



#### **Episode 4, Ernie Pyle's Typewriter, Albuquerque, NM Bloomington, IN and Portland, OR**

Wes Cowan: Our last story dives into the trenches with journalist Ernie Pyle to uncover the truth about this typewriter. During the Second World War, newsman Ernie Pyle broke new ground and became a household name by giving voice to the common foot soldier. *"I love the infantry because they're the underdogs. They are the mud, rain, frost and wind boys. They have no comforts and they even learn to live without the necessities. And in the end, they are the guys that wars can't be won without."* Pyle reported from the front lines in North Africa and Europe. But perhaps his defining moment came in the Pacific during the bloody invasion of Okinawa. And it was here too that Pyle was killed. Sixty years later, Eric Warlick from Portland, Oregon, may own the typewriter which Pyle carried during that bloody campaign. Wow! That's an antique alright, huh?

Eric Warlick: Yep. The old Corona. Let me twist it up here for you.

Wes: Wow. So what's the story with it?

Eric: Legend has it that my grandfather won it in a poker game in the 1950's or '60's from a gentleman by the name of George Pratt. Evidently, George Pratt was in the same unit with Ernie Pyle in the Pacific.

Wes: Wow. Really? No kidding?

Eric: Yep. And George had said that it was his typewriter.

Wes: Eric's grandfather was also a veteran and idolized Pyle.

Eric: He truly, I think, like a lot of the other GI's at that time loved the man and read all of his books and talked very highly of him.

Wes: So, really, I mean, what you want me to do is to find out if this is really Ernie Pyle's typewriter?

Eric: Oh, I would love it. I would love it because my grandfather, even though he's no longer with us, would love to know.

Wes: It's a simple question, but I'm not sure about the story. So much World War II memorabilia is not what it's claimed to be. But Ernie Pyle did die in the Pacific, and if this guy Pratt ran across Pyle while he was there, maybe this typewriter's the real thing. Hey, Mary. I'll need my assistant to send for Pratt's files. Do me a favor. Can you try to find the military records for Major George H. Pratt? While I'm waiting for those records, let me get started with the investigation. Let's take a look at this typewriter. It's certainly portable. The kind of thing that you'd think a roving reporter ought to use. I wonder how old it is? Okay, there's a couple of patent dates –



1904, 1910. So that means that it has to date after 1910. I'm not an expert on antique typewriters, but I wonder if the style of this machine isn't a little on the old side to have been used in World War II. I wonder what model of typewriter Pyle favored? Well, one thing's for sure, Ernie Pyle sure wasn't camera shy. Pyle hadn't always been a war correspondent. Early in his career he'd spent years crisscrossing the U.S. as a roving reporter. When the war came, he took his knowledge of the heartland and joined American soldiers in the trenches. There are a lot of pictures of him with typewriters. But I can't tell if any of them are Eric's. I'm on my way to Ace Typewriter to meet with Matt and Dennis McCormack. You must be Dennis? I'm hoping they can identify the typewriters in these photos.

Matt: The serial number's in the back. Let me get a flashlight here...

Wes: Matt and Dennis use the serial number from the guts of the machine and match it to a typewriter reference book.

Matt: So...that would be between 1915 and 1916.

Wes: You mean to tell me that a guy like Ernie Pyle could have been using an old typewriter like this?

Dennis: Well, the Coronas were made between '12 and '40, you see, so they continued making that same model for quite a few years.

Wes: I want to show some of my research to Matt. Hey, listen, there's a book down there. Could you grab that?

Matt: Sure.

Wes: Yeah, I want you to take a look at some of these pictures that I've flagged here. Okay, so what kind of typewriter? Was Pyle using a Corona like Eric's?

Matt: That's either an Underwood or a Remington Noiseless portable.

Wes: Underwood or Remington Noiseless. Okay. Yeah, there he is in the field.

Matt: Yeah, that's an Underwood 77. Probably the same in all.

Wes: So not a Corona though?

Matt: Not a Corona, no.



Wes: My next step is to try to get this old typewriter working again.

Matt: Now would you grab me that spring hook right there by that roll of wire?

Wes: This thing?

Matt: Yeah. This is your main spring. And this tightens it up to the proper tension to bring it across.

