

## Ernest Hemingway and His Unconventional Role in World War II

Anders Greenspan, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, USA

### Abstract

While Ernest Hemingway is often viewed as one of the United States' greatest writers, the heterogeneous features of his life experience can surprise readers who are simply familiar with his literary production. Although he officially served as a correspondent in World War II, Hemingway wrote only five articles during his time in Europe in 1944 and 1945. Much of his time away from writing was spent participating in irregular warfare. While Hemingway officially denied the charges made against him by other correspondents, Hemingway's private correspondence reveals that he did, in fact, actively engage in the war effort. Indeed, as a reward for his heroics, Hemingway was decorated with the Bronze Star Medal, the highest military award available to a civilian. The official citation credited Hemingway with courage while bringing the reality of war to his readers. His battlefield heroics could not be mentioned in the citation because it was against the Geneva Convention for correspondents to engage in military actions. There is no doubt, however, that such actions did take place. While Hemingway's actions were illegal, they undoubtedly helped the US forces advance in France. Sundry skills, from his knowledge of French to his ability to read maps and understand terrain, proved highly useful to US military commanders in the area.

*Keywords:* Hemingway, World War II, irregular warfare

It is customary to regard Ernest Hemingway as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, part of the group of men whom Gertrude Stein called the “lost generation.” Hemingway did not necessarily agree with that characterization, however. In a letter to his biographer Carlos Baker, Hemingway wrote, “I believed there was no such thing as a lost generation. I thought beatup, maybe ... in many ways. But damned if we were lost except for the deads ... and the certified crazies ... We were a very solid generation though without education (some of us). But you could always get it.”<sup>1</sup> Hemingway made his reputation the years following his service with the Red Cross in World War I and later had experience in the Spanish Civil War. He would again see action in World War II, proving, indeed, that he was not part of a lost group of men, but rather of a contingent of men who were very alive and very active in promoting their ideals and beliefs. Indeed, Hemingway’s actions in World War II, though often criticized, did show a calmness under fire and a willingness to risk his life in support of the Allied cause. Far from the scared young man who first experienced war on the Italian Front in World War I, Hemingway had become a creature of war and had grown accustomed to it. As he wrote to David Garnett in 1938, war, in his experience, was not always horrible: “When people know what they are fighting for, or at least are sure of themselves, it is not a gloomy business. It is gloomy to be sent out to die on the Somme or at Passchendaele in . . . un-understandable idiocy.”<sup>2</sup>

In the Second World War, Hemingway chased German submarines off the coast of Cuba until he went to Europe to serve as a war correspondent and an unconventional soldier. Yet, as could be expected with Hemingway, his service was not ordinary nor was his behavior. He was already a famous writer returning to his journalistic roots and enjoying a celebrity status that suited his massive ego. During his time covering the war in Europe, he broke the rules for actions by a correspondent in wartime as his private correspondence indicates, although he denied any wrongdoing when he was brought up on charges. As was often the case with Hemingway, he dealt with the war on his own terms, ultimately winning a Bronze Star, the highest military award for which civilians are eligible.

By the time World War II began for the United States in 1941, Hemingway was living in Cuba with his third wife, Martha Gelhorn. More prescient than most, Hemingway had long warned about the dangers of fascism, starting with his support for the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War. He believed that if the Germans and Italians were not stopped in Spain, they would eventually cause greater problems in the years to come. An alliance between these two countries and the Japanese had created the Axis powers, an alliance that had been successful in seizing land across Europe and in Asia.

Although Hemingway spent less than a year in Europe, he saw a considerable amount of fighting and conveyed his experiences to readers back home who were anxious to learn about the war’s progress. His talent as a writer of fiction made his reports from the front lines more exciting than those of a typical news correspondent, as he added colorful commentary along with the recounting of the events of the war.

