

FINAL PROJECT:

**AN ANALYSIS OF
*YANK: THE ARMY
WEEKLY***

by Meredith Dedopoulos

Throughout the course of World War II, “the public received only that news of the war which [the] government considered advisable to tell it,” writes historian Phillip Knightley in his book, *The First Casualty*.¹ Strict censorship regulations in the United States were especially frustrating to journalists because “the army and navy applied ‘censorship at the source’ – that is, they tried to prevent correspondents from learning anything they did not want them to know.”² American correspondents were heavily restricted from combat zones, and those who were allowed in the “theaters of war” had to submit all copy to military censorship. For the most part, American newspapers were forced to base many of their stories on information from official (government) sources, who could pursue criminal charges if they did not approve of what was printed. These restrictions caused the American mainstream media coverage of World War II to be predominantly one-sided. According to John Steinbeck, “Reporters were all part of the war effort. [They] went along with it, and not only that, [they] abetted it...It is in the things not mentioned that the untruth lies...[They] wrote only a part of the war....”³

Censorship caused all mainstream newspapers to exclusively present the official (government) outlook of the war effort, and this narrow selection of information propelled the development of publications with different perspectives. One of these publications was *Yank: The Army Weekly*, a magazine that provided the average American soldier with the unofficial, albeit pro-military, perspectives of other men in the armed forces. *Yank* was “by the men...for the men in the service,” according to the cover of each issue. From May 1942 to December 1945, American GIs stationed in the U.S. and overseas could purchase a subscription to a magazine created specifically for men in the military. The major differences between *Yank* and mainstream newspapers were two-fold: first, the reporting, writing, and editing of *Yank* was done

entirely by enlisted GIs; second, only members of the military received *Yank*.⁴ Therefore, both the reporters and the target audience came from the same pool, one much smaller than the general population.

Throughout its run, *Yank* published a variety of material, including articles on the aftermath of major battles, stories of hometown heroes, local news from each of the then-48 states, American sports coverage, letters to the editor, ask the expert, poetry and fiction, crosswords, and cartoons. One of the most popular features of *Yank* was its weekly photographs of pin-up girls, including Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth, Ava Gardner, Esther Williams, Gene Tierney, Jane Russell, Ingrid Bergman, and Lauren Bacall.

Despite a considerable time lag in the publishing of news stories, *Yank* reported on many of the same events as the most influential newspaper in the U.S. at the time, *The New York Times*. Because it was written by GIs, for GIs, it may be assumed that *Yank* possessed a pro-military perspective. But if the claims of Phillip Knightley and John Steinbeck are true, then *The New York Times* and other newspapers across the country also contained a pro-military bias. How do these biases compare? What are key similarities and differences between the most prominent American military magazine and the most prominent American newspaper? How are these accounted for? Only direct comparison between the two publications can begin to offer answers to these questions.

The New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, NY, has a collection of twenty-five American edition issues of *Yank* magazine spanning from March 1943 to December 1945. Due to an incomplete collection of chronological *Yank* issues and the vast number of articles in *The New York Times* archives, it would be impossible to make accurate generalizations about *Yank* magazine as a whole in comparison to *The New York Times*. Instead, topics covered by

both publications during the same time period were extracted, and relevant articles from each were culled and compared. The resulting analysis remarks on the similarities and differences within the coverage of these specific events, and should not be used to make general statements about each publication as a whole. In short, this comparison is meant to provide only a glimpse into the interwoven practices of two very different, albeit both pro-military, American publications during wartime.

The most obvious difference between stories in these two publications was the nearly month-long time lag for *Yank* articles. The clearest evidence of this was a story written about the anniversary of D-Day; the reporter, Sgt. Dewitt Gilpin, described the Omaha and Utah beaches one year after the invasion of Normandy (June 6, 1944). This article was published in the July 6, 1945 issue.⁵ Therefore, a story written on or about June 6th was not published in the June 8th, June 15th, June 22nd, or June 29th issue; it was published approximately four weeks after the fact. This time lag between article subject and publication date was further illustrated by a comparison of *The New York Times*' publication dates with the dates of corresponding articles in *Yank* issues. The shortest lag between publication dates for the same article subject was seventeen days.^{6,7}

