BREAKING NEWS

HOW THE ASSOCIATED PRESS HAS COVERED
WAR, PEACE, AND EVERYTHING ELSE

Reporters of the Associated Press

with a foreword by David Halberstam
Boyle, whose war reporting won a Pulitzer prize in 1945, could find poetry in unlikely places, as in his description of a troop convoy bound for North Africa:

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\text{AT SEA WITH A U.S. TASK FORCE (AP) — Water old as the world rings the gray-clouded horizon, and winds trouble the sea into troughs. Across the vast, slate-gray surface, scores of tiny dots slug slowly through the never-ending waves, like determined ants painfully inching across a furrowed field.}
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\text{A full moon shines upon the sea, etching convoy ships in a silver radiance. The vessels sail down a path of lustrous, rippling light, as if the ocean surface had been paved with jewels. Along the deck rails, men stare at the bright waters, lit by intermittent phosphorescent gleams, and give themselves to long, long thoughts of home.}
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\text{“You know, I’d like to come this way again sometime,” a soldier says, “on my honeymoon, maybe, when this is all over.”}
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From Africa, the war campaign moved to Sicily and then to Italy. Meanwhile, plans went ahead for what would be the greatest invasion in history. When the Hellschreiber radio printer in a corner of AP’s London bureau came suddenly to life at 6:30 a.m. on the murky morning of June 6, 1944, the message from Berlin was swiftly translated into English and turned into an AP bulletin:
LONDON, JUNE 6 (AP) — The German news agency Transocean reported in a broadcast early today that Allied troops had begun landing near LeHavre at the mouth of the Seine River in France, and termed the blow the beginning of “invasion operations.”

Allied parachute troops also dropped “on the northern tip of the Normandy peninsula,” the broadcast said.

There was no immediate Allied confirmation.

At AP in New York, overnight editor John Aspinwall, in shirtsleeves and green eyeshade, was alerted by five bells on the London incoming printer, ripped off the bulletin, and sent it to the national wire. By 12:37 a.m. Eastern War Time, six minutes ahead of other news agencies, the first details of D-Day were landing on newspaper copy desks across America.

AP had also sent news of the Allied invasion three days earlier, because of a practice mistake by a London Teletype operator. The erroneous report was briefly aired on New York radio stations, and Eisenhower said later that it had helped to confuse the Germans. When the real bulletin on the landing came into the New York Times office seven blocks south of AP headquarters, editors there wondered if the Transocean broadcast were “some sort of Nazi disinformation,” recalled Arthur Gelb, then a twenty-year-old copy boy with one week on the job. Unable to find officials in Washington at that hour, the Times rushed out an extra edition, quoting AP. It hit newsstands about 1:30 a.m., less than an hour after the flash.

It wasn’t unusual for news to come first from the enemy. As AP would later report, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) “felt it necessary to yield the initiative in the war of words to the Germans in order to retain the initiative on land and keep the German high command in the dark as long as possible.” The strategy worked; by the time Hitler realized Normandy was not just a diversion, the Allies controlled the beaches and were moving inland.

SHAEF had delegated the planning of D-Day news coverage to the press itself. The London Foreign Correspondents’ Association, headed by AP London bureau chief Robert Bunnelle, arranged for Atlantic cable and radio transmissions of half a million words a day, carrier pigeons to bring copy and film from the invasion beaches, and thirty-eight journalists to accompany the invasion forces. AP’s Wes Gallagher, recently recovered from a jeep accident in North Africa, selected the print reporters. As a wire service man, he favored those who worked on deadlines, and New Yorker magazine writer A. J. Liebling never forgave Gallagher for denying him a spot in a landing craft. Even Ernie