Yet Hemingway, now in his forties, did not immediately jump into the fray, as he had done in years past. As he wrote to his brother Leicester in August 1942, “I am delighted to hear that your older brother is being heavily criticized by all the desk polishers in Washington for

---

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Carlos Baker, Easter Sunday 1951, Box 10, Folder 4, Ernest Hemingway Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Hemingway to David Garnett, postmarked 1 November 1938, Box 3 Folder 5, Hemingway Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

taking no part in the war. Please encourage all such rumors as much as possible. I only enter wars according to my horoscope and the signs are not right at the moment.”<sup>3</sup> At this point in the war, Hemingway was living comfortably at his home, Finca Vigía, outside of Havana, Cuba. Initially, he was interested in setting up a group that would go after Nazi spies working in Havana. There had been a similar type of organization that he had worked with in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War. He also wanted to use his boat, the *Pilar*, as a submarine hunter. He would wait until the German submarine surfaced and they attempted to board his vessel, at which time his men would open up with machine guns and try to sink the ship with the bazooka they had on board. As Hemingway wrote to Alfred Rice, “in 1942–3 I never left Cuba at anytime except to go to sea on the most difficult type of mission you could be assigned in counter espionage and anti-submarine work ... in 1944 I was at sea until the subs left, going to sea each time one was signaled in our area.”<sup>4</sup> His wife Martha wrote from London urging him to give up his submarine hunting and come to Europe to witness what everyone knew would be coming – the invasion of the continent.

Martha Gelhorn left Cuba in the fall of 1943, after taking as much abuse as she could stand from Hemingway. She had vowed not to return to the island – a promise that she made good on, starting an affair with General John Gavin and effectively ending her marriage to Hemingway. Life in Cuba had revolved around him, and Martha, much like the woman who’d become his next wife, Mary, felt that she never fully fit into the life at the finca. To add insult to injury, Hemingway had decided to work for Martha’s employer, *Collier’s*, who chose him as their official war correspondent and not her. Shortly after arriving in Britain, Hemingway was in a car accident, and while he was laid up in the hospital Martha came to see him to essentially say that their marriage was over. He had reserved a room for her next to his at the Dorchester Hotel in London, but she rejected his offer and instead took a room on a higher floor. Hemingway took advantage of his new-found freedom by starting romance with a reporter named Mary Welsh, whom he met through the writer Irwin Shaw (Lynn, 1987, 508–509).

Still suffering the effects of his car accident – a head wound and sore knees – Hemingway boarded the transport to France the night before D-Day. His article in *Collier’s* gave the impression that he had gone ashore with the troops, when fact he had gone back to the transport ship after the men had landed. Ultimately, he wrote his article from the safety of the Dorchester Hotel in London. Hemingway still needed another six weeks of convalescence before he would be able to join the troops fighting in France. After joining the men, he again suffered a head injury that had lingering effects, such as headaches and ringing in the ears (Lynn, 1987, 512–513). In the article, entitled “Voyage to Victory,” published in *Collier’s* on 22 July 1944, Hemingway recounted his activities on D-Day and the landing at Fox Green Beach. This was Hemingway’s third war after World War I and the Spanish Civil War; as a result, he was one of the most experienced men in the field, although he held no commission in the US armed forces. As he described it “we came roaring in on the beach, I sat high on the stern to see what we were up against. I had the glasses dry now and I took a good look at the shore. The shore was coming toward us awfully fast, and in the glasses it was coming even faster.” As it turned out, the beach was mined, so they needed to abort the landing, picking up wounded men on the way back to the destroyer, and dropping Hemingway off there as well.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Leicester Hemingway, 12 August 1942, Box 3 Folder 9, Ernest Hemingway Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Alfred Rice, 15 December 1948 in Carlos Baker, ed. *Ernest Hemingway Selected Letters, 1917–1961*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1981, 654–655; Kenneth S. Lynn, *Hemingway*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, 498, 502–504.

