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Notes: Lawrence Youngman was, essentially, an embedded reporter with the 134<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Europe. As a reporter for the *Omaha World-Herald*, his photographs and stories concentrated on the daily lives of every day soldiers. His work, now held by the Nebraska State Historical Society, continues to be a valuable resource for the men and activities of the 134<sup>th</sup>.

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Photos: Youngman leaving for Europe; Youngman and his driver Pvt John Robidoux; group pictures that appeared in December 3, 10, and 19, 1944 editions of the *Omaha World-Herald*; promotion of Joseph F Peitz, Thomas Higley and Cecil D Foster; a training exercise in England with Eisenhower and Miltonberger; French mud; circulation ad featuring Youngman in Europe

# Lawrence W. Youngman

# WAR CORRESPONDENT

for the *Omaha World-Herald*

By Douglas R. Hartman

One of the newest acquisitions at the Nebraska State Historical Society is a collection of more than 700 photographs of the 134th Infantry Regiment (Nebraska National Guard) taken in Europe during World War II by Lawrence W. Youngman, the *Omaha World-Herald's* war correspondent. Youngman originally donated his correspondent's uniform, 35mm Kodak camera, press identification booklet, and photographs to the Nebraska National Guard Historical Society's Museum in 1990. Although most of Youngman's artifacts and articles remain on display at the National Guard Museum as part of a traveling exhibit, his photographic negatives have been transferred to the Historical Society to provide researchers with better access to the collection.

Youngman was born on June 21, 1905, in Harveyville, Kansas, where his father practiced medicine for over seventy years. He entered Kansas State University in 1923 and graduated in 1927 with a B.S. in journalism. After college he went to work for the now defunct *Manhattan Morning Chronicle*. Following short stints at the *Morning Chronicle* and *Aviation Magazine* in New York, Youngman accepted a position with the *World-Herald* in 1929. For the next seventeen years he served as an assignment reporter and the aviation editor. He covered such events as the 1935 Republican River flood, the 134th in World War II, and the 1946 World's Fair of Aviation.

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Youngman leaving for Europe.  
NSHS-PC1720

Immediately following the United States's entry into World War II, the thirty-five-year-old assignment reporter applied for a commission in the army. The military rejected Youngman's application when a physical revealed he had a slight curvature of the spine. Disappointed at not being able to serve, Youngman focused his energy on home front projects. He helped organize the *World-Herald's* scrap metal drive, wrote most of the paper's lead articles promoting the project (for which the *World-Herald* won a Pulitzer Prize), and assisted in the formation of the Nebraska Civil Air Patrol, becoming its wing intelligence officer.

Youngman, determined to play a more significant role in the war, approached the managing editor of the *World-Herald*, Fred J. Ware, in early 1944. Youngman proposed going to Europe to cover the local angle in the pending invasion of France. Ware thought it was a good idea and discussed it with publisher Henry Doorly and editor-in-chief H. E. Newbranch. The *World-Herald* management was somewhat leery about sending a reporter to Europe, but eventually agreed to the idea. The paper's executives warned Youngman before he left Omaha that he had better produce once he arrived in England or he would be recalled quickly.

Youngman spent ten days in Washington, D.C., in late May 1944 being accredited by the Joint Army and Navy Board on War Correspondents' Credentials. "Accreditation was a long process that included an interview with the FBI," explained Youngman. The joint board

## Lawrence Youngman



Lawrence Youngman (left) and his driver, Pvt. John Robidoux of Falls City. The words "Ye Omaha Bugle" are partially obscured by the "Press" sign. NSHS-PC1720

accredited 1,646 American correspondents between February 1942 and September 1945.<sup>1</sup> Once a reporter had arrived in a particular theater of operations, the senior Allied commander decided whether or not to certify the correspondent's accreditation and issue press credentials. These identification cards, which contained the reporter's vital statistics, photograph, and fingerprints, could be revoked by the senior Allied commander at any time and for any reason. "Once you were accredited," said Youngman, "it entitled you to a certain amount of cooperation and respect." All civilian reporters received the assimilated rank of captain. They also wore a standard U.S. Army uniform that included distinctive green felt patches with yellow lettering that clearly identified them as war correspondents.

