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**James Cassidy, Edited by Michael S. Sweeney, *NBC Goes to War: The Diary of Radio Correspondent James Cassidy from London to the Bulge* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022).** Review by Mike Conway, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

The first American World War II journalist to broadcast live from Germany after the D-Day invasion wasn't CBS' Edward R. Murrow or one of his "Murrow Boys." It wasn't a famous newspaper war correspondent such as Ernie Pyle. Instead, it was a 27-year-old reporter from a Midwest radio station helping out NBC in exchange for battlefield credentials.

For this fact alone, we owe the late Michael S. Sweeney a debt of gratitude for one of his final contributions to our understanding of American journalism history. At the start of the Covid lockdown in 2020, while living with terminal cancer, Sweeney turned his investigative talents toward the story of James Cassidy, a broadcaster who worked at WLW radio in Cincinnati. Cassidy used his ambition and contacts to land in France in the fall of 1944, covering the brutal fighting as the Allies advanced on Germany.

Sweeney started with an oral history and other documents found at his Ohio University campus. He then tracked down the late Cassidy's daughter, who had her father's diary of his time as a World War II war correspondent.

Cassidy's war diary provides such vivid detail and personal struggles that Sweeney chose to let the primary documents tell the story. Sweeney provides 12 pages of context before Cassidy takes over the story, from a diary he wrote while covering the war. Cassidy had also saved some of his scripts from that period, which are provided at the end of the book.

Cassidy's diary starts in Cincinnati as he is preparing for his trip and then chronicles his time in

London while he anxiously awaits the clearance and path towards joining the troops in France roughly two months after the Normandy invasion.

After arriving near the front at Falaise, his initial entries are as unnerving and stark as the scenes must have been to Cassidy when he got his first look at the ravage of war. He described the scene outside Trun: "And German bodies everywhere. One with teeth bared in agony. Another without a head. Others sprawled in the taut grip of death by concussion and by fire. A burned blackened body hanging, arms outstretched, from the turret of a tank. Another." (p. 45)

With the diary format, the reader follows along as the first shocks of the enormity of death and destruction on a battlefield transition into the daily process of covering the war. A strength of this diary is that Cassidy's four and a half months as a war correspondent happen during important moments in the Allies' European campaign, including the liberation of Paris, the push onto German soil, and the bloody Nazi counterattack in the Battle of the Bulge.

Cassidy, and Sweeney, provide important details on the complicated process of covering the war live for radio, including racing back and forth from the front, writing a script, getting it approved by censors, tracking down the closest transmitter, broadcasting at a time convenient for a United States audience, and then waiting to see if the report had ever made it across the ocean. Atmospheric disturbances and human error meant that many of Cassidy's midnight sessions were never heard beyond the transmitter site. But when it worked, such as when he was the first to broadcast from German soil, his work would be quoted by top newspapers and lauded by his peers.

Cassidy's entries showed how his mood could quickly shift with letters from his wife, Rita, or kudos from his bosses. He often wrote about food. The resourcefulness the correspondents showed in their procurement and consumption of alcohol in the middle of a war is impressive. Along the way, he provides glimpses of other reporters he encounters, including Richard C. Hottelet, Charles Collingwood, Bill Downs and Ned Calmer of CBS, Red Mueller and John MacVane of NBC, and ABC's George Hicks. One of his group correspondent lunches even included Ernest Hemingway.

What is most striking is how in three months, Cassidy transitions from the elation of his German broadcast with talk of a permanent NBC overseas job to quietly leaving the war at the end of 1944. In his last weeks, the Germans launched their final offensive, now known as the Battle of the Bulge. As the Allies retreated, Cassidy had several close calls

and lost his closest friend during the war, United Press' James Frankish: "I have lived closer with him than any human being in the past four months. The pictures from his wife. The scotch for Christmas Eve. Oh Jesus." (p. 57) His last diary entry was New Year's Eve, 1944, which happened to be James Cassidy's 28<sup>th</sup> birthday.

*NBC Goes to War* is an important contribution to our understanding of American coverage of World War II. While most of World War II journalism history focuses on print, what little we know about radio broadcasting is almost entirely centered on CBS' Edward R. Murrow and his staff. This book shows what it was like to work for a local station as well as contribute to a national network. James Cassidy's personal war experiences may have been hidden for nearly 80 years, but with the help of Michael S. Sweeney, his diary helps us better understand that war in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.