Since there was much uncertainty about the landings, most correspondents were prevented from going ashore on June sixth.<sup>5</sup>

Hemingway ultimately arrived in France and later recounted his experiences during the liberation of Paris for his readers. As usual, his skills as a storyteller helped him to convey what happened, making his accounts a far more interesting read than one might find in a local newspaper: “Never can I describe the emotions I felt on the arrival of the armored column of General Leclerc southeast of Paris. Having just returned from a patrol which scared the pants off of me ... I was informed that the general himself was just down the road and anxious to see us.”<sup>6</sup> In reality, Leclerc was not interested in seeing Hemingway, since as the writer later told his readers, the general told him to buzz off. As the day of liberation approached, Hemingway wrote, “We knew there would be fighting the next day by the screen that the German army had left. But I did not anticipate any heavy fighting, since we knew the German dispositions and could attack or by-pass them accordingly, and I assured our guerrillas that if they only would be patient, we would have the privilege of entering Paris with soldiers ahead of us instead of behind us.”<sup>7</sup>

He continued to describe the scene to his readers: “The French armor operated beautifully. On the road to Toussus le Noble, where we knew there were Germans with machine guns in the wheat shocks, the tanks deployed and screened both of our flanks and we saw them rolling ahead through the cropped wheat field as though they were on maneuvers. No one saw the Germans until they came out with their hands up after the tanks had passed.”<sup>8</sup> Yet for Hemingway, the most important thing was getting to Paris safely. As he commented, “my own war aim ... was to get into Paris without being shot. Our necks had been out for a long time. Paris was going to be taken.”<sup>9</sup>

Hemingway wrote to Mary Welsh on 31 July and 1 August 1944 from Villebandon and Hambye in France detailing his experiences with the infantry, which he said he preferred to the armored forces on account of the dust. He missed her but was unable to convey his true feelings, given that he knew that many people would be able to read the letter before it eventually reached her. He wrote her “Am very happy when I see you. I make as good a war as I can and I understand infantry but am hearing *much* [emphasis original] new stuff. Am very happy at Front but that is not loving.”<sup>10</sup> Later he shared his thoughts on the battle with her: “I went over to the big lot I was supposed to be with and asked permission to stay with the Division as long as we are fighting and then catch up with the other people. We are fighting the most important part now and I do not want to leave because timeliness means nothing and like to finish what you start.”<sup>11</sup>

With the liberation of Paris, Hemingway took up residence at the Ritz Hotel and drank copiously of the alcohol stored in its cellars. Many visitors, including a young J. D. Salinger came to visit the world-famous writer. Hemingway went to visit many of his old haunts from his time in Paris in the 1920s, although, as he wrote to Mary in August 1944, “but it is all so

---

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “Voyage to Victory,” 22 July 1944 in *Collier's*, reprinted in Ernest Hemingway (Sean Hemingway, ed.), *Hemingway on War*, New York: Scribner, 2003, 321; Michael Reynolds, *Hemingway: The 1930s Through the Final Years*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999, 379.

<sup>6</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “We Came to Paris,” 7 October 1944 in *Collier's*, reprinted in *Hemingway on War*, 327.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “We Came to Paris,” 7 October 1944 in *Collier's*, reprinted in *Hemingway on War*, 328.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “We Came to Paris,” 7 October 1944 in *Collier's*, reprinted in *Hemingway on War*, 329.

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “We Came to Paris,” 7 October 1944 in *Collier's*, reprinted in *Hemingway on War*, 332.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Mary Welsh, 31 July and 1 August 1944 in Baker, 559.