Although those reading *Yank* had to consider the fact that the news was nearly a month late, they were rewarded with the rich and descriptive detail provided by eyewitness observers of the ongoing war. Those observers were the correspondents themselves, writing articles about what they saw and experienced in between fighting for the victory of the United States. The published articles were filled with such vivid imagery that it was more like reading a novel than a news magazine. For example, in a *Yank* story about a destroyer that survived attacks by Japanese kamikazes, the author began the article as follows: "The skipper of the destroyer stood on the bridge, his head thrown back, peering through glasses at the ack-ack fire high on the horizon."⁸

This descriptive approach to wartime journalism was in stark contrast to the content of mainstream American newspapers. In a piece on the same kamikaze incident, *The New York Times* used this lead: “The Navy told today how the destroyer Newcomb survived hits by four Japanese suicide planes that ‘literally disembowled’ [sic] the ship and caused ninety-one casualties.”⁹ This statement implicitly relied on descriptions given by official sources (i.e., the Navy), while the introduction to the *Yank* article clearly had some observational advantage that allowed the author to know exactly what the skipper looked like. Quite simply, the author of the article in *Yank* was there. As a staff member of *Yank*, Evan Wylie was an enlisted serviceman who wrote articles for a weekly publication in between performing his military duties. He happened to be present when the kamikazes attacked the Newcomb, so he wrote a story about it.

Accordingly, the use of descriptive language in an article was more than a stylistic choice; it was a consequence of the wealth of information to which the reporter had access. In the case of suicide bombers – and in most events in general – the ability to provide the detail so common in *Yank* could only come from witnessing the actual event. How else could the author know that “the electric motors whined...the destroyer shivered as the throbbing engines picked up speed...the seas began to curl away from her bow?”¹⁰ Therefore, while *The New York Times* was able to state that “at 4:25 P.M. the first enemy dived at the Newcomb, whose gunners sent it crashing twenty feet away without damage to the ship,”¹¹ *Yank* provided a much more detailed description of the first kamikaze attempt: “Dirty brown bursts appeared in the sky. One Jap bore through them, jiggling from side to side as he tried to line up the ship in his sights. He was a suicider, deliberately trying to crash the ship. The *Newcombe* [sic] shook as her 40s and 20s joined in. Their bullets hammered into the Jap. He faltered, lost control and splashed into the sea 400 yards away.”¹²

It is important to note that, at the start of these kinds of attacks in 1944, “the [N]avy kept from correspondents the extent to which Japanese suicide pilots, the ‘Kamikaze Corps,’ were crippling American ships....At first, all mention of the attacks was banned, on the ground that it would provide the Japanese with a propaganda weapon.”¹³ When the strategy of kamikazes could no longer be suppressed from the press, censorship shifted to limiting details of the damage inflicted by these kamikazes. In these two articles, both authors focused on the excellent performance of the servicemen in preventing some of the kamikazes from hitting the *Newcomb*. The emphasis was on the superior talent and ability of the Allied forces, not on any damage actually inflicted by the kamikazes themselves. As John Steinbeck’s aforementioned quote reflected, journalists were naturally inclined to write articles that cast American efforts in a positive light. If any correspondent were to violate this norm, censorship structures were in place to prevent destructive articles from going to print. Although the structure of *Yank* was not immediately apparent, it may be assumed that censorship safeguards were also in place, since the military censored regular American correspondents’ pieces anyway, and *Yank* itself was in the hands of the military.

In very rare instances, both an American correspondent and a *Yank* reporter/GI witnessed a historical event that became the subject of multiple articles. One of these instances was the attempted suicide of Japanese ex-Premier Hideki Tojo; accounts from George E. Jones and Sgt. George Burns were published in *The New York Times* and *Yank*, respectively. Both descriptions were very similar in content – hearing a shot, entering the apartment, the appearance of Tojo, the actions of the police officers, etc. – but differed in use of language. The article in *Yank* used less formal wording throughout, the most blatant of which was as follows: “Then there was a helluva lot of confusion as correspondents, CIC men, police guards and household help piled through the

battered door into the small, cube-shaped room.”¹⁴ In contrast, *The New York Times*’ article employed fancier descriptions: “His breathing became a cadence of racking signs and moans.”¹⁵ The latter depiction indicated both a professional writing style learned through specialized training and a more sophisticated audience than the average men who read *Yank*.

