



STEPHEN ROTH (LONDON, 1943)

on top of each other, their sides caved in, their suspension doors knocked off. In this shoreline museum of carnage there were abandoned rolls of barbed wire and smashed bulldozers and big stacks of thrown away life belts and piles of shells still waiting to be moved. In the water floated empty liferafts and soldiers' packs and ration boxes, and mysterious oranges. On the beach lay snarled rolls of telephone wire and big rolls of matting and stacks of broken, rusting rifles.

Pyle wrote that on Omaha Beach lay sufficient men and mechanism for a small war, gone forever. Most bodies had been cleared off the beach before he arrived but their litter remained.

It extended in a thin little line, just like a highwater mark, for miles along the beach. This was the strewn personal gear that would never be needed again.... There were socks and shoe polish, sewing kits, diaries, Bibles and hand grenades. There were the latest letters from home, with the address on each one neatly razored out (a security precaution). There were toothbrushes and razors and snapshots of families back home staring up at you from the sand. There were pocketbooks, metal mirrors, extra trousers, and bloody, abandoned shoes. There were broken-handled shovels, and portable radios smashed almost beyond recognition, and mine detectors twisted and ruined. There were torn pistol belts and canvas water buckets, first aid kits, and jumbled heaps of lifebelts.... Two of the most dominant items in the beach refuse were cigarettes and writing paper. Each soldier was issued a carton of cigarettes just before he started. That day those cartons by the thousands, water-soaked and spilled out, marked the line of our first savage blow (against Hitler's 'Fortress Europe').

The strong, swirling tides of the Normandy coastline shifted the contours of the sandy beach as they moved in and out. They carried soldiers' bodies out to sea, and later they returned them. They covered the corpses...with sand, and then in their whims they uncovered them. As I plowed out over the wet sand, I walked around what seemed to be a couple of pieces of driftwood sticking out of the sand. But they weren't driftwood. They were a soldier's two feet. He was completely covered except for his feet; the toes of his GI shoes pointed toward the land he had come so far to see, and which he saw so briefly.

Pyle left Europe for the Pacific War in early 1945. He was initially astounded at the distances. The whole Western Pacific is (the) battlefield. Whereas distances in Europe are at most hundreds of miles, out here they are thousands, and there's nothing in between but water. A man can be on an island battlefield, and the next thing behind him is a thousand miles away.... In the Pacific they bring men clear back from the western islands to Pearl Harbor rest camps — the equivalent of sending an Anzio beachhead fighter all the way back to Kansas City.... It's 3,500 miles from Pearl Harbor to the Marianas, all over water, yet hundreds of people travel it daily by air as casually as you'd go to work every morning. An admiral told him that the Pacific War was like watching a slow-motion picture. You planned (an operation) for months, then finally the great day came when you launched your plans and then it was days or weeks before the attack happened — because it took that long to get there.

Another thing Pyle had to adjust to in the Pacific was a different attitude toward the Japanese enemy. In Europe we felt our enemies, horrible and deadly as they were, were still people. But out here I soon gathered that the Japanese were looked upon as something inhuman and repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice.

(Japanese-Americans were imprisoned in one of the most shameful actions committed by the U.S. government. The authors of *On The Edge: A History of America Since World War 2* [Peter N. Carroll, David D. Lee and David A. Horowitz, a professor of history at Portland State University] dissect the government's interment in so-called relocation camps [such as the famous Manzanar] of 110,000 Japanese-Americans, most of whom lived on the West Coast: Alarmed by Pearl Harbor and Japanese victories in the Pacific, white Americans focused their rage on the Japanese-American population. Journalists falsely reported that California Japanese had conspired in the attack on Pearl Harbor and planned further subversion at home.... In this disregard for Japanese rights, racism was no small motive. "It's a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific or a brown man," admitted one farmer anxious to get rid of Japanese-American competition. The commanding general of the area, John DeWitt, explained the situation more simply. "A Jap's a Jap...It makes no difference if he's an American citizen." [President] Roosevelt responded to public pressure with Executive Order 9066, which required the interment and relocation of all Japanese. Two thirds of the affected people were American citizens by birth.... Many of these victims, particularly second

generation Nisei, wished to prove their loyalty by complying with the order. Others protested vigorously: "Has the Gestapo come to America? Have we not risen in righteous anger at Hitler's mistreatment of the Jews? Then, is it not as incongruous that citizen Americans of Japanese descent should be similarly mistreated and persecuted?".... Forced to sell their property at short notice — usually to unscrupulous white buyers — the Japanese were herded into detention centers and then relocated into 10 concentration camps in remote, often bleak parts of the country.)