Wes: Typeface often has a unique signature or fingerprint. If this matches letters typed by Pyle, then I can prove it's his machine.

Matt: It should work now. Would you like to try her out?

Wes: Some typing teacher is going to have a fit. As I'm hunting online for some Pyle correspondence to compare with typing done on our machine, I come across another lead. It seems that the Albuquerque Museum of Art has a Corona a lot like ours. And they claim theirs belonged to Ernie Pyle. Looks like I need to go to Albuquerque. During the war, Pyle had a home in Albuquerque. Deb Slaney is the museum's curator. She showed me their typewriter and it's a Corona 3, just like ours. Wow! They look the same but yours has E. Pyle on it.

Deb Slaney: Yeah, it sure does.

Wes: Do you know how old this typewriter is?

Deb: The serial number suggests that it was made about 1921.

Wes: The typewriter I brought was made in 1915. And I always wondered, would Ernie Pyle use an old, out of date typewriter...you know, in the 1940's! And I guess the answer is, if he was using this one, he was using one that was made a long time ago, even in the 40s. Deb reads me an incredible letter from an American soldier, Sgt. Bell, written in the summer of 1944.

Deb: He says: "I met Ernie Pyle in a foxhole. Ernie and I met on Normandy shortly after D-Day...!"

Wes: When a German mortar hits, the foxhole they're sharing collapses. They escape but Pyle's typewriter is buried. According to the letter, Pyle tells Bell, if you can get it, it's yours.

Deb: And so, a couple of days later, about two days later, Bell returns to the foxhole and recovers the typewriter in its case.



Wes: What a great story. You know, Deb, listening to you read those letters, it seems to me that Ernie Pyle was close to danger all the time.

Deb: I think he did experience danger, along with the men that he reported on. And, I think he was probably very glad to get back to Albuquerque.

Wes: *"This 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 can never tell. I do hate to leave right now, but I've 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."* Deb says that after the Normandy invasions, Pyle had come back to New Mexico in desperate need of rest. But the rest he longed for never came. He'd just won the Pulitzer Prize and now found himself the subject of a major motion picture. The siren song of his work was also calling him back to war – this time to the Pacific theater. Do we have the typewriter that Pyle took with him on that fateful, final departure? At least now I know that Ernie Pyle did use Corona typewriters. And he used old beat up Coronas. But I still have got to find a document, or some documents, that were actually typed by Pyle. Here's something else. My office has finally sent me George Pratt's military records. He's the man who gave the typewriter to Eric's grandfather. Turns out Pratt was in the Pacific and served in Okinawa where Pyle was killed. There it is, right there. Ernie Pyle Hall. I'm on my way to the Ernie Pyle Archives at Indiana University to meet with Pyle expert, Owen Johnson.

Owen Johnson: Welcome to the School of Journalism.

Wes: He's offered to share copies of Pyle correspondence so we can compare the typeface with our machine. I tell Owen our typewriter may date from Pyle's fateful final days, when he'd left Albuquerque for the last time. Pyle had been on the front for a number of years and then he came home in '44. Why didn't he stay home?

Owen: He felt he had to. He had become part of the team. A. J. Liebling, a writer of that time described how when Pyle first went abroad, in 1942, he went on assignment. When he went abroad the last time, in 1945, he was on a mission.

Wes: Pyle's final mission was to report on the invasion of Okinawa. It was the largest amphibious operation of the Pacific War and one of the most dangerous.

Owen: He really felt he was part of the team that was going to be necessary to lead the U.S. troops to victory, and so he went back.



Wes: Owen gives me copies of typed documents from Pyle's final months in the Pacific. He also shows me a letter Pyle had written to his wife after the invasion. It shows just how shaken he was. This is an original letter that he wrote home?

Owen: This is an original letter. And this was written just ten days before he died; probably the last letter he ever wrote his wife.

Wes: Wow.

Owen: And he writes something like, "You can't know the relief I felt" – that is, after going through the most recent invasion – "for as you know, I had dreaded this one terribly. Now it is behind me and I will never make another landing. So I can't help but feel good about that."

