



## Reporting War: How Foreign Correspondents Risked Capture, Torture and Death to Cover World War II by Ray Moseley.

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As a child, Ray Moseley listened to reporters of World War II on the radio. He later came to know fourteen of them, but they never spoke of their experiences and he never asked (xi)—a missed opportunity many of us have experienced with the diminishing older generation.<sup>1</sup> Moseley himself was a war and foreign correspondent for forty years from 1961, so he knows the territory from the inside out. He was posted to Moscow, Berlin, Belgrade, and Cairo, among many newspaper datelines. His book is an account and tribute to mostly British and American reporters who told “the greatest story of all time” (1, unintended blasphemy?).<sup>2</sup> He does not include World War II photographers as such,<sup>3</sup> but offers photos taken of many reporters.

As usual, the European theater gets fuller attention than the Pacific (17 of the book’s 22 chapters). By design, breadth of coverage here trumps depth.<sup>4</sup> Moseley prints excerpts from British, Australian, Canadian, Soviet, South African, Danish, Swedish, French, and Italian reporters. He excludes Japanese and German correspondents because “no independent reporting was possible in those countries” (x). This is a shame, since a constant thread in the reports is the relentless, severe censorship in occupied countries, invaded and invading Allied authorities, and the American and British Armed Forces themselves. There was to be no good news about the enemy and their truly villainous villains,<sup>5</sup> and no bad news (like, say, epidemics of gonorrhea in Italy) about “our” forces and heroes or those of our allies (218). One wonders what German reports had to say about Hermann Göring’s repeated promise that Berlin could never be bombed (53). “Allies Sink Jap Cruiser” was the headline when the Japanese seized the second largest naval and air base in the Dutch East Indies (5). When John Steinbeck referred to Herodotus’s account of the battle of Salamis (480 BCE), censors killed the story because it mentioned place names (6). But selective non-reporting by all nationals led to the exaggeration of successes and the suppression or glossing over of failures; therein lay the origins of the American myth of the “greatest generation” that lives on in books, films, and classrooms. The novelist Erskine Caldwell, husband of famed photographer Margaret Bourke-White, had run-ins with Communist censors, but claimed that

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1. I write this review in memory of my stepfather, Stanley Schaffer, who died last January. He served in France 1944–45 with the 310 US Army Signal Service Battalion.

2. Richard Collier, *The Warcos: The War Correspondents of World War Two* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989) treats the subject of Moseley’s book less fully, and new material has become available since it appeared. The impressive two-volume anthology *Reporting World War II* (NY: Library of America, 1995) reprints complete dispatches by only American contributors. Moseley’s index lists newspapers and news organizations as well as individual reporters. To my surprise, he calls the *Chicago Daily News’s* field staff the nation’s “pre-eminent corps of foreign correspondents” (29).

3. Cf. David P. Colley, *Seeing the War: The Stories behind the Famous Photographs from World War II* (Lebanon, NH: ForeEdge, 2015), with my review at *MiWSR* 2016-014. Photographers were even more acutely censored than print journalists.

4. Moseley excerpts material from the autobiographies many war correspondents later wrote to memorialize their combat-infused careers.

5. German soldiers flogged Soviet children in front of their mothers to get the women to reveal partisan hideouts (93), Ilya Ehrenburg reported for *Pravda*.

such abuse of the news enabled the Soviet Union to halt and repel Nazi conquest (94). So, too, American authorities manipulated the truth by quashing reports of “friendly fire”—even (or especially) when a thousand American “boys” died in Algiers harbor during Operation Torch in 1942 (209, 249).

Despite gender prejudices, many swashbuckling women reporters figure prominently, for example, the glamorous Boston socialite Virginia Cowles and Lee Miller, a fashion model and biographer of Picasso.<sup>6</sup> Female correspondents faced more stringent restrictions on frontline access and entry to transport and transmission facilities. Some reporters were multilingual, like George Weller, but others never bothered to learn any foreign language. One sixteen-year Moscow-beat veteran knew not a word of Russian.

Broadcast reporting features Edward R. Murrow, born Egbert Roscow. In the Battle of Britain chapter, American reporters wonder at the unflappable Brits: “Nothing becomes [them] like catastrophe” (63), Martha Gellhorn observed. Many TV reporters in the 1950s had been in the war’s mud ten or fifteen years before. Ernest Hemingway, Gellhorn’s wandering husband, comes off poorly in “The Liberation of Paris” chapter. John Steinbeck covered war fronts and later wrote a book about them. John Hersey reported from China before his *New Yorker* piece on Hiroshima (31 Aug. 1946). This contribution made him even more famous and influential than another he wrote on the captain and crew of a destroyed small craft—the PT-109.<sup>7</sup> The beloved Ernie Pyle died on 18 April 1944, six days after President Roosevelt—as President Truman publicly noted (337).

