

Detroit and the "Good War": The World War II Letters of Mayor Edward Jeffries and Friends. Edited by Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996. Pp. xiii, 321. Illustrations, notes, selected bibliography, index. \$34.95.)

In *Detroit and the "Good War,"* Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., reprints the letters that Detroit mayor Edward L. Jeffries and his friends exchanged in the course of World War II. The project promises to reveal much about the city that has been a cauldron of economic and social change throughout the twentieth century. Jeffries was first elected mayor in 1939 shortly after the city was swept by an unprecedented working class insurgency. He presided over Detroit as it became the nation's center of war production and as it was racked by brutal, at times bloody, racial conflict. And he left office in 1947, just as the city was beginning to undergo a complex, and ultimately devastating, economic restructuring. Surely, in conversation with his most intimate associates, Jeffries would have much to say about his struggles to govern amid such profound transformations.

Capeci portrays Jeffries and his friends—mostly newspapermen then serving in the armed forces—as exemplars of civic duty and personal loyalty. Jeffries's circle, Capeci writes in his introduction, shared a "Periclean" concept of governance, committing themselves to "independent leadership" in service to the entire community. Their shared vision pushed them beyond professional association into personal commitment, binding them as comrades who cared about, indeed loved, one another. This portrayal is moving but not convincing. For the most part Jeffries's letters are simply chatty, full of city hall gossip, local political news, and reports of the mayor's golf and card games. Jeffries's friends respond in kind, at least until June, 1944, offering detailed, gently humorous descriptions of training camp routines and military snafus. The exchanges can make for sprightly reading, and it is easy to see how they sustained friendships; but they are hardly the stuff of Periclean virtue.

Capeci's framework becomes even more problematic when it is placed alongside the larger story of Jeffries's mayoralty. Facing progressive opponents in the 1943 and 1945 mayoral campaigns, Jeffries ruthlessly played the race card, trading on the white hatred of African Americans that in the summer of 1943 had caused two days of rioting and had left thirty-four Detroiters dead. Jeffries's letters brush lightly over the race issue even in the riot's immediate aftermath. But there is no reason for Capeci, who has written two important monographs on Detroit's wartime race relations, to do likewise. In fact, Capeci needed to do the opposite, to fill the silences of the letters either with his own commentary or with supplementary documents drawn from newspaper stories, campaign speeches, or similar sources. For it is in the letters' silences—in the problems left unaddressed, the injustices untreated—that Jeffries most clearly

expresses himself. He was, as Capeci suggests, a decent, even well intentioned man. But he dreamed no great dreams for his city or for himself. He was, simply, a local politician who loved the camaraderie and competition of city hall and who was willing to call on the most dangerous of impulses to maintain his place in that world.

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Ernie Pyle's War: America's Eyewitness to World War II. By James Tobin. (New York: The Free Press, 1997. Pp. 312. Illustrations, appendix, notes, note on sources, index. \$25.00.)

Indiana-born Ernie Pyle brought World War II home to the American people. His dispatches captured the life and death of the G.I. from North Africa to the Pacific. Besides being America's most famous war correspondent, Pyle was also one of the nation's most admired citizens. When he was killed by a sniper's bullet on a Pacific island in April, 1945, his passing was compared to the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which had occurred a few days before.

While newsreels showed battles and invasions, and while Edward R. Murrow brought to America the sounds of the bombs falling over London, Pyle gave America a straightforward yet emotional account of G.I. Joe and his war. To tell the soldiers' heroic tales, Pyle squatted in their foxholes, ate their K rations, and saw them die. If he held back a little about the more horrible aspects of war, it was because he felt that their families could take just so much. The troops loved Ernie and considered him one of their own; even the generals said there was no finer soldier than Pyle and that by his stories he even aided the war effort.

Born on a farm near Dana, Indiana, in 1900, Pyle hated farming. In order to escape that confining life he enrolled at Indiana University in 1919. Although he majored in economics, it was journalism that held his attention. Soon he worked his way up to become editor of the Indiana University *Daily Student*. Before he graduated, Pyle left the university to work briefly as a reporter on the La Porte, Indiana, *Herald* and then moved on to a job on a Washington, D.C., paper.

Pyle began writing a successful column on aviation and then was made a roving reporter to write about life in America. In his stories one can detect the development of his style—his succinctness, the choice of the right word, and his ability to explain Americans to themselves. He was able to identify with the people about whom he wrote. He became an American Everyman, who described common men doing uncommon deeds.