<sup>11</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Mary Welsh, 31 July and 1 August 1944 in Baker, 560.

improbable that you feel like you have died and it is all a dream.” He tried to convince Mary to come to Paris so they could be together; he admitted that they had not known each other very long, but even in that short time period he had gained a lot of affection for her.<sup>12</sup>

In 1956 Hemingway wrote a fictional short story, “A Room on the Garden Side,” about events at the Ritz Hotel in Paris during World War II. The 2,100-word manuscript described a writer named Robert who was referred to by his admirers as “Papa,” Hemingway’s popular nickname. First published in 2018, this story had previously been viewed only by scholars (Haag, 2018, A1). It was one of five stories that Hemingway penned about the war dealing with subjects such as the irregular warfare in which he had participated en route to Paris. As he wrote to his editor Charles Scribner, Jr. in August 1956, “I suppose that they are a little shocking since they deal with irregular troops and combat and with people who actually kill other people ... they are probably very dull stories but some are very funny I think. Anyway you can always publish them after I am dead. I have five more that I am going to write now.”<sup>13</sup>

In October 1944, Hemingway was summoned to a hearing of the Inspector General, Third Army, regarding his conduct while in the field during the fighting to take Paris. The charges were that he had removed the correspondent’s insignia from his uniform, had assumed command of some of the Free French partisans, had conducted patrols in the area, and that there were weapons stored in his room. Many of the charges had been made by fellow journalists who were perhaps jealous of Hemingway’s fame and saw him as their major competitor. All of these issues could result in a violation of the Geneva Convention’s regulations governing the conduct of journalists in a war zone. Hemingway was able to talk his way out of the charges by saying that he had merely provided advice when asked by the free French forces, he had removed his tunic when it was hot, and the weapons had been stored in his room because there was no other place to store them (Lynn, 1987, 518).

In his recounting of the events of the hearing, Hemingway praised the Inspector General. The incident, which had become the subject of allegations by fellow correspondents, had also invited protests by neutral power signatories of the Geneva Convention. “Allegations were that [I] commanded troops, removed insignia, defended town, ran patrols, had full Col as chief of staff, and other crap. I.G. very sound and understanding,” Hemingway wrote.<sup>14</sup> He clearly lied to save himself embarrassment as well as to protect those in command who had allowed him to perform these actions. While many have criticized such actions as going beyond acceptable behavior by a correspondent, Hemingway’s activities were quite useful and, without question, they aided in the success of the military operations in which he was involved (Dearborn, 2018, 469). Commanders made use of Hemingway’s military knowledge and experience, as well as his language skills and knowledge of the terrain. Colonel David Bruce, who was with Hemingway in his exploits during the move into Paris, concluded that Hemingway was a “born leader of men, and, in spite of his strong independence of character [was] a highly disciplined individual.” (Reynolds, 2017, 164, 171; Reynolds, 1999, 386)

There were many stories surrounding Hemingway’s actions. While his actual role in combat is hard to verify, and there is no evidence that he killed any Germans, his behind-the-lines activities are indisputable (Mort, 2016, 202). In many ways, such actions suited Hemingway’s view of himself as a warrior, but he was careful not admit to doing anything

---

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Mary Welsh, 27 August 1944, in Baker, 564–565.

<sup>13</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Charles Scribner, Jr., 14 August 1956, in Baker, 868.

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Colonel Charles T. Lanham, 8 October 1944 in Baker, 572–73.

that would have been illegal for him to do. Yet in his private correspondence, Hemingway admitted that he did do more than simply offer advice and referred to the French partisans (the Maquis) as “his” men. Hemingway recounted his experiences during this period to Soviet author Konstantin Simonov in a letter written in June 1946 from Finca Vigía: “I tried to be useful through knowing French and the country and being able to work ahead with the Maquis. This was a good life and you would have enjoyed it ... Andre Malraux came to see me and asked how many men I commanded. I told him never more than 200 at the most and usually between 14 and 60.”<sup>15</sup>

Further evidence of Hemingway’s actions come from a letter he wrote to Mary Welsh: “[O]n nineteenth [of August 1944] made contact with group of Maquis who placed themselves under my command. Because so old and ugly looking I guess. Clothed them with cavalry recon outfit which had been killed at entrance to Rambouillet.”<sup>16</sup> Clearly, he was doing more here than simply offering advice, which gives credibility to the charges made against him. He also mentioned his actions with the Maquis to his son Patrick in a letter written in September 1944: “have been with an Infantry Division . . . except for the time that commanded a French Maquis outfit (while temporarily detached from being a correspondent) that was the best time of all but can’t write you about it will have to tell you.”<sup>17</sup>