Youngman arrived in England by plane on July 5 (the night before the D-Day invasion), checked into the Savoy Hotel in London, and received an unexpected telephone call. Col. Barney Oldfield, a Lincoln reporter prior to the

war who was part of Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery's press corps, had spotted Youngman's name on a list of incoming correspondents. Oldfield explained the requirements for receiving press credentials in the ETO (European Theater of Operations) and told Youngman where he could locate the 134th Infantry Regiment. According to Youngman, "This was a great relief to me because I had no lead on the 134th when I left Omaha."

Youngman began covering the regiment's activities while it trained in southern England. "My instructions from the *World-Herald* were to write and photograph the Nebraska GIs and not to worry about the grand sweep of the war," explained Youngman. He detailed the 134th's preparation in England for combat, followed the unit to France in July 1944, and wrote about the regiment's battles at St. Lo, Nancy, and Morhange. National papers such as the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times*, combined with the wire services, covered the broader

strategic aspects of the war.

The 134th's commander, Col. Butler B. Miltonberger, placed a jeep and a driver (Pvt. John Robidoux from Falls City) at Youngman's disposal, giving Youngman a freedom of movement not all reporters enjoyed. As a result he was able to write about and photograph almost every aspect of the Nebraskans' service. Typically, he would go to hospitals, the front line, support units, award ceremonies, and anywhere else he could find Nebraskans. He would then gather them together for a group photograph. The 700 negatives in the Youngman collection show many activities: church services in the field, firing howitzers, card playing, bathing in rivers, captured equipment and prisoners, award presentations, football games, training exercises, wounded men in hospitals, and field inspections by Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower, George S. Patton, and Paul W. Baade, Thirty-fifth Division commander. Youngman "used any excuse to get a man's name and photograph in the paper."





# World-Herald Staff Reporter F-L-I-E-S TO EUROPE TO MEET YOUR BOY!

The World-Herald has sent its ace reporter and feature writer, Lawrence Youngman, to Europe for the express purpose of reporting home about all the Nebraska-western Iowa boys he can find.

He's there to meet your boy and the Johnnie Jones and the Bill Smiths; he's there to get their opinions and views on everything from shoes to sealing wax . . . the things you and all of us are curious about.

It's a big assignment, but just leave it to Lawrence . . . he'll get the kind of stories we're all thirsting for. Fifteen years as a World-Herald feature writer have given him the background; his smiling personality and quick ways of making friends are assets invaluable.

So watch The World-Herald for Lawrence Youngman's stories direct from Europe . . . he may meet your boy. And if you aren't now a World-Herald subscriber, mail your subscription order today . . . we'll do our best to fill your order.

Youngman operated from his hotel while in England and from the 134th's regimental command post while in France. Customarily he would set out early each morning to gather information and take photographs. Youngman's only "weapons" were his portable typewriter and his camera, which he took with him wherever he went. He returned to the 134th's dimly lit command post each night to write his articles, eat, and sleep. Youngman typically worked between fourteen and sixteen hours a day while remaining as close to the 134th Infantry Regiment as possible.

Only rarely did Youngman break away from the 134th to cover a significant event within the larger context of the war. One of these was the liberation of Paris. "It was the high spot of the war for me," said Youngman, "I'll never forget it as long as I live." As they entered Paris, Youngman and his driver were caught in a cross fire between French freedom fighters and German troops. He almost became one of the 37 American war correspondents who were killed or the 112 who were wounded during World War II. Youngman also had the rare privilege of working with Ernie Pyle, one of the most famous correspondents of the war.

While in England, Youngman wired his articles to the *World-Herald* via Universal Press, Western Union, or Postal Telegraph from the Allied press headquarters in London. In France, he wired timely stories where and when he could. Most of his articles, however, were features about the experiences of average soldiers. Because these accounts and photos were not time sensitive, they could be sent through regular mail. Unfortunately, some photographs got separated from the articles, stories were temporarily lost in the mail, and censors held certain stories and photographs for several months. A few negatives even arrived at the *World-Herald* with servicemen's faces obliterated by the censor. Youngman's accounts had become so popular in Nebraska, however, that the *World-Herald* ran even

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Omaha World-Herald, June 7, 1944.

## Lawrence Youngman

those that had been detained in the mail or by censors for several months. The paper published delayed articles with an introduction explaining their tardiness. The *World-Herald* was so anxious to publish material from Youngman that it printed cut lines listing individuals who appeared in photographs that had been lost in the mail.

