

Ernie Pyle remembered at World War II Memorial

SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Tucked among a registry of more than 1.5 million veterans at the new World War II Memorial, being officially dedicated Memorial Day weekend, is the name of a plainspoken scribe from Indiana who died with the troops nearly 60 years ago.

Rail-thin, balding, chain-smoking war correspondent Ernie Pyle eschewed the story of the day, military propaganda and terminology in favor of simple, lyrical 1,000-word dispatches that gave readers insight into the lives of everyday grunts.

Pyle described mousy soldiers with a talent for eluding gunfire. He talked about life aboard an aircraft carrier whose inhabitants had "not seen a woman... for nearly 10 months." He introduced readers to one rather unhygienic soldier with a talent for fixing things. That soldier was "eager to be clean," Pyle wrote. "They just never give him time to wash. They keep him too busy fixing things."

► Excerpts from some of his vivid writings

From a battlefield. Dated Aug. 14, 1944:

The afternoon was tense, and full of caution and dire little might-have-beens.

I was wandering up a dirt lane where the infantrymen were squatting alongside in a ditch, waiting their turn to advance. They always squat like that when they're close to the front.

Suddenly German shells started banging around us. I jumped into a ditch between a couple of soldiers and squatted. Shells were clipping the hedgerows right over our heads and crashing into the next pasture.

Then suddenly one exploded, not with a crash, but with a ring as though you'd struck a high-toned bell. The debris of burned wadding came showering down over us. My head rang, and my right ear couldn't hear anything.

The shell had struck behind us, 20 feet away. We had been saved by the earthen bank of the hedgerow. It was the next day before my ear returned to normal.

A minute later a soldier crouching next in line, a couple of feet away, turned to me and asked, "Are you a war correspondent?"

I said I was, and he said, "I want to shake your hand." And he reached around the bush and we shook hands.

That's all either of us said. It didn't occur to me until later that it was a sort of an unusual experience. And I was so addled by the close explosions that I forgot to put down his name.

► Columnist died in the line of duty

One of his most lauded columns was about the death of the beloved Capt. Waskow in Italy in 1944. Waskow, in his mid-20s, was like a father to his troops. By the light of a full moon, miles carried down the bodies of Waskow and four others. When Waskow was unslashed from his mule, one soldier after the next went up to the body. "I sure am sorry, sir," the last man said.

The troops loved him, and he loved them," said David Stolberg, a retired executive with the E.W. Scripps Company. "He got to the core of the dogface how they were living and what they were thinking. How they missed their home and sweethearts. The boredom of war and the adrenaline of war. He got it all down."

Pyle carried on a literary love affair with his subjects, writing poetically about the most

humble infantryman, but the tragedy of young men going to war ate at him.

At first an aviation columnist and then a roving correspondent for the Scripps Howard Newspaper Alliance, Pyle began covering the war in November 1942 in North Africa. He was killed by a sniper April 18, 1945, in Le Shima, near Okinawa. He was 44, but looked years older.

Soldiers who discovered his body found with it a draft of Pyle's last column, describing the horrors of seeing the dead, in winter and summer, "in such monstrous infinity that you come almost to hate them."

"To you at home they are columns of figures, or he is a near one who went away and just didn't come back... We saw him, saw him by the multiple thousands. That's the difference..."

On the Net:

www.erniepyle.com

www.in.gov/on/historicalsites/erniepyle

indianapolis.com

www.journalism.indiana.edu/news/erniepyle

we put our steel helmets back on.

On leaving Europe. Dated Sept. 5, 1944:

This is the last of these columns from Europe. By the time you read this, the old man will be on his way back to America. After that will come a long, long rest. And after the rest — well, you never can tell.

Undoubtedly this seems to you to be a funny time for a fellow to be quitting the war. It is a funny time. But I'm not leaving because of a whim, or even especially because I'm homesick.

