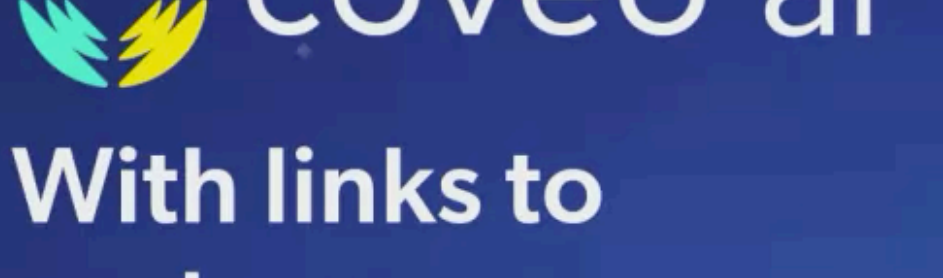


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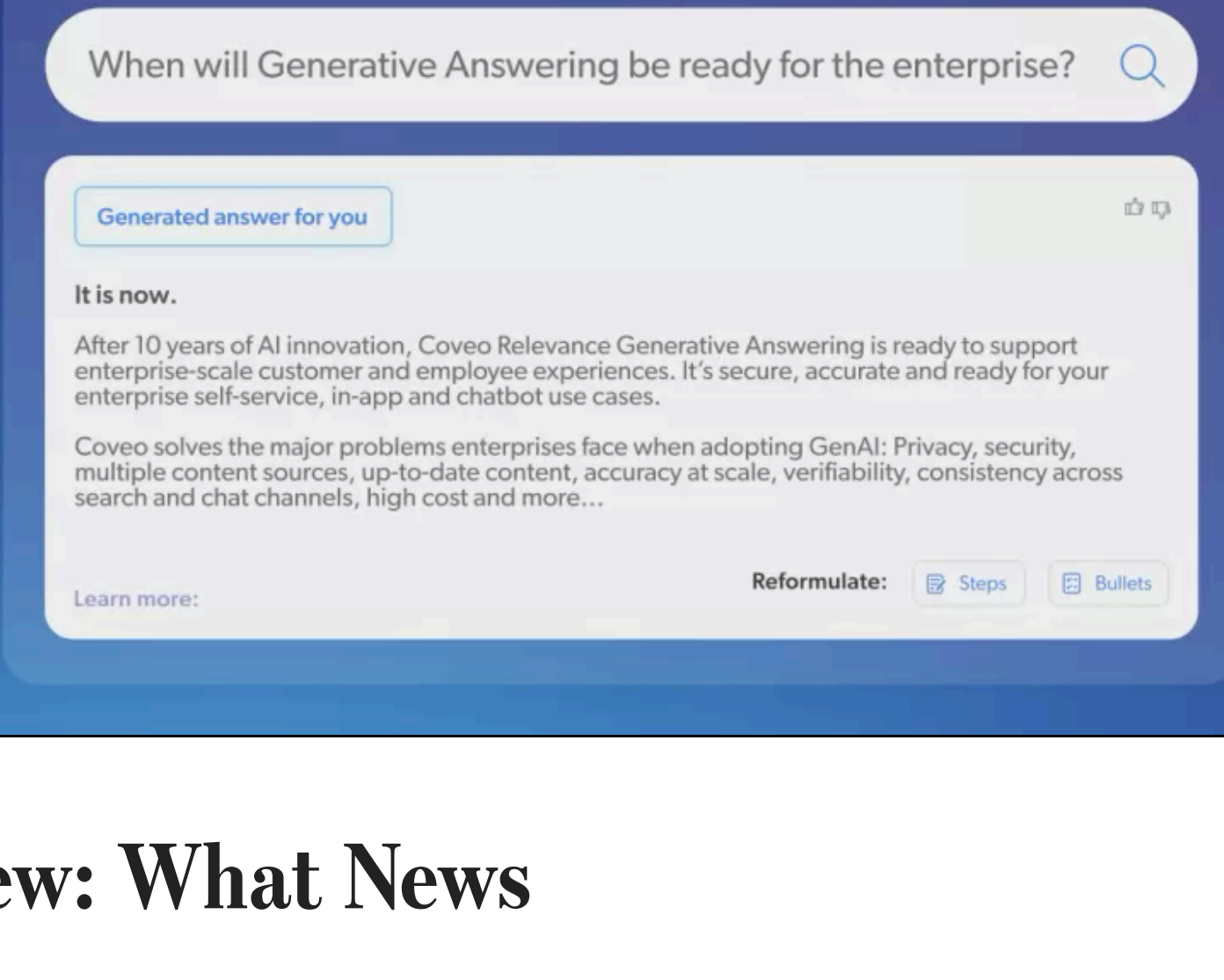
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## 'The War of Words' Review: What News to the Front?