Wes: Owen thinks our story may hold water. During the Okinawa invasion, Pyle had been covering the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry. That's the same division as George Pratt, who gave Eric's grandfather the Corona. I forward Owen's documents to a forensic examiner, along with some I had typed on our machine. A couple of days later I head over to Jacqueline Joseph of Accurate Document Examiners to see the results.

Jacqueline Joseph: This is the number 1, photographed from the key on the Corona.

Wes: Jacqueline has found a telltale mark on one of the keys that causes our typewriter to leave a unique fingerprint on documents.

Jacqueline: I enlarged the date, 1945, from the exemplar that you typed for me. There is a serif on the bottom and there's a serif, a curved serif on the top.

Wes: That little swoop that you're talking about there.

Jacqueline: This little swoop on the top.

Wes: Okay.

Jacqueline: And let's compare it to the date 1945, that was typed on the Ernie Pyle specimen that you asked me to compare.

Wes: The real Ernie Pyle letter?

Jacqueline: Yes.



Wes: Okay.

Jacqueline: And that's shown right here. And what do you notice about the number 1?

Wes: They're just totally different. I mean, there's no serif here, or little swoop I guess I'd call it. And this is at a ninety degree angle, so I mean, they're not even close.

Jacqueline: They're not even close.

Wes: It's possible Pyle used multiple typewriters on Okinawa. But truthfully, I'm feeling pretty thwarted. Did George Pratt even know Ernie Pyle? I'm heading back to the library to track Pyle's final days on Okinawa. Pyle had survived the initial landings, but a few days later agreed to go to the nearby Island of Ie Shima. On the morning of April 8<sup>th</sup> 1945, he hitched a ride to the site with Colonel Joseph Coolidge and a few other men. At first, the road was quiet. But suddenly, a Japanese machinegun fired and the men dove into a ditch. But what my research digs up next really startles me. I can't believe it. I've certainly got a story for Eric.

Wes: Eric, I've got to tell you that this was a pretty cool story for me. I told Eric, Ernie Pyle might have used multiple typewriters during the war. And may have used a vintage Corona very similar to the one his grandfather had gotten from George Pratt.

Eric: Wow.

Wes: And my library research had come up with a dramatic story about Ernie Pyle's final minutes. They'd come under this machinegun fire in the jeep. They all piled out of the jeep and were lying in a ditch. Pyle was dodging bullets face down in the dirt with none other than George Pratt. Pratt then saw the horror which unfolded when the Japanese machinegun fired. And Pratt says, "I was lying there wondering what to do next when Ernie and Coolidge lifted their heads for a quick look, he continued. The sniper must have been sighted in perfectly, for Ernie had just yelled, 'Are you all right?' to me when the Nambu opened up again." Eric's story looks like it was true about this guy Pratt being with Ernie Pyle. I showed Eric an image I'd found in the library. But, I want you to take a look at this photograph and just read for me the first couple a lines there.

Eric: "Next morning, April 18<sup>th</sup>, Ernie got into a jeep with Colonel Coolidge, Major George H. Pratt, of Eugene, Oregon" – wow – "and two noncommissioned officers, and set out along the well-traveled road towards the front."

Wes: Yeah. I mean, so that's the smoking gun. I mean, Pratt was there when Pyle was killed.



Eric: Wow.

Wes: So, I mean....Although Eric's typewriter didn't match any of the documents we'd gotten from the Pyle archive, Pratt was with Pyle when he died and might have been in a position to obtain his typewriter. That then says, well, to me, maybe there is some credibility to this.

Eric: Yeah. Well, wow, just the story is fascinating. I feel like I know so much more than I did before.

Wes: What would your grandfather think now, you think?

Eric: Well, I think that he would be a little disappointed, but I think that he would be happy to know...In fact, I know he's happy to know that I went ahead and followed through and found out if in fact it was or was not his typewriter.

Wes: Ernie Pyle was cut down by a sniper just as he was asking if George Pratt was all right. To the last, Pyle was showing concern for his GI buddies.

*"I guess it doesn't make any difference once a man is gone. Medals and speeches and victories are nothing to them anymore. They died and others lived, and nobody knows why it's so. There's nothing we can do for the ones beneath wooden crosses, except perhaps to pause and murmur, Thanks, Pal."*