

In an afterword, Cohen asks, "are the schools overall better or worse than they were thirty, fifty, or seventy years ago?" He responds, "I would not venture a guess" (p. 241). Cohen then proceeds to describe the pathologies afflicting schools that are "overwhelmingly black, plagued with academic problems, occasionally violent, having an essentially automatic promotion policy, and marked by sporadic academic, athletic, and social successes" (p. 243). He wistfully concludes: "Perhaps a return to the old work-study-play plan would make the elementary schools at least more interesting, if not actually increasing the students' academic, cultural, and social skills. Perhaps" (p. 244). This is a solid, worthwhile, and very readable study that places Gary's public schools and its famous "platoon system" and founder into a meaningful and understandable historic framework. Students of education, progressive, and urban history will want to read it.

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*Ernie's America: The Best of Ernie Pyle's 1930s Travel Dispatches.*

Edited by David Nichols. (New York: Random House, 1989.

Pp. lii, 423. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$21.95.)

Ernie Pyle's place as the most admired American correspondent in World War II has been long established. *Ernie's America* proves that the reporting style associated with Pyle during the war already had surfaced in his work in the 1930s. From 1935 until the United States entered the war, Pyle was a roving reporter who published a travel column six times a week for the Scripps Howard papers. This volume is a selected collection of the dispatches that were used in his column. The more one reads them, even today, the more one understands the columns' popularity.

Pyle sought subjects about ordinary life that would touch the curiosity of his mass readership and found them most often in rural and small town America. In the latter years of the Great Depression stories based on common folk had a distinctive pulling power in the American imagination. His dispatches introduced readers to people and places throughout the country whose significance could have been overlooked without his guidance. The stories blended geographical description and local history and added dashes of local lore and folkways. They captured the idiom and detail of American life, conveying in the process the hardships endured by Americans in the stringent years of the 1930s. Pyle's intimate, anecdotal, and nostalgic writing gave him strong personal appeal. In part that appeal was the result of his interesting and informal descriptive style. He wrote in such a way that it led his

ERNIE PYLE IN HIS  
PONTIAC CONVERTIBLE,  
LOS ANGELES,  
CALIFORNIA, 1930S



Courtesy Pyle Archive, Weil Journalism Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

readers to imagine they were there with him. In part it was also due to the sense of discovery that was central to his dispatches. What remarkable person would he find to write about in this town? What tale could be told of this hamlet? His popularity was also the result of the way in which Pyle put himself into the column; he became a type of unpretentious narrator who shared the language and thoughts of his middle-class readers. Among the personal things he shared with readers were references to his own home and family. His dispatches made frequent references to his boyhood on a farm outside Dana, Indiana, and his periodic visits back there to see his family. Pyle seemed to have an intuitive grasp of what would interest his readers, and these references to his own background and family strengthened the tie he had with them.

*Ernie's America* is a skillfully compiled volume. It is enhanced by David Nichols's introduction, which ably introduces Pyle in a way that increases understanding of the man and his work. Nichols should be commended for his astute explanation of Pyle's skills of observation and narration and also for his sensitive treatment of the character flaws that both Pyle and his wife Jerry endured during the years when the couple roamed about the country. Ultimately, however, it is Pyle's dispatches that stand out in this volume. They remind readers that the human interest factor in journalism need not be trite, sensational, or startling to be successful.

JAMES D. STARTT, professor of history, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana, is the author of *Journalism's Unofficial Ambassador: A Biography of Edward Price Bell, 1869-1943* and coauthor of *Historical Methods in Mass Communication*. He is presently working on a book on Woodrow Wilson and the news media.

*The Bishop's Boys: A Life of Wilbur and Orville Wright.* By Tom D. Crouch. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989. Pp. 606. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$22.50.)

Since the first public flight by Wilbur Wright in 1908, the Wright brothers have not lacked for biographers. *The Bishop's Boys* contributes a sympathetic personality analysis of Wilbur and Orville Wright, as well as a fresh and very readable account of their roles in the technological and social history of aviation.

Author Tom D. Crouch contrasts the Wrights with other members of the international aeronautical fraternity at the end of the nineteenth century. Although the Wrights readily acknowledged debts to other aviators, their own advances stemmed from a more practical engineering approach. While other experimenters studied birds, Wilbur Wright analyzed bicycle steering to determine the principles of controlling an airplane in flight. As successful bicycle manufacturers, Wilbur and Orville easily overcame the problems of construction and power that so preoccupied their peers.