In addition to Stars & Stripes and Yank, American G.I.s devoured publications like the 59th Latrineogram and the Hospital Gauzette.

By Edward Kosner

Oct. 1, 2023 at 4:34 pm ET

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A group of soldiers reading the news from home. PHOTO: BETTMANN ARCHIVE

One of the pleasures of popular history is the retrieval of fascinating but forgotten episodes that reanimate an epic era. One might think that every aspect of World War II has been scrutinized by now, but there are always welcome surprises. Molly Guptill Manning's "The War of Words," a compact account of how America's soldiers, sailors and airmen got the news, is one of them. The global effort to sustain the morale of U.S. combatants—and to counter the enemy's energetic efforts to dishearten Allied forces—by keeping them informed was a crucial element of the war.

Deeply researched and crisply written, the book is a compelling social history of the four-year conflict as told through military-produced publications. Along the way, Ms. Manning, a historian and law professor at New York Law School, covers the treatment of the 800,000 African-Americans and 20,000 Japanese-Americans serving in units that were segregated from white troops—except during combat; the hostile initial reaction by conservative elements in the military to the formation of the Women's Army Corps; the differences in concerns for the troops as demonstrated by Gen. Dwight Eisenhower in Europe and the imperious Gen. Douglas MacArthur in the Pacific; and much more. "In their newspapers," Ms. Manning writes, "troops dismantled hate, explored the causes of the hostilities, exposed the imperfections of their democracy, and recorded their experiences. In the process, they saw how publishing free words was the most powerful counterattack they could unleash."

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The War of Words: How America's GI Journalists Battled Censorship and Propaganda to Help Win World War II

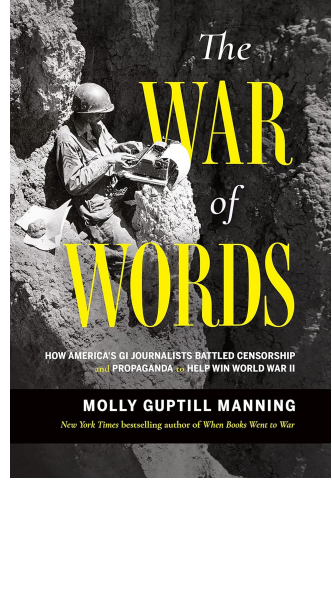
By Molly Guptill Manning

Blackstone

274 pages

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American units, whether training stateside, or fighting the Nazis among the ruins of Europe or the Japanese on the sweltering islands of the Pacific, devoured the 59th Latrineogram, the Hospital Gauzette, the Iwo Jima Inquirer, the Railsplitter, the Ramp-Age, the Scars and Grips, and the Screamer—to name a few of the 4,600 military newspapers that were often turned out on hand-cranked presses or mimeographs.

The military newsstand boasted 30 regional editions of the Army's daily paper, Stars & Stripes, circulated from Algiers to Tokyo; Outfit, for the

wounded who were convalescing at military hospitals; and Yank, the Army weekly, which counted two million subscribers. The Yank's masthead included Harold Ross of the New Yorker, Alexander Woollcott of Algonquin Round Table fame, the columnist Franklin P. Adams and the sports scribe Grantland Rice. Servicemen and women—some with journalistic experience, most without—put out the news sheets.

There were also country guides for G.I.s serving in North Africa and other foreign fronts; special service editions of hometown newspapers sent to the war zones; and countless copies of miniaturized magazines like Newsweek's "Battle Baby," Time's "Pony Edition" and other popular American slicks.

Gen. George C. Marshall, the Army's chief of staff, was the driving force behind the war of words. It was Marshall, we are told, who commanded the crash effort to upgrade America's neglected military for World War II. He knew that keeping his fighting men informed was as vital as their arms, transport and supplies—and so what might have been called Operation News got under way in 1942 with crates filled with publishing equipment and supplies shipped to units at home and abroad. Even so, many of the papers had to improvise, carving stencils with unburnt paper clips and fashioning ink by mixing shoe polish with insect repellent.

Along with the news, the G.I. press ran sentimental poetry, pinups and satire, including a parody of the wartime hit "Don't Fence Me In" called "Don't Send Me In." After a photographer snapped a Stars & Stripes staffer riding a donkey to deliver papers to troops on a beachhead, the paper ran the photo with the headline, "Circulation Man Gets His Ass Up to the Front."