The different audiences targeted by *The New York Times* and *Yank* affected even something as seemingly simple as the reporting of casualty figures. In an article from the February 15, 1944 issue of *The New York Times*,¹⁶ the unnamed author reported the “latest figures made public by OWI,” the United States Office of War Information. Following the listing of the casualty numbers, the article remarked that “grievous as these figures are, our losses in the two years since Pearl Harbor have been lighter than they were in the eighteen months that the First World War lasted.” The article then listed the casualty numbers from World War I. The purpose of this was to provide context for the number of military dead thus far; by comparing the figures to those of the previous war, the most recent number of casualties seemed less devastating. Putting the numbers in context also indicated an audience of laypeople (i.e., those who did not know how to interpret casualty numbers).

In the March 3, 1944 issue of *Yank*,¹⁷ the casualty numbers from OWI were slightly higher than those reported in the February 15th issue of *The New York Times*. The reason for the discrepancy was unclear; because of the consistent time lag between articles of a similar nature, the casualty numbers reported in *Yank* would have been collected from OWI on the same date or even before *The New York Times* attained their information. Why casualty numbers would be adjusted to be lower than previous reports is beyond the scope of this analysis.

In its reporting, *Yank* was more straightforward in the sense that it did not mitigate casualty numbers with historical context. Instead, the article broke down the casualty figures by branch

of the armed forces: Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. This indicated an audience of military personnel looking for specialized information (i.e. specific numbers on one branch). Overall, this report was more dispassionate than the article in *The New York Times*, mainly because it did not include mitigating historical background.

The subtle differences between two almost-identical articles illustrated how the reporters and the anticipated audience affected the content of the story. In the June 24, 1945 issue of *The New York Times*,¹⁸ one article described the structure and functions of the newly created United Nations. The July 27, 1945 issue of *Yank*¹⁹ had a similar chart explaining the structure and functions of the U.N. However, the chart in *Yank* only described the General Assembly, Security Council, Trusteeship Council, Military Staff Committee, International Court of Justice, and International Contingent of Armed Forces; it did not include the Economic and Social Council, International Labor Organization, International Bank for Reconstruction, International Monetary Fund, United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization, International Civil Aviation Organization, or Secretariat. Because *Yank* is a military publication, it focused on the branches of the U.N. that were most relevant to the armed forces.

The language used in these two very similar articles indicated a difference in audience between the two publications. For example, *The New York Times* explained that in the General Assembly, “Each of the United Nations is to be represented on this body with one vote.”²⁰ In its description of the General Assembly, *Yank* used less formal wording: “Each of the United Nations gets one vote in the Assembly.”²¹ This slight variation between the two descriptions signified diverging audiences for each publication: for *Yank*, the average soldier; for *The New York Times*, an older, educated consumer of daily news.

One other difference in use of language between publications was evidence of disparity in the underlying perspectives of each publication. In describing the Security Council, *The New York Times* characterized the subjects of military aggression as potential aggressors,”²² whereas *Yank* simply recognized them as “future aggressors.”²³ This slight yet nevertheless important distinction indicated how military personnel characterized any nation deemed a potential aggressor by the outside world: that nation was a future aggressor, and the only question was *when* it would become a full-fledged threat.

The use of language was especially important when describing the consequences of American-Japanese engagements. A journalist’s unwritten duty to leave out any devastating effects of a Japanese attack had a counterpart: overemphasize any mistreatment of American soldiers in Japanese POW camps. As Phillip Knightley points out, “neither side reported its own atrocities...[yet] both sides emphasized atrocities committed by the enemy.”²⁴ Furthermore, “the Allies had an advantage, in that they could use the brutal treatment of Allied POWs to stimulate hatred of the Japanese – it was a joint United States Army and Navy release in 1944 that coined the expression “march of death” to describe what had occurred at Bataan.”²⁵ This joint statement was the focus of an article in *The New York Times* and included the following: “The calculated Japanese campaign of brutality against the battle-spent, hungry American and Filipino soldiers on Bataan began as soon as they surrendered, with that was always thereafter known among its survivors as ‘the march of death.’”²⁶ Even though these were not the reporter’s words – they were just a repetition of an official statement – their impact was likely indeed the stimulation of hatred of the Japanese. *Yank* provoked this hatred even further, characterizing all Japanese people as America-haters who would rather die than capitulate to the U.S.