Warning signs of Hitler’s invasions of Poland and the Soviet Union were clearer than for Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, but messengers were ignored rather than shot. The *Daily Telegraph*’s twenty-seven-year-old Clare Hollingworth, hired only a week earlier, scored the scoop of the century: the Reich’s Blitzkrieg of Poland. Continental journalists figure in a chapter on the war in Finland, where temperatures fell to -43 °F. “The German Conquest of Greece and Yugoslavia” chapter notes Greek contempt for the ill-equipped Italian invaders, whom worse equipped, reckless Greek aviators attacked with antique planes and little ammunition.

The attack on Pearl Harbor should have been less of a surprise, but Adm. Husband Kimmel, Pacific Fleet Commander, assured reporters that, until Germany defeated Russia, there would be no Pacific war (109). Lack of preparedness afflicted the egotistical Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines and the British top brass comfortable in “impregnable” Singapore. The Japanese punished correspondents and other Europeans who despised “little yellow men.” The fate of interned prisoners, when word reached Allied censors, was often disbelieved and suppressed (126). Omission and distortion twisted defeats into “strategic withdrawals.” Censors elided basic geographical information even when they came from *Baedeker* guidebooks and delayed stories until they were no longer news.

Censors also excised evidence of racketeering in China; readers of *Time* magazine learned nothing of it because of owner Henry Luce’s fondness for Chiang Kai-shek’s vicious regime. Corrupt GIs in liberated France looted and resold local goods and US aid items. Reporters, sometimes accused of writing fiction as fact, sometimes got their facts published only as fiction (147). Competition was fierce, although cooperation brought swifter publication (171). Some journalists never forgave those who scooped them, as when Edward Kennedy’s early<sup>8</sup> AP bulletin announced Gen. Alfred Jodl’s unconditional German surrender at Reims. General Eisenhower’s fury and Kennedy’s silenced colleagues’ irri-

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6. The volume’s thirty-two photos include one of Miller bathing nude in Hitler’s Munich bathtub.

7. “Survival,” *New Yorker* (17 June 1944).

8. Earlier than Allied permission but later than the announcement by the new German foreign minister in Karl Dönitz’s government to his prostrate fellow-citizens and another broadcast by the BBC. Supreme Allied Commander Eisenhower agreed to Stalin’s petulant demand for delay.

tation and envy did permanent damage to his career in both the short and long term (319–23). “I’d do it again,” he later wrote, and the AP eventually apologized for its handling of the matter—albeit three years after Kennedy’s death in 2009.

His troops may have found the “neurotic and bloodthirsty” Gen. George Patton charismatic, but, as Australian reporter Osmar White wrote, this “most brilliant” of Allied commanders sadistically attacked his own recuperating men. Blustering Patton claimed shell shock was “an invention of the Jews” (211–12).<sup>9</sup> Journalists who observed his erratic, unprofessional behavior in Sicily reported it to Eisenhower, but chose not to publish it (352). Moseley pardons this and other examples of self-censorship, because “cheerleaders for the Allied campaign” helped maintain public morale, a vital necessity. He objects to “ludicrous misjudgments of overly zealous and often untrained censors,” but accepts self-censorship as “sometimes appropriate but ... always provoking doubts and controversy” (351–54). Thus Allied mistakes went uninvestigated, replacements of commanders unexplained, misbehavior of troops unreported, and the Nuremberg trials under-questioned during and after the war. The author, like others, conjectures that, had the hard-driving Patton’s Seventh Army misbehaviors been reported and the erratic commander recalled permanently, his absence from the mechanized, fast-moving Third Army might have prolonged the war for weeks or months.

Journalism has been called the first version of history, but Moseley makes clear that the importance of certain events, like the turning-point American victory at Midway was unclear to most combatants and journalists at the time (160). Hindsight and time permit a more consistent narrative and eventually open revisionist perspectives.

The reporter’s life was dangerous. In a war that took sixty million lives, sixty-nine correspondents of the eighteen hundred or so accredited to Allied forces died in war accidents or under direct fire (3). The Gestapo captured and tortured Jack Smyth of Reuters before sending him to a prison camp (273). The Geneva Convention forbade reporters to carry arms (249), a rule often honored in the breach. The much and justly maligned Ernest Hemingway flouted this regulation and others by macho acts that prompted colleagues’ complaints about the “chickenshit spectacle” and an Army investigation (257, 277–78). Robert Sherrod ran a five-hundred-yard gauntlet through shallows and machine-gun crossfire to reach shore at Tarawa (168). Some reporters at Normandy landed in the water carrying their typewriters on their heads as bullets pinged around them (236). The AP’s Larry Allen sailed on eight ships that went down under him—and he did not know how to swim (179). There were hero stories, of course, but their truth obscures the everyday war horrors.

