that make it a hard news story?

2. "The Death of Captain Waskow" is a feature story. What qualities does the article have that make it a feature story?

News Writing versus Feature Writing Handout cont.

3. How is the tone different in “The Death of Captain Waskow” than it is in “Winter Line”?

4. In what ways does “The Death of Captain Waskow” tell some of the facts read about in “The Winter Line”?

5. Which article is more interesting to read? Why?

Assessment Rubric

Prompt: Using the information from the Herman Ohme Fallen Hero Profile and the “88th Infantry Division in Italy” secondary source, write a feature story like “The Death of Captain Waskow” about the reaction to Ohme’s death on the battlefield .

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
Headline	Article has a headline that captures attention and accurately describes the content.	Article has a headline that accurately describes the content.	Article has a headline that does not accurately describe the content.	Article does not include a headline.
Lead and Supporting Details	The lead sentence focuses the article and details are clear and supportive.	The lead sentence tells most important details and details are clear but need to be more developed.	The lead sentence is not clearly connected to the article and details do not focus the topic.	The lead sentence is not clear and details are not clear or do not focus the article.
Ernie Pyle Style	The article is a solid mixture of facts and Ernie Pyle’s signature emotional style.	The article contains some facts but clearly has Ernie Pyle’s signature emotional style.	The article is more heavy on facts than on Ernie Pyle’s signature emotional style.	The article fails to capture the style of Ernie Pyle.
Historical Perspective	The article contains specific historical details like dates, statistics, and facts.	The article contains some historical details, including dates and facts.	The article contains some historical details but fails to include dates and specific facts.	The article fails to include historical facts.
Spelling and Grammar	No spelling or grammar errors.	No more than two spelling or grammar errors.	No more than three spelling or grammar errors.	Multiple spelling and grammar errors.

Ernie Pyle, “The Death of Captain Waskow,” January 10, 1944, p1

Ernie Pyle Archive, The Media School, Indiana University

The Library of America • Story of the Week

Reprinted from *Reporting World War II: American Journalism 1938–1944*
(The Library of America, 1995), pages 735–37.

Originally distributed via Scripps-Howard wire, January 5, 1944.
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ERNIE PYLE

“This One Is Captain Waskow”

AT THE FRONT LINES IN ITALY, Jan. 10—(by wireless)—In this war I have known a lot of officers who were loved and respected by the soldiers under them. But never have I crossed the trail of any man as beloved as Capt. Henry T. Waskow, of Belton, Tex.

Captain Waskow was a company commander in the 36th Division. He had been in this company since long before he left the States. He was very young, only in his middle 20s, but he carried in him a sincerity and gentleness that made people want to be guided by him.

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

“He always looked after us,” a soldier said. “He’d go to bat for us every time.”

“I’ve never known him to do anything unkind,” another one said.

* * *

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

Dead men had been coming down the mountain all evening, lashed onto the backs of mules. They came lying belly down across the wooden packsaddle, their heads hanging down on the left side of the mule, their stiffened legs

Ernie Pyle, "The Death of Captain Waskow," January 10, 1944, p2

Ernie Pyle Archive, The Media School, Indiana University

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ERNIE PYLE

sticking awkwardly from the other side, bobbing up and down as the mule walked.

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

Ernie Pyle, "The Death of Captain Waskow," January 10, 1944, p3

Ernie Pyle Archive, The Media School, Indiana University

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

That's all he said, and then he walked away.

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

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

"I'm sorry, old man."

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

"I sure am sorry, sir."