Pyle was awestruck afresh at the war's scale of effort and materiel. He provides a written snapshot of the teeming American activity in the Marianas Islands (Saipan, Guam and Tinian, wrested from the Japanese at great cost to both sides the previous summer) in February 1945.

Scores of thousands of troops of all kinds were there. Furious building was going on. Planes arrived on schedule from all directions as though it were Chicago Airport — coming from thousands of miles over water. Convoys unloaded unbelievable tonnage. These islands...will never return to their former placid life, for we are building on almost every square inch of usable land. Supplies in staggering quantities were being stacked up there for future use. You could take your pick of K rations or lumber or bombs, and you'd find enough there to feed a city, build one, or blow it up. Fleets based there between engagements. Combat troops came there to train; other troops came back to rest. Great hospitals were set up for our wounded. Pipelines criss-crossed the islands. Trucks bumper to bumper dashed forward as though they were on the Western Front. Oxcart trails turned almost overnight into four-lane macadam highways for military traffic.

There was no blackout in the islands. If raiders came the lights were turned off, but they seldom came anymore. The Marianas were pretty safe. Great long macadam airstrips were in operation and others were being laid. The Marianas were the base for some of our B-29 bomber fleets, and it was growing and growing and growing. Thousands of square tents, thousands of curved steel Quonset huts, thousands of huge, permanent warehouses and office buildings dotted the islands. Lights burned all night and the roar of planes, the clank of bulldozers and the clatter of hammers were constant. A strange contrast to the stillness that dwelt amidst the greenery for so many centuries. (B-29s from the Marianas firebombed Japan and dropped two atomic bombs.)

He wrote about the monotony of life on islands left behind by the war. War everywhere is monotonous in its dreariness. But in the Pacific even the niceness of life gets monotonous. The days are warm and on our established island bases the food is good, the mail service is fast, there's little danger from the enemy, and the days go by in their endless sameness and they drive men nuts. It's sometimes called going "pineapple crazy".... A man doesn't have to be in the frontlines to have finally more than he can take without breaking. He can, when isolated and homesick, have more than he can take of warmth and sun-

shine and good food and safety — when there's nothing else to go with it, and no prospect of anything else.

Pyle discovered the same sense of isolation and monotony among seagoing sailors. They were all sick to death of the...vast Pacific. I believe they talked even more about wanting to go home than soldiers in Europe. Their lives really were empty; they had their work, their movies, and their mail, and that's just about all they did have. And nothing to look forward to. They never saw anybody but themselves. They sailed and sailed and never arrived anywhere; they hadn't even seen a village for a year. Three times they'd been to remote, lifeless sand bars in the Pacific, and had been allowed to go ashore for a few hours and sit under palm trees and drink three cans of beer. That's all.

(Not to be forgotten or underplayed is that soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen broke down from exposure to the war's horrors. James J. Fahey, in his remarkable and contraband personal record of his life as a Navy Seaman 1st Class aboard an American cruiser during World War 2, *Pacific War Diary* — which Naval historian [and admiral] Samuel Eliot Morison wrote gives the American bluejacket's point of view about naval war in the Pacific — described in one entry shellshocked sailors who were transferred aboard his ship: This afternoon [June 23, 1945] at about 5 p.m. one of the minesweepers pulled alongside with five shellshock cases. We were bombarding [Borneo] when it came alongside and every time the guns fired the poor fellows almost went insane, their nerves were completely shot. If they stayed aboard our ship they could have gone mad so we had to send them to the tanker where it was out of range of the noise — four of the men had to be held and the fifth one had to have two men hold him. He was shaking so much he could not control himself, he was crying at the same time. His teeth were chattering like a machinegun. Every time our guns went off he doubled up and brought the two men to the deck with him. He wanted to get away from here as quickly as possible and you could not blame him. He might have jumped over the side. Everyone felt sorry for him.... They say shock is worse than getting wounded. These fellows shook all over, it was just like you put them on a big vibrating machine. Fahey's compassion is at odds with Army General George Patton's slap heard around the world, perhaps the most famous sound of the war, louder than bombs or gunfire. Patton despised weakness; his sympathy was not extended towards those who were psychologically damaged by combat. He slapped a battle fatigued soldier and called him a coward.)