Confirmation of Hemingway’s command of the Maquis unit also came from a letter he wrote to General R. O. Barton, whom he addressed as “Tubby.” He wrote “I am eternally grateful to you for turning me loose that time so I could go on and into Paris so I had a chance to have a command, no matter how irregular, and do something useful and fight into the town I love the best in the world.” He continued, “I could not have done any of things I was happy about in the war without you backing me. And you backed me afterwards when we found out that things were illegal, technically, that should not be in war.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, his employer *Collier’s* heard about his improper actions during the fighting for Paris and did not pay his expenses: “they found out from squealers that I had fought. I was using [sic] my own money that I had in England and France . . . so the war cost me 12 G. in 1944–45.”<sup>19</sup>

For his actions, Hemingway was awarded the Bronze Star after the war. As he wrote to Alfred Rice in December 1948, “I was decorated with the Bronze Star which was the highest piece of junk they could give a civilian and an irregular and was proposed for various worthwhile things which could not be given due to my irregular status and the fact they would contravene the Geneva Convention.”<sup>20</sup> The official account of the award, which he received at the American Embassy in Havana in June 1947, gave no mention of Hemingway’s leading of an irregular force, his work as an interrogator, or the setting up of an operations center, but rather referenced his work under fire in the front lines in order to bring the story of the fighting to his readers (Reynolds, 2017, 167). The Bronze Star is the highest award available to civilians serving with armed forces in combat areas, but Hemingway would have liked to have received a Distinguished Service Cross. This more illustrious award, however, was available only to military personnel (Reynolds, 2017, 202).

---

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Konstantin Simonov, 20 June 1946, in Baker, 607.

<sup>16</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Mary Welsh, 27 August 1944, in Baker, 564.

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Patrick Hemingway, 15 September 1944 in Baker, 570.

<sup>18</sup> Ernest Hemingway to General R.O. Barton, 9 June 1948 in Baker, 639.

<sup>19</sup> Ernest Hemingway to General R.O. Barton, 9 June 1948 in Baker, 640.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Alfred Rice 15 December 1948 in Baker, 656.

In a November 1944 article published in *Collier's*, Hemingway described his experiences as the unit that he was with advanced toward Germany, preparing for the Battle of the Huertgen Forest. For security reasons, he did not specify which unit or exactly where it was located. Entitled “War in the Siegfried Line,” the article recounts an exciting trek into German territory. As he wrote, “the rat race went on again through rolling, forested country. Sometimes we would be half an hour behind the retreating enemy’s mechanized force. Sometimes we would get up to within five minutes of them.”<sup>21</sup> He noted the sounds as well as the sights. As they came close to Germany he noted, “There was a heavy, familiar roar from the creek valley below as the bridge was blown, and beyond the back cloud of smoke and debris that rose, you saw two enemy half-tracks tearing up the white road that led into the German hills.”<sup>22</sup>

Hemingway set the scene well for his readers, using his literary talents to provide them with a detailed look at the conditions the men endured. “The weather had broken. It was cold and raining and blowing half a gale, and ahead of us was the dark forest wall of the Schnee Eifel range where the dragon lived, and behind us on the first hill behind was a German reviewing stand that had been built for high officers to occupy ... we were hitting it on the point that the Germans had chosen to prove, in sham battles, that it was impregnable.”<sup>23</sup> Hemingway used his story to inform the readers about what often happened in combat. Like many of his articles, this one demonstrated the confusion that often occurred when troops were engaged in the field – contrasting that with the commonly perceived belief that wars were well organized affairs with clear objectives.