I'm leaving for one reason only — because I have just got to stop. "I've had it," as they say in the Army. I have had all I can take for a while.

I've been 29 months overseas since this war started; have written around 700,000 words about it, have totaled nearly a year in the front lines.

I do hate terribly to leave right now, but I have given out. I've been immersed in it too long. 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. And if I had to write one more column I'd collapse. So I'm on my way.

It may be that a few months of peace will restore some vim to my spirit, and I can go war-hungry off to the Pacific. We'll see what a little New Mexico sunshine does along that line.

WHEN ARIZONA WAS YOUNG Early jail escapes common

BY FRANK LOVE

The Yuma Territorial Prison didn't exist in 1873 when Canuto Soto and a number of other criminals demonstrated several times how easy it was to break out of Yuma's jail.

The lockup was an adobe structure. Soto and Manuel Fernandez who were awaiting trial for murder demonstrated the weakness of the jail on Sunday, Jan. 5. Using a piece of a broken file, the pair dug through the adobe wall and made their escape.

Unfortunately for them, they were wearing irons about their legs which they needed to remove. When they tried to get a local Indian to saw them off, the Quechan reported it to the local sheriff. They were recaptured the next day.

News about how easily the two escaped led to talk here about the need for a territorial prison, but no immediate action was taken. Yuma's newspaper, The Arizona Sentinel, commented on the lack of jail security on Feb. 22, suggesting that in the absence of a secure jail, the creation of another vigilante group might be a good idea.

An earlier Yuma vigilance committee hanged the killer of a wagon master in 1866, but it ceased to exist when it seemed law and order was re-established. "A well-organized vigilance committee will deal out more justice in a single year than all the law in the country," Yuma Editor C.L. Minor suggested in an editorial in his Arizona Sentinel.

The two men who had been recaptured were guilty of a hideous crime. Their murder of merchant Michael McCartney shocked Yuma in December of 1872. Knowing that their victim was in the habit of locking himself into his store and remaining drunk for several days at a time, the pair entered his building by removing a part of the wall. Finding McCartney in an alcoholic sleep, Soto held a lighted candle while Fernandez killed the storekeeper with an axe.

How the killers were apprehended wasn't disclosed in the existing 1872 Yuma newspapers. Only a few partial issues of the first Yuma newspaper, The Free Press, still exist and don't mention it. Neither does the Sentinel which began publication later that year.

The pair were arrested and charged with murder by the time McCartney had been buried. Tried in March of 1873, both were convicted. Fernandez was sentenced to death while Soto escaped execution with a life term. Whether Soto was a witness against Fernandez wasn't reported in the local newspaper. Hanged in Yuma on May 2, 1873, the execution of Fernandez was the first legal execution Yuma experienced.

By then, a new jail had been built. It proved no more secure than the earlier one. Along with

murderers William Gertrude, Patrick Luny, Quechan Que-cha-qua, and two other prisoners held on misdemeanor charges. Soto escaped on Oct. 26, 1873. Using a spike, a piece of iron, and a razor, they somehow got free. The six felons dug their way out of the new adobe jail. They also used the tools to remove the irons from around their ankles and set off in different directions.

Three of them, Gertrude, McGuire and Luny stole a boat on the banks of the Colorado. They traveled down to Mexico where McGuire and Gertrude went ashore and hid for several days in a Mexican home. Luny continued farther into Mexico.

Perhaps believing they were safe after a few days in hiding, McGuire and Gertrude crossed back into the United States and headed for the California coast. They got as far as Coyote Wells before they were recaptured by a Yuma deputy sheriff who was searching for them. It appears that Luny was never recaptured.

Que-cha-qua, the Quechan, was serving a sentence for the killing of Yuma County Sheriff James Dana. Instead of heading for California as McGuire and Gertrude did, he remained on the east side of the Colorado and eventually reached Mexico. A book by an early Arizona historian, James McClintock, has a report about this escape which seems incredible. It alleges that members of the Quechan tribe later lured Que-cha-qua back to the United States by promising him a feast. McClintock wrote that the killer's brother then beat Que-cha-qua to death with a club.