Ernie Pyle participated in the invasion of Okinawa, the last campaign of World War 2 and the largest sea, land and air assault in history: over 1,200 ships carrying more than 180,000 soldiers and Marines. He was in the first wave of landing craft with Marines on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945:

An hour and a half before H-hour at Okinawa, our vast fleet began its final, mighty bombardment of the shore with its big guns. They had been at it for a week, but this was a concentration whose fury hadn't been approached before. The power of the thing was ghastly. Great sheets of flame flashed out from a battery of guns, gray-brownish smoke puffed up in a huge cloud, then the crash of sound and concussion carried across the water and hit you. Multiply that by hundreds and you had bedlam. Now and then the smoke from a battlewagon would come out in a smoke ring, an enormous one 20 or 30 feet across, and float upward with perfect symmetry. Then came our carrier planes diving on the beaches, and torpedo planes, carrying heavy bombs and incendiaries that spread deep-red flame. Smoke and dust rose up from the shore, thousands of feet high, until finally the land was completely veiled. Bombs and strafing machineguns and roaring engines mingled with the crash of naval bombardment and seemed to drown out all existence. The ghastly concussion set up vibrations in the air — a sort of flutter — which pained and pounded the ears as though with invisible drumsticks. During all this time the waves of assault craft were forming up behind us.

The water was a turmoil of movement: dispatch and control boats running about, LSMs and LSTs moving slowly forward to their unloading areas, motor torpedo boats dashing around as guides. Even the destroyers moved majestically across the fleet as they closed up for the bombardment of the shore.... (The) first wave (of assault craft) consisted solely of heavy guns on amphibious tanks which were to get ashore and blast out the pillboxes on the beaches. One minute behind them came the second wave — the first of our foot troops. After that, waves came ashore at about 10 minute intervals. Wave 6 was on its way before Wave 1 ever hit the beach. Wave 15 was moving up before Wave 6 got to the beach. That's the way it went.

The way it went for Ernie Pyle was that his life ended a little more than two weeks after invasion day. 'The Little Man's Little Man' was killed by a Japanese sniper on the island of Ie Shima just off Okinawa on April 18, six days after President Franklin Roosevelt died (and three years to the day since Jimmy Doolittle's carrier launched B-25 raid on Tokyo, the first American bombing of Japan). An Associated Press dispatch reported, Ernie Pyle, war correspondent, beloved by his coworkers, GIs and generals alike, was killed by a Japanese bullet through his left temple this morning. Soldiers erected a sign where he died: On this spot the 77th Infantry Division lost a buddy, Ernie Pyle.

George Feifer wrote of the battle of Okinawa in his book *Tennozan* (the name of a place in Japan where a 16th century Japanese ruler staked his fate on a single battle and which has come to mean any decisive struggle):

Okinawa was the site of the largest land-sea-air battle in history. Apart from a few sorties elsewhere, the entire Japanese kamikaze effort of the war was directed against the American armada, also the largest in history, situated off the Okinawan coast. This caused the Navy greater casualties than in any previous engagement in either the Atlantic or the Pacific. The agony and carnage were even greater on land, where the Japanese defenders were better fortified and armed than anywhere else in the Pacific. More than twice the number of casualties were killed on Okinawa than on Guadalcanal and two Jima combined (over 72,000, including 12,000 killed and missing).... American casualties were a small part of the overall loss. The Japanese story, essentially untold in America, is more gruesome. And the immense Japanese suffering was minor compared to that of Okinawa itself, a once independent kingdom of gentle farmers and traders who had maintained no arms whatever for centuries before Japan swallowed them in 1879.... The greatest suffering was borne by this peace-loving homeland, which ended in rubble and ash, its cultural heritage almost totally obliterated.... The civilian tragedy on Okinawa exceeded that of Hiroshima in every way, including the number of noncombatants killed. At least 150,000 of them died, even more horribly than those seared and slaughtered under the mushroom cloud, with weeks to witness their children's mutilation by the typhoon of



CONTINUED ON PAGE 10