In a letter to his son Patrick, nicknamed Mouse and various varieties of that word, Hemingway was frank: “We are in the middle of a terrific damned battle Mousie – that I hope will finish off the Kraut Army and end the war – and I cannot leave until our phase of it is over. That is why I didn’t get back and I couldn’t tell you before hand. Then I got in some trouble accused of commanding irregular troops ... Anyway it came out all right. We’ve had a tough time Mousler. Very tough. Now tougher than ever ... Mouse big fight today in the Forest. Forest is about same as back of Clark’s Fork – trees as thick as thickest.”<sup>24</sup> He also filled his son in on events in Paris following the liberation: “Paris beautiful but still had bad chow situation. Bicycle racing going on. Very fine new riders ... Papa still living at the Ritz (joint we took) when back in town. Town so lovely but with the exchange 50 to 1 dollar ... horribly expensive.” He also discussed the new paintings by Picasso and other artists that had been finished during the war, commenting that as a result of the German occupation they had nothing else to do except stay home and paint.<sup>25</sup>

While Hemingway indicated that he prayed during the First World War, especially after he was injured, that was not the case for World War II. As he wrote, “[t]his war got through without praying once. Times a little bad sometimes too. But felt that haveing [sic] forfeited any right to ask for these intersessions would be absolutely crooked to ask for same no matter how scared.”<sup>26</sup> Hemingway claimed he had stopped praying for himself in Madrid in 1937

<sup>21</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “War in the Siegfried Line,” 18 November 1944 in *Collier's* reprinted in *Hemingway on War*, 335.

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “War in the Siegfried Line,” 18 November 1944 in *Collier's* reprinted in *Hemingway on War*, 335.

<sup>23</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “War in the Siegfried Line,” 18 November 1944 in *Collier's* reprinted in *Hemingway on War*, 336.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Patrick Hemingway, 19 November 1944, in Baker, 576–577.

<sup>25</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Patrick Hemingway, 19 November 1944, in Baker, 577.

<sup>26</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Thomas Welsh, 19 June 1945 in Baker, 592.

during the Spanish Civil War, “when other people were having such a time being destroyed by shell fire that it seemed egotistical and wicked to pray for one’s self.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, as he later wrote to Robert Morgan Brown, “I remember asking the chaplain one time if he believed this shit we were fed that there were no atheists in fox holes and him saying, ‘No sir, Mr. Hemingway. No[t] since I came to know you and the Colonel sir.’”<sup>28</sup>

In his third war, Hemingway was not fearful – he was actually enjoying himself. During the First World War Hemingway found shelling to be something that would “make me quite sick to my stomach.”<sup>29</sup> But with his experience in the Spanish Civil War and now World War II he learned to relax and accept the dangers of battle. He related a story to Robert Morgan Brown about events when he was involved in the Battle of the Bulge in Luxembourg. “We had a CP [command post] in a priest’s house... and every night I would drink a bottle of the priest’s wine (it was not sacramental wine) and then urinate in the bottle to fill it up. The priest was reported to be collaborator as everyone always was and I marked the bottles Schloss Hemingstein 1944.”<sup>30</sup> He went on to recount his conversations with the Methodist chaplain who was attached to the unit Hemingway was reporting about: “In the evenings I used to tell the Chaplain... about the Marechale de Saxe who was one of 367 illegitimate children by the same father and commanded his regiment at the age of fourteen and devoted himself to a life of gluttony, sexual indulgence and corruption and I explained that while the Colonel and I had no time for this type of this while the war was on ... who knew what we might dedicate ourselves to after this war was over.”<sup>31</sup> Hemingway developed a relationship with this unnamed chaplain and read out loud to him from de Saxe’s book *Reveries on the Art of War*. Hemingway read this, he indicated, “to improve morale; mostly my own. [The chaplain] acquired a strange confidence in us, really believing, and when I was really ruined one night I told him that the Colonel and I were not able to decide if we should conquer the world or take some limited objective like the Belgian Congo.”<sup>32</sup>