There was crusading journalism, too. Yank published a letter to the editor describing how, in Louisiana, escorted German prisoners of war were served at a railroad-station lunchroom while black American G.I.s had to eat out of sight in the kitchen.

The G.I. press was designed to help counter Hitler's skillful and relentless propaganda aimed not only at U.S. forces in North Africa and Europe but on the home front as well. Ms. Manning writes that in the years leading up to U.S. intervention in World War II, nearly 20 German-controlled publications—with patriotic-sounding names like Crusaders for Americanism, American Guards and Facts in Review—spread lies around the country. Later, overseas G.I.s were showered with Nazi leaflets. "Hello, suckers," began one, purportedly from a veteran of World War I describing how "stay-at-home" shirkers were taking their jobs and stealing their women.

One star of the military press was neither a uniformed reporter nor editor but the cartoonist who created "Willie and Joe," the bearded dogface beloved by troops everywhere for evoking their lives at war. Bill Mauldin's work first appeared in the 45th Army Division's News while the unit trained at Fort Sill, Okla. "Willie and Joe" then followed the force to North Africa and Italy. Stars & Stripes quickly picked up Mauldin's cartoons, which later won him a Pulitzer Prize. Mauldin's images of bedraggled G.I.s infuriated Gen. George Patton, the master of spit-and-polish. In Italy, we are told, Patton summoned Mauldin and excoriated him for weakening discipline. Mauldin defended himself, but wisely decided to keep his distance from then on.

Censorship and the dictates of commanding officers often hindered the efforts of civilian correspondents and the military press to cover the global conflict. Official word of the Germans' early successes during the Battle of the Bulge was muffled, but the 84th Division's Railsplitter newspaper covered the combat until its successful conclusion. And when the 42nd Rainbow Division liberated the concentration camp at Dachau, the excruciating story of what the troops found there was told by the correspondents and photographers of the Rainbow Reveille.

Now, thanks to Molly Guptill Manning, the overlooked story of the resourceful, heroic military press in World War II is on the record.

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Mr. Kosner is the author of "It's News to Me," a memoir of his career as the editor of Newsweek, New York magazine, Esquire and the New York Daily News.

Appeared in the October 2, 2023, print edition as "What News To the Front?"

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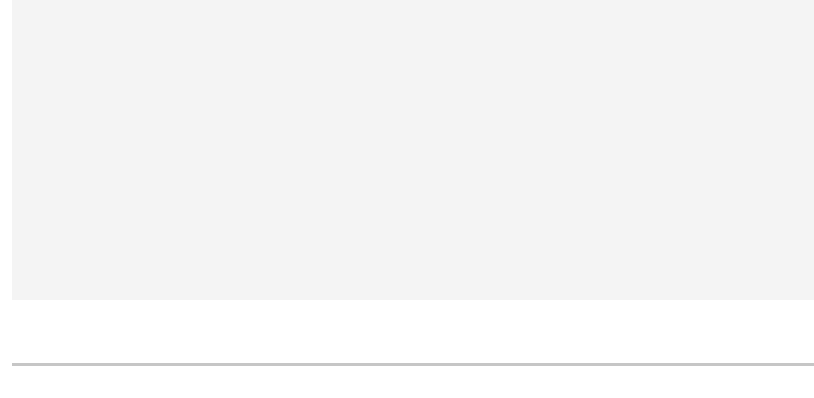
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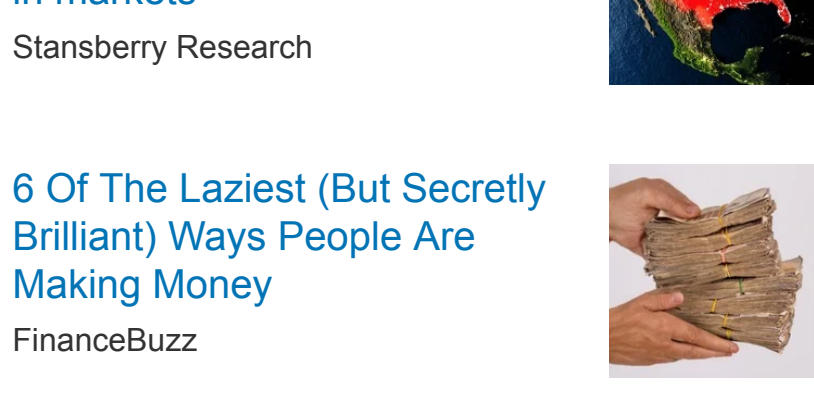
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