In short, both *The New York Times* and *Yank* depicted the Japanese actions as reprehensible. For the American readers of *The New York Times*, the revelation was as shocking as it was disgusting. In contradistinction, *Yank* cultivated a connection with its readers over every soldier's constant awareness that a "Jap" can do terrible things: "This announcement...did not shock those of us who have seen the Jap at close range in the Pacific and know from personal experience and observation how much respect he has for the international laws of civilized warfare."²⁷

Descriptions of battles against the inhumane enemy forces demonstrated the differences in story presentation between a weekly publication and a daily newspaper. From January 30 to February 8, 1944, *The New York Times* ran daily articles about the developments in the American struggle for control of the Marshall Islands. Because new articles were published every day, columnists found it necessary to summarize the previous events of the battle, to the point where the same facts were being repeated at the end of each article. Publishing daily accounts of ongoing events also required the authors of the articles to exercise caution; specifically, many articles referenced the tough but winnable battle ahead. One author remarked that "the ability of the Japanese to effect quick repairs to flight strips, especially on coral atolls, has been demonstrated"²⁸

Overall, the articles in *The New York Times* gave the impression that the battle for the Marshall Islands was hard fought against competent Japanese forces; for example, one article cited a report "that a heavy naval battle between Japanese and Allied units had been raging since Sunday morning."²⁹ This was in contradistinction to the articles in *Yank*, which characterized the battle as a sure American victory against "rapidly diminishing enemy resistance."³⁰

A final characteristic of *The New York Times*' battle descriptions was a direct consequence of its status as a daily newspaper. The lack of exciting developments on a day-by-day basis likely encouraged reporters to include historical context – for example, references to raids during the previous October³¹ or the fact that “the Japanese have barred foreigners from these islands since 1938.”³²

Because *Yank* was a weekly publication (with a three-week-plus time lag, no less), its articles served a different function from those in a daily newspaper. The stories in *Yank* were meant to summarize important events that may have been interesting and/or relevant to the GIs receiving the publication. Therefore, battle descriptions were limited to one article per issue, and usually were not addressed in later issues, at least not until the end of 1945 when there was no battle news to report anymore. In an atypical fashion, the takeover of the Marshall Islands was described in three different articles, one per issue in three consecutive weeks.^{33,34,35} However, these articles did not rely on official communications, which were the predominant sources of *The New York Times*; one of *Yank*'s biggest strengths was its access to eyewitness accounts of soldiers, and this was put to use in the articles on the Marshall Islands battle.

For the American soldier serving in World War II, the weekly issue of *Yank* provided a dozen or so pages of news, information, and entertainment, all written by other members of the armed forces. The pro-military perspective of mainstream newspapers like *The New York Times* was not enough to quench the thirst of interested men stationed at home and abroad. *Yank* provided them with everything a military man might need in a magazine, including puzzles, pictures of attractive women, answers to specific questions, and extremely detailed descriptions of their fellow brothers in battle. In a war at the forefront of everyone's minds, *Yank* was a welcome relief from the big-picture, little detail summaries in *The New York Times*, instead

allowing readers to immerse themselves in the stories of American war heroes fighting – and reporting – for the freedom so dear to the United States herself.

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- ² Ibid. p. 300.
- ³ Ibid. p. 301.
- ⁴ (1945, December 14). Honorable Discharge. *Yank: The Army Weekly*, 4(28).
- ⁵ Gilpin, D. (1945, July 6). D+365. *Yank: The Army Weekly*, 4(3), 3-5.
- ⁶ (1945, August 27). 17-Minute Oversea Rocket Plane Among Germany's War Secrets. *The New York Times*, p. 10.
- ⁷ Bendiner, R. (1945, September 14). Nazi Secret Weapons. *Yank: The Army Weekly*, 4(13).
- ⁸ Wylie, E. (1945, July 13). Kamikaze. *Yank: The Army Weekly*, 4(4).
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- ²⁰ (1945, June 24). The United Nations: Structure and Functions. *The New York Times*, p. 43.
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- ²³ (1945, July 27). The United Nations: Structure and Function. *Yank: The Army Weekly*, 4(6).
- ²⁴ Ibid. p. 321.
- ²⁵ Ibid. p. 321.
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- ²⁷ (1944, February 18). The Torturing and Killing of American Prisoners in the Philippines. *Yank: The Army Weekly*, 2(35).
- ²⁸ Horne, G. F. (1944, January 31). A Two-Day Assault; Carrier Forces Strike Hundreds of Miles Into Japanese Waters. *The New York Times*, p. 1.
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