Soto avoided going to California, remaining free in Arizona Territory. He would eventually pay some of the penalty for his crime, but he had fourteen years of freedom before the law caught up with him. It was due to the efforts of the man who became the Yuma County Sheriff in 1885, Andrew Tyner.

Tyner was familiar with the Soto escape story when he took office. Upon hearing rumors that Soto might be in Tucson, the sheriff went there looking for him several times with no success. He learned that Soto had been there, but the killer was gone when he arrived.

When Tyner heard that Soto was again in Tucson in March of 1886, Sheriff Tyner decided to make one more attempt to catch him. He succeeded capturing Soto on March 18, 1886. The escapee was returned to waiting arms of the Yuma Territorial Prison.

Tucson's Daily Star newspaper announced on Feb. 2, 1887, that the Arizona Territorial Legislature was so pleased about the recapture of Soto that they passed a bill rewarding Sheriff Tyner with \$200.

Frank Love is a Yuma historian.

Elderhostel clicks with photo program

SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Escape the August heat, spend a week in the coastal community of Ventura, Calif., and learn about digital cameras and the art of photography all at the same time.

Elderhostel, the nation's first and the world's largest educational travel organization for adults 55 and over, is sponsoring a five-night six-day program, the Clocktower Inn in Ventura from Sunday, Aug. 29, through Friday, Sept. 3.

"We supply the cameras and computers — you supply the imagination," said Marcia Rhodes, program director.

Technical instruction includes how to use the

camera, digital camera software, downloading pictures, cropping and image enhancement plus how to print images, save them to a disc and send via e-mail. A professional photographer will instruct participants on how to take better pictures as well as improve their ability to critique a photo.

Tuition is \$365 for double-occupancy and \$715 for single-occupancy. Cost covers all instruction, meals and accommodations.

Register for program No. 11206 online at the Elderhostel Web site, www.elderhostel.org or call toll free at 1-877-426-8066.

Information for this article was provided by Elderhostel.

The Sun publishes free listings of senior-friendly activities. For more information, call 539-6868 or e-mail desertlife@yumasun.com.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

AARP

The Yuma Chapter of AARP meets at 2 p.m. on the third Thursday of every month at the Yuma Adult Center, 160 E. 1st St. Members also meet for a no-host breakfast from 8 to 9 a.m. Saturdays at D. Jay's Restaurant, 2256 S. 4th Ave., next to the post office. All national AARP members and guests are invited.

For more information, call 726-2290 or 726-6133.

Almost Yumans

Almost Yumans chapter of the Good Sam Club meets at noon the first Tuesday of each month at Gene's Restaurant, 771 S. 4th Ave. For more information, call 344-3820.

Ballroom dancing

Weekly senior ballroom dances with live band music will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesdays through the summer at the Yuma Adult Center, 160 E. 1st St. Admission is \$2.

For more information about the Yuma Recreation Division's activities for seniors, visit the Adult Center or call 373-3245 or 373-5243.

Elder abuse hot line

If you suspect adult abuse, neglect or financial exploitation, call Adult Protective Services at 1-877-767-2385 or TDD 1-877-815-8390. Locally, call the Yuma Police Department at 783-4421 or Yuma County Sheriff's Office at 783-4427.

Gila Mountain Sams

The Gila Mountain Sams chapter of the Good Sam Club camps on the second Tuesday of the month, both locally and in Mexico. For more information, call 343-2112 or 785-4968.

Yuma Roadrunners

The Yuma Roadrunners running club meets at 7 p.m. every Wednesday at Smucker Park, 2100 S. Avenue A. All fitness levels are welcome. For more information, call Wendy Reinhart at 305-6421.

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Armed and Dangerous

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