Hemingway left France on March 6, 1945 to return to Cuba via the United States. He wrote a brief note to Mary as he departed. “I love you always and always will. Now go to get our life started. Don’t let anything bother you. I’m sorry to be so sticky getting off. Will be wonderful when I see you and will be truly faithful to you every minute I am away. In my heart, in my head and in my body.”<sup>33</sup> After he returned to Cuba, Hemingway wrote to Colonel Lanham claiming that he missed being with the men in Europe. “It is a hell of a thing going away from the 22nd tho. It probably sounds wet but I was, and am, absolutely homesick for the regiment and I miss you very badly Buck. I don’t give a damn about writing. Will have to get over that. I guess I will. Have gotten over everything else.”<sup>34</sup> He felt that the time he spent away from the fighting when he was in Paris was a time to let loose and enjoy himself, for even though he was not an active participant in the fighting, he could still have been killed or wounded when up in the front lines. “I always liked it in Paris because I knew I was always going back and so tried to have as much fun as possible and never had any guilty feelings

<sup>27</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Robert Morgan Brown, 14 July 1954, Box 3 Folder 8, Ernest Hemingway Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>28</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Robert Morgan Brown, 8 August 1956, Box 3 Folder 8 Ernest Hemingway Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>29</sup> Ernest Hemingway to David Garnett, postmarked 1 November 1938, Box 3 Folder 5, Hemingway Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>30</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Robert Morgan Brown, 8 August 1956.

<sup>31</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Robert Morgan Brown, 8 August 1956.

<sup>32</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Robert Morgan Brown, 8 August 1956.

<sup>33</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Mary Welsh, c.6 March 1945, in Baker, 578.

<sup>34</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Colonel Charles T. Lanham, 2 April 1945, in Baker, 578.



because knew where we came from and what we did.”<sup>35</sup> Hemingway went on to write that he regretted that he could not still be with Lanham. He wrote, “I feel like a swine here while you fight... Am quite bitter about some things. But that is another piece of baggage we can not afford. Have some luck and if anything ever happens to us we will all have a fine time with the better element in hell.”<sup>36</sup> He also wrote to Lanham that he struggled with depression, and he was doing his best to cut down on his drinking as a present to Mary. Like him, Mary was married at the time they met. She traveled back to the states a month later and returned to Chicago to announce to her parents that she was planning to divorce her husband, Noel Monks. As he wrote to Lanham in April 1945, “Mary finally got to the states. Had a hell of a trip. She couldn’t tell me why over the phone. So have thirteen days more of Limbo while she finishes N.Y. and sees her family... Cut out all drinking at night, you know... So all morning drinking... haven’t had the real headaches now for quite a while.”<sup>37</sup>

He wrote Mary a week later, to let her know about the events going on at Finca Vigía and in the village that was going to be her new home, until the land appropriation of the Cuban Revolution forced the couple to relocate to the United States. As he mentioned to her, “[h]ave gotten you a lot of lovely books and there is a humming bird that lives quite near and comes everyday to the bougainvillea. Little house is fixed up so you can have it if you want it. It is very nice. No childnies [children] come until the end of June.” He indicated that writing to her was, as he put it, a “selfish pleasure.” Hemingway felt that he was working to get into writing shape and that letters were one way to accomplish this. They would be followed by a simple story and later a complicated one.<sup>38</sup>