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

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

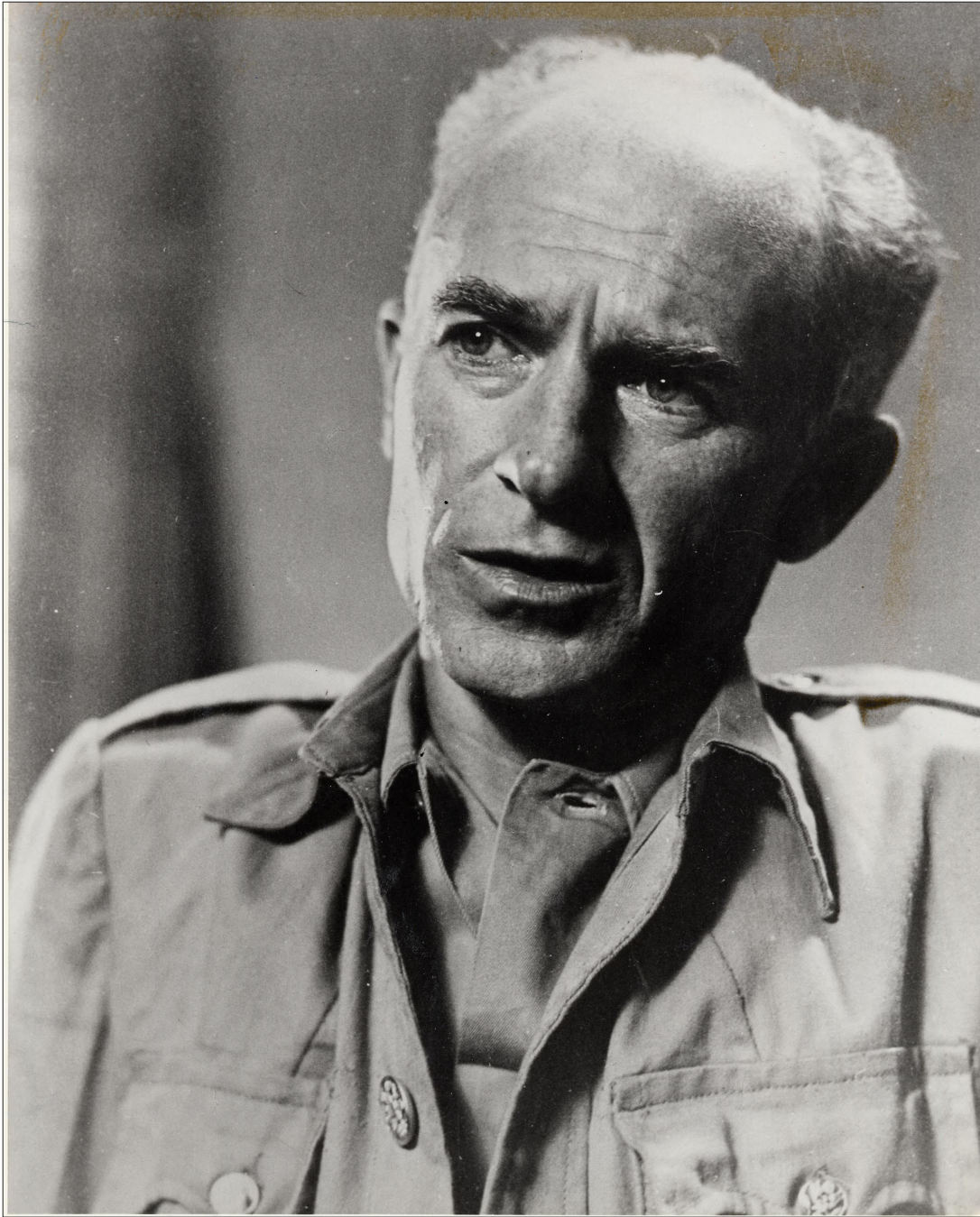
The rest of us went back into the cowshed, leaving the five dead men lying in a line end to end in the shadow of the low stone wall. We lay down on the straw in the cowshed, and pretty soon we were all asleep.

