

Lester Cowan:

A Preliminary Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Cowan, Lester, 1907-1990
Title	Lester Cowan Papers
Dates:	1943-1990
Extent:	6 boxes and 5 galley files (2.52 linear feet)
Abstract:	This collection contains material relating to the 1945 film <i>The Story of G. I. Joe</i> , based on the writings of the journalist Ernie Pyle.
Call Number:	Film Collection FI-00006
Language:	English
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchase, 1999 (Reg. no. 14447)
Processed by	Liz Murray, 1999
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Scope and Contents

This collection, from the files of Lester Cowan, independent Hollywood producer of ten films from the 1930s to the 1950s, contains material relating to the 1945 film *The Story of G. I. Joe*, based on the writings of the journalist Ernie Pyle. Of particular interest is Arthur Miller's early work on the screenplay. In his autobiography, Miller wrote that Cowan was "looking for a young writer to make a screenplay of *Here Is Your War*, a collection of columns by America's best-loved war reporter, Ernie Pyle of the United Press.... Far, far down the road this project would finally emerge as *The Story of GI Joe*, but only after some four or five other writers had hauled and pushed and recarved my original screenplay about an infantry company moving through the war." The film starred Burgess Meredith in the role of Ernie Pyle and featured a new actor, Robert Mitchum, as Lieutenant Bill Walker. It received four Academy Award nominations including Best Song by Ann Ronell, Lester Cowan's wife, and Best Supporting Actor for Mitchum's portrayal of Lt. Walker. While the screenplay was also nominated, Miller's name does not appear on the credits. He left the project when writer Alan LeMay was hired as his collaborator, in an effort to create a storyline that was more palatable for Hollywood consumption. However, Miller's work was not wasted. He transformed his screenplay into his first published book, *Situation Normal*, which Miller described "as a book of reportage about army training drawn from my research for my screenplay *The Story of GI Joe*."

The papers are arranged in four Series: Series I. *The Story of G. I. Joe*; Series II. Paige Cavanaugh's "Indiana Story"; Series III. Lester Cowan; and Series IV. Ernie Pyle.

Series I contains material related to the writing and production of the film and is arranged in four subseries: Subseries A. Works by Arthur Miller, Subseries B. Other Screenplay Versions, Subseries C. Music, and Subseries D. Production Photographs and Ephemera. The works by Arthur Miller in Subseries A include an early outline of the motion picture, the earliest surviving Miller manuscript in the Cowan archive. Two versions of the "Diary of Arthur Miller" record Miller's experiences as he gathered research for the screenplay, talking with military personnel at U.S. army bases and installations and absorbing the day-to-day realities of military service.

A treatment and two screenplay versions are also present along with an uncorrected typescript of Miller's *Situation Normal* published in 1944. Although undated, it appears to be a final version, faithful to the published piece, with the exception of the last two chapters which do not appear in the book. One of these chapters describes Miller's ultimate departure from the film project, unable to solve the dilemma of delivering a screenplay which was faithful to the visions of both Pyle and Cowan.

The screenplays in Subseries B, written after Miller's departure, are substantially different from his screenplay but do contain elements of his original field work. These screenplays are dated and numbered for the most part, but authors are not indicated, with the exception of Albert Maltz's "American Sequence" which describes Pyle's return home to Albuquerque, his visit with his wife Jerry and friend Paige Cavanaugh, and his decision to rejoin U.S. troops overseas.

The music scores, many handwritten, and sheet music found in Subseries C, are the work of Ann Ronell and Louis Applebaum, both Oscar nominees for Best Scoring of a Dramatic Picture. A small amount of related correspondence, contracts, and holograph notes is also present.

The production, publicity, and studio photographs in Subseries D cover not only the cast and stars, such as Burgess Meredith and Robert Mitchum, but also Ernie Pyle, Lester Cowan, and Bob Hope who visited Pyle on the movie set. The ephemera in this subseries includes a page of storyboard sketches, a press preview brochure for the movie, and a typescript proposal for the premiere.

After the release of *The Story of G. I. Joe* and Pyle's untimely death on Ie Shima on April 18, 1945, Cowan planned a series of Ernie Pyle projects including a new screenplay which would portray Pyle's personal life. The outline and progression of screenplays in Series II reflect the work of Pyle's longtime friend and writer, Paige Cavanaugh, who had assisted Cowan on the initial film project.

Cowan's additional projects and business papers related to Pyle and *The Story of G. I. Joe* are reflected in his correspondence from 1945 to 1990 found in Series III. Plans for a TV series, proposed courses at the University of Indiana and University of Southern California, and a published compilation of Pyle's columns are discussed. Other projects not related to *G.I. Joe* are also mentioned in Cowan's correspondence.