As Hemingway wrote to Colonel Lanham later that month, “I would have given anything to have stayed as you know and did a very poor job of getting away as it was. But there really wasn’t any choice.” This was largely because Hemingway was still suffering the effects of his head injuries, which should have received greater attention at the time, and indeed may have gotten that proper treatment at a time when there was not a major war in progress. He also indicated that he had been absolutely faithful to Mary. As he mentioned, it was “easy when you really love somebody.” He felt that when Mary came to join him life would be able to start – although he was quite lonely otherwise. As he wrote, “As it is am just killing days and wishing I was a soldier instead of a chickenshit writer. Old worthless wish.” He also encountered braggarts at the local bar telling their war stories to all who would listen, only to be shot down by Hemingway, who declined to talk about his time in the thick of the fighting.<sup>39</sup> In many ways, Hemingway’s work in combat turned out to be more successful than his job as a journalist. He took the correspondent job as a step to getting some useful job in Europe, but he ultimately wrote only five articles for *Collier’s* over the course of ten months and they paid less than half of his expenses. While there is no question that Hemingway played an important role in the war, he played only in a minor role as a journalist. His work in combat with the Maquis, his knowledge of French and of the countryside around Paris, which he had explored while he lived there in the 1920s, were all very helpful to the Allied cause.<sup>40</sup> But when the specter of war again rose in Korea in 1950 Hemingway stayed out of it. His age and physical condition probably precluded his participation. As he wrote to his young love interest Adriana Ivancich in July of 1950,

---

<sup>35</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Colonel Charles T. Lanham, 2 April 1945, in Baker, 579–580.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Colonel Charles T. Lanham, 2 April 1945, in Baker, 573–574.

<sup>37</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Colonel Charles T. Lanham, 2 April 1945, in Baker, 585–586.

<sup>38</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Mary Welsh 9 April 1945 in Baker, 581–584.

<sup>39</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Colonel Charles T. Lanham, 20 April 1945 in Baker, 589.

<sup>40</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Alfred Rice, 15 December 1948 in Baker, 655.

“About going to the war: I will only if it is my true duty. I will not go to be *valiente*, nor to advance myself, nor to maintain any reputation. I will go only if it is truly necessary that I go fight. Then I know where I go and with whom. But I refuse to worry one minute about it until it is time to go.”<sup>41</sup>

Hemingway's role in World War II demonstrated both his willingness to aid his country in a time of need as well as his unconventional approach to wartime service. His submarine patrols did relatively little to help the war effort, but the time spent in Europe was an important aid to the Allied victory in World War II. In many ways, his position as a journalist was merely a way for him to get involved in the fighting. From his days in the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway had been a premature anti-fascist and his fighting against the Germans in World War II was a natural extension of his ideological and political beliefs. The war marked a transition in Hemingway's career. He no longer sought glory with the same intensity as he did as a younger man. He never again went into the fray of battle, preferring the comforts of home in Cuba and Idaho. He emerged as a mature writer, winning the Nobel Prize and the Pulitzer Prize in the mid-1950s. Yet his depression and heavy drinking took a serious toll on his health. Mary would join Hemingway in Cuba at Finca Vigía, although their relationship would prove to be a complicated one, with Mary attempting to leave Hemingway only to be stopped at the airport in Havana and taken back to the finca. She remained married to Hemingway until his death in 1961 from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. She, like the other women who loved him, saw a special quality in Hemingway that made him, as some would argue, the greatest writer of his generation. Such genius rarely comes without a price, and that was certainly the case with Hemingway.

---

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Hemingway to Adriana Ivancich, 23 July 1950, Box 3 Folder 6 Hemingway Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

## References

- Baker, C. (Ed.). (1981). *Ernest Hemingway selected letters, 1917–1961* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Dearborn, M. (2018). *Ernest Hemingway: A biography*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Haag, M. (2018, August 3). Hemingway story emerges long after war. *New York Times*, A1.
- Hemingway, E. (2003). *Hemingway on war*. S. Hemingway (Ed.). New York: Scribner.
- Lynn, K. (1987). *Hemingway*. Cambridge: Harvard U.P.
- Mort, T. (2016). *Hemingway at war: Ernest Hemingway's adventures as a World War II correspondent*. New York: Pegasus Books.
- Reynolds, M. (1999). *Hemingway: The 1930s through the final years*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Reynolds, N. (2017). *Writer, sailor, soldier, spy: Ernest Hemingway's secret adventures, 1935–1961*. New York: William Morrow.

### Archival Collection:

Ernest Hemingway Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

**Corresponding author:** Anders Greenspan

**Contact email:** [historianag@yahoo.com](mailto:historianag@yahoo.com)