The Germans captured John Mecklin of the *Chicago Sun* and the next day, under fire, released him. His colleagues brandied him up, he told his story, and they scampered out to file it. Afterwards, his editor informed him that he had been scooped on his own story (267). Martha Gellhorn reported interviews with German civilians, “No one is a Nazi. No one ever was. There may have been some Nazis in the next village, and ... that town about 20 kilometers away was a hotbed of Nazidom” (288). Eric Sevareid noted that the Germans “had not the faintest sense of having done anything wrong” (294). The journalists who first entered German concentration camps (chap. 18) were disbelieved by the same editors who did not flinch from gory battle accounts. Stateside overseers wanted “further corroboration” of mass murder, putrefaction, tortures, casual murder, machine-gun executions hours before liberation, experimental deaths in freezing waters, and bodies stacked in ditches or lying unburned in ovens (283; *NY Herald-Tribune*, cf. 306:

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9. A taste of his colorful rhetoric in an address to his soldiers on the eve of D-Day: “We’re not just going to shoot the bastards, we’re going to rip out their living goddamned guts and use them to grease the treads of our tanks. We’re going to murder those lousy Hun cocksuckers by the bushel-fucking-basket.”

BBC). Distressingly, Army censors worried that “unfounded exaggerations might ... provoke the Germans to retaliate” (288) and held back reports of the concentration camps’ horrific cruelties (297).

Several stories concern Americans’ blatant racist attitudes toward black enlisted men and reporters during a war allegedly being fought against German racism. There were no black or female broadcasters (apart from Tokyo Rose and Axis Sally, an Ohio Wesleyan Univ. graduate). Roi Ottley of the *PM* newspaper noted the exclusion of blacks from a Red Cross club and the separate-but-equal army brothels for black and white soldier clientele (244). As for American rapes of subjected enemies, one army commander “wisecracked” that “Copulation without conversation does not constitute fraternization” (294). How droll.

American authorities in Japan tried to censor eyewitness reports of radiation poisoning and tens of thousands of deaths caused by the two atomic-bomb detonations. The Australian Wilfred Burchett of the UK tabloid *Daily Express* filed the first reports from Hiroshima reporting what he saw there, while his colleagues rushed to Tokyo to witness the more glorious Japanese surrender. Despite threats from Japanese soldiers, American censors, and Manhattan Project officers who claimed no radiation sickness had affected the Japanese, Burchett reported what he had seen. His camera disappeared, MacArthur expelled him, and his colleagues fell victim to false Allied propaganda—despite their own lying eyes.<sup>10</sup>

Problematic issues of censorship and uncritical reporting produce both a recognized problem and an under-analyzed subject.<sup>11</sup> In subsequent wars, hot and cold, advances in communication technologies have made it possible for information to move from battlefields to TVs, the internet, and smart phones almost instantaneously, unfiltered by Second World War lines of communication.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the last surviving reporter chronicled here was tough Clare Hollingworth. She who had scooped the invasion of Poland and exposed the British spy and defector to the Soviet Union, Kim Philby. She reported on wars in Algeria, China, Aden, India, and Vietnam, as well as the vicious suppression of free speech in Tiananmen Square in 1989. She died at age 105 in January 2017, too late for Moseley’s obits. Reporter Bill Downs, while advancing under German fire, once told the cranky Walter Cronkite, “Just remember. These are the good old days” (271).

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10. Moseley includes a chapter on his reporters’ postwar careers. Burchett, a man sympathetic to Communism, later served in Greece, Berlin, China, North Korea, and Moscow. During the Korean War, he scored many scoops. At sixty, he traveled with the Viet Cong and praised Pol Pot’s murderous Cambodian regime. Eventually, he condemned it and was added to their death-list. He died in exile in Bulgaria. Intrepid Martha Gellhorn covered the Viet Nam War, the Six-Day War, and civil wars in Central Africa (361).

11. Censors forbade correspondents from writing about Japanese suicide plane attacks (335).

12. Still, the American military “embedded” reporters in the Iraq War in order to control access and reward favorable reporting. Such “embeds” signed contracts with the military and were expected to help win the “information war.”