Scripps-Howard wire copy, January 10, 1944

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Photograph, Ernie Pyle

Ernie Pyle Archive, The Media School, Indiana University



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Photograph, Herman Ohme, c. 1930

United States Military Academy at West Point



“Winter Line’s’ Outskirts Now in Hands of Yank Infantry,” December 21, 1943, p1

Stars and Stripes

'Winter Line's' Outskirts Now In Hands Of Yank Infantry

By Sgt. MILTON LEHMAN
(*Stars and Stripes* Staff Writer)

WITH THE FIFTH ARMY, Dec. 20—The outskirts of the German “winter line” in Italy were in American hands today. In terms of towns captured, yesterday’s communique announced that the village of San Pietro, north of Highway 6, had been taken by American infantry troops. Today fierce fighting was reported near San Vittore, about two miles north of San Pietro and of Highway 6.

While communiqes were directing their attention on the vital highway leading to Cassino and eventually to Rome, and military staff members were estimating the remaining distance to Cassino at six miles, Allied troops both north and south of the highway to Rome were fighting their battle of high hills. In this battle, the names of towns are incidental

to the fighting and the towns themselves are falling only when the high points surrounding them are made untenable to the Germans.

In one division sector north of the road to Rome is Mt. Pantano, part of which was occupied by Allied infantrymen after six days of bitter fighting. German counter-attacks during this six-day period were constant and stubborn. They were beaten off with heavy casualties on both sides.

In another mountain mass south of Pantano, an Allied infantry unit battled for nine days to take a high point south of the hill town of Mastro Giovanna. Seven days of this battle against the well-prepared German defenses,

(Continued on page 3)

“Winter Line’s’ Outskirts Now in Hands of Yank Infantry,” December 21, 1943, cont.

Stars and Stripes

but
ne-

YANKS HOLD LINE'S OUTSKIRTS

(Continued from page 1)

G. which included rock-reinforced
sh- dugouts and interlocking machine
in- gun fire, resulted in a stalemate
ng for both sides. At the end of this
as- time, the battalion commander
ng found one weak spot in the en-
re. emy's defense and directed one of
his companies to attack it. Two
es days later, the Germans were
ed forced to evacuate the entire de-
ip ne- fense of this sector.

y. Both battles, in which American
r- troops have gained their objectives
er after days of plugging and heart-
s, breaking losses, represented little
ft distance in immediate terms. But
e these actions, coupled with others
- like them, have resulted in the
s beginning of the first German
s withdrawal along the front in sev-
eral weeks.

The frontlines in Italy today
showed a marked contrast to their
condition of a week ago. Patrols
from many battalions probed more
than ten miles ahead in many
places without meeting resistance,
although other patrols meet coun-
ter-fire shortly after leaving their
outposts. It was perhaps too early
to tell if the resisting German
forces represented a strong defense
or were merely delaying parties,
designed to stay the Allied attack
until the new German defense line
was ready to receive it. During
the day, German artillery con-
tinued to pound Allied artillery
positions and where Allied patrols

met German outposts, the fighting
was bitter.

In the hills which the 5th Army
forces have taken, the German in-
tention to peg their "winter line"
south of Cassino was seen time
after time in the deeply-entrench-
ed foxholes, many of them ten
feet deep and reinforced with rock
and timber, and in the caves
blasted out of the rock-bound
peaks. Italian civilians in several
frontline towns have reported
that they were required to help
build these entrenchments for the
Germans over a month and a half
ago. These entrenchments have
stood up against some of the
heaviest American artillery and
aerial blastings.

But now, as the weather cleared
this week, 5th Army infantry
forces have pushed their way into
these German defenses, outflank-
ed many of them and forced local
retreats. The extent of these re-
treats today appeared to point to
a new German "winter line" sev-
eral miles to the north.

If the German local withdrawals
pointed to a new defense line,
frontline commanders did not
place their hopes too high. As one
of them remarked:

"You drive them out of this hill,
and there's one ahead. You drive
them out of that one and there's
always one more. As long as they
supply the hills, we'll have a fight
on our hands."