Suppression of information by the military never concerned Youngman. Censorship had become a fact of life for Americans, who were so caught up in the desire to help the war effort that it never became a serious issue, as it did during America's latest conflict, "Operation Desert Shield/Storm." "I knew the types of information that would not get by the censors and generally tried to adhere to the rules," said Youngman. "Besides, I did not want to be the one who caused anyone getting killed."

The *World-Herald* tried to use Youngman's articles to bolster its circulation. The paper ran a full page ad consisting of a picture of Youngman boarding an airplane with a word bubble containing the expression, "If I meet your boy in Europe I'll include his name in my column." At the corner of the advertisement was a *World-Herald* subscription form. Although exact figures are not available, the paper credited the popularity of Youngman's stories with increasing its circulation during the war.

Few regional newspapers in World War II assigned a reporter to write about a specific unit, let alone a National Guard organization. In this respect the *World-Herald's* coverage of the 134th is unique. Nebraskans throughout the state appreciated Youngman's stories about local boys and the 134th. The articles proved particularly meaningful to relatives and friends of the soldiers he wrote about. Youngman and the *World-Herald* received hundreds of appreciative letters from Nebraskans who saw photographs and read stories about their loved ones in combat. One particularly heartfelt letter was from Mrs. C. G. Bridges of North Platte, whose son Sgt. Jim Bridges was killed in action near the

Vire River. Mrs. Bridges began by asking Youngman if he realized the service his stories had rendered to the mothers and wives of those in the 134th. "I read your stories over and over," she wrote. "I was with those boys all the way with your help and all I can say is thanks for giving me that privilege."<sup>2</sup>

Family members also sent Youngman's stories to their men overseas. The 134th's regimental commander appreciated that his men had received credit for their accomplishments and sacrifices in their home state. In a postwar letter to Youngman, Miltonberger credited the *World-Herald* articles with "raising the morale of the 134th."

After five months of working long hours in dim light under strenuous battlefield conditions, Youngman began experiencing eye problems. Military and civilian optometrists advised him in December 1944 that it was in his best interest to return to the United States. By this time the *World-Herald* realized Youngman's coverage of the 134th had been a great success. Its management encouraged Youngman to remain in Europe. Nevertheless Youngman wrote the *World-Herald*, "and told them that I had to leave regardless how they felt about it." He left Europe in December 1944, just before the Battle of the Bulge.

Youngman returned to his job with the *World-Herald* in January 1945, but remained with the paper for only twenty-two more months. He resigned in October 1946 to begin his own business, Travel and Transport, Inc. He retired in Omaha in 1969, where he continues to live.

Youngman received many accolades for his coverage of the 134th. He was one of only 314 war correspondents to receive the army's European-African-Middle-Eastern Campaign Ribbon. His citation reads "for outstanding and conspicuous service with the armed forces under difficult and hazardous combat conditions."<sup>3</sup> In April 1991 Governor E. Benjamin Nelson presented Youngman with the National Guard Legion of Merit

in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the state and the Nebraska National Guard.

The collection of Youngman's negatives at the Nebraska State Historical Society, combined with a scrapbook kept by his wife containing all of the articles and photographs published in the *World-Herald*, is an invaluable resource. Although most of Youngman's photos are not combat action shots, they detail the daily activities in the life of Nebraska soldiers in the 134th Infantry Regiment during World War II. Moreover, the collection represents a photographic history of the regiment. If a Nebraskan served with the 134th in Europe in 1944 there is a good chance that Lawrence Youngman captured him on film.

### Notes

All information, unless otherwise cited, is taken from two tape recorded interviews of Lawrence Youngman by the author on Dec. 2, 1989, and May 24, 1991. Copies of the tapes are available through the Nebraska National Guard Association's Museum in Lincoln. A third interview, conducted by Lori Cox in 1989 as part of the "What did you do in the War?" project of the Nebraska State Historical Society, is available at the Society.

<sup>1</sup> M. L. Stein, *Under Fire: The Story of American War Correspondents* (New York: Julian Messner, 1968), 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. C. G. Bridges to Lawrence Youngman (no date), in A. Mae Youngman scrapbook, MS1523, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

<sup>3</sup> General Order 315, HQ, U.S. Forces, European Theater, Nov. 26, 1945, A. Mae Youngman scrapbook.