Series IV includes articles by and about Pyle, correspondence written to Ann Ronell, information on the Ernie Pyle State Historical Site, memorials, an early draft of his will, *Time* magazine cover story, and fragments of Pyle's writing. Also of interest are galleys of an unpublished book of Pyle's newspaper columns, variously titled. Edited by Cowan, the book opens with a chapter from Miller's *Situation Normal* recounting Miller's impressions of Ernie Pyle after meeting with him in Albuquerque in 1943.

Series I. *The Story of G. I. Joe*

Subseries A. Works by Arthur Miller

"Outline of motion picture on the army ground forces"	box 1 folder 1
"Diary of Arthur Miller," October 1943	
Carbon typescript	box 1 folder 2
Carbon typescript, with seven additional pages dated October 19	folder 3
Treatment, carbon typescript	folder 4
Screenplay marked "Miller Script," carbon typescript	folder 5
Screenplay, duplicated copy	folder 6
"Situation Normal," uncorrected carbon typescript draft and clipping of review	folder 7

Subseries B. Other Screenplay Versions

No. 13 Oct. 20, 1944	box 2 folder 1
No. 14, ca. Oct. 1944?	folder 2
No. 35, Oct. 20, 1944	folder 3
No. 1, Nov. 7, 1944	folder 4
Unnumbered, Nov. 7, 1944	folder 5
No. 91, Nov. 7, 1944,	folder 6
"American Sequence," by Albert Maltz, two carbon typescripts, Nov. 25, 1944	folder 7

Subseries C. Music

Piano-conductor score, holograph and photocopy	box 3 folder 1-2
--	-----------------------------

"The Ernie Pyle Infantry March," along with advertising broadside	folder 3
"The Ernie Pyle Infantry March," condensed conductor's score arranged by Leo A. Kempinski	folder 4
"I'm Comin' Back"	folder 5
"Linda"	folder 6
"Man to Man (Infantry Song)" by Fred Waring and Jack Dolph	folder 7
Music cue sheets	folder 8
Correspondence, contracts, and notes related to film's music	folder 9
Subseries D. Production Photographs and Ephemera	
Burgess Meredith	box 3 folder 10
Burgess Meredith with cast and studio personnel	folder 11
Cast	folder 12
Ernie Pyle	box 4 folder 1
Ernie Pyle and Burgess Meredith	folder 2
Ernie Pyle on set with others, including Bob Hope and Morrie Ryskind	folder 3
Lester Cowan, with others including Burgess Meredith, Ernie Pyle, and studio personnel	folder 4
Publicity photographs and related studio events	folder 5
Photocopy of storyboard, press preview brochure, and proposal for premiere of <i>G.I. Joe</i>	folder 6

Series II. Paige Cavanaugh's "Indiana Story"

"Ernie and Jerry Pyle," preliminary outline, carbon typescript and photocopies, 3/21/46	box 4 folder 7-9
"Ernie Pyle in Indiana," [also titled "Indiana Story"]	
Carbon typescript	box 4 folder 10
Photocopy	folder 11-12
Photocopy with extra pages of script	box 5 folder 1
Bound photocopy with additional material including "Ernie and Jerry Pyle"	folder 2
"Dana Sequence," carbon typescript	folder 3
"Indiana Story"	
Screenplay, carbon typescript	box 5 folder 4
Incomplete photocopy, with treatment and outline, Jack Foreman's copy	folder 5

Series III. Lester Cowan

Correspondence

1943-1975

box 5 folder 6

1976-1990

folder 7

G.I. Joe operating budget, business papers and correspondence related to the Drake Investment Corp., 10/14/44

**folder
8**

Information about Lester Cowan, articles and career summary

folder 9

Series IV. Ernie Pyle

Articles by and about EP	box 6 folder 1
Correspondence, EP to Ann Ronnel, and Jerry Pyle to Ann Ronnel, 1944 and 1945	folder 2
Ernie Pyle State Historical Site, correspondence, articles, and literature	folder 3
"Ernie Pyle Told the Soldier's Story," Army News Photo Features, U. S. Army Command Information Unit, April 6, 1970	folder 4
Galleys for book <i>The Heroes Are All the People</i> , alternate title <i>Is It Worth Having a World</i> [five galleys removed to galley file]	folder 5
Last Will and Testament of Ernest T. Pyle, early typescript copy	folder 6
"Memorial to Ernie Pyle," Sons of Indiana of New York, April 20, 1945	folder 7
Photograph of EP's grave site at Okinawa	folder 8
Scripps-Howard Foundation Awards brochure, includes "Ernie Pyle Memorial"	folder 9
<i>Time</i> magazine, "Ernie Pyle, War Reporter," cover story, July 17, 1944	folder 10
Typescript fragments, attributed to EP	folder 11