



## *The Lost Soldier: The Ordeal of a World War II GI from the Home Front to the Hürtgen Forest* by Chris Hartley.

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In *The Lost Soldier*, author Chris Hartley tells the story of an American soldier who fought on European soil in World War II. It revolves around the life of Pete Lynn, a cotton-mill worker from North Carolina, and his wife Ruth. Hartley describes the road Lynn took from being drafted to his boot camp training and relocation to the war zone on the European front. Lynn fought in a far away country, while his family back home coped with the struggles of daily life without their father and husband. Based on family correspondence, Ruth's diary, and numerous photographs, Hartley tells the tale of a "Lost Soldier" who died in the Hürtgen Forest. Using a range of secondary literature, he sets Lynn's story in the context of the battle as a whole.

The author describes in detail the social setting of rural North Carolina. Young Pete (b. 1910) began working in a cotton mill in Kings Mountain at age twelve. He later married Ruth, from the same town, and became a father. He was a humble man happy with his work and family life. After being drafted into the Army, Lynn traveled to various training camps and military bases. It was at this point that he and his wife began their remarkable correspondence, supplemented here by Ruth's diary entries. There are accounts and testimony of Lynn's fellow soldiers as well.

Hartley has Pete Lynn speak in his own (sometimes misspelled and uncouth) words. He rotates his narrative focus from Pete and Ruth to training camps, military bases, and the home front in North Carolina. Along the way, he mentions local socioeconomic conditions vis-à-vis women's lives and employment, average incomes, and educational opportunities. The reader follows Ruth and her day-to-day work as a single parent raising her children without their father. Pete's letters describe boot camp life, free time activities on military bases, and shipping out to Europe (103).

The correspondence breaks off for a time after Pete leaves for the front. When he is not writing about specific events or stations, Hartley has others talk about similar stages of their military journey or uses other primary sources (official statistics and reports, and so on). Pete's letters describe his homesickness and need for "cigarettes and razor blades" (68).

After his first combat experience, Lynn did not write many letters about the fighting and killing. Hence, Hartley turns to accounts or memoirs by other soldiers in Pete's location at the same time. Studies have shown that letter writers were naturally reticent about providing details of the killing and the horrors of the battlefield at all, but they also simply lacked the time to write and post letters.<sup>1</sup> When they did write home, soldiers concealed traumatic events either to spare their loved ones or because they could not bring themselves to express what they had seen in combat.

War letters most often concerned training and transportation, and long hours standing in chow lines (125). As Lynn moved closer to the front, his correspondence provided a precious link to home. He shares his impressions of France and Belgium where, he tells Ruth, the girls "aren't as

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1. See Martin Humburg, "Jedes Wort ist falsch und wahr—das ist das Wesen des Worts: Vom Schreiben und Schweigen in der Feldpost," in *Schreiben im Krieg—Schreiben vom Krieg*, ed. J. Ebert and T. Jander (Essen: Klartext, 2011) 75–85.

pretty as the ones in Texas” (126); he was also fascinated with great cities like Luxembourg (135). Lynn does report on his first contact with the front: his unit sustained casualties and captured a German soldier (152–53).

When mail service between Europe and North Carolina was interrupted, soldier Lynn went missing, so Hartley must reconstruct the story of his unit and wartime experiences using various army reports. He shifts from scenes at US Army headquarters (182) to German reactions and attack strategies (Rundstedt Offensive), and then back to Lynn and his accounts of training, food, and church services (185). After joining his last unit (the 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division), Pete Lynn reached his duty station in the Hürtgen Forest as the Battle of Vossenack began. Hartley describes the actions of Lynn’s unit during the German attack (Nov. 1944), when he went missing.

Across the Atlantic, Ruth was working and caring for their children when a telegram arrived with the news that Pete was missing (224). Thus began a time of uncertainty and trepidation for her. The author’s juxtaposition of events—Lynn dying in a forest and his weary and worried wife carrying on her daily struggle—emphasizes the strong ties to home and the vital importance of the postal service.

The book goes on describe the discovery of Lynn’s grave (German soldiers had buried him) and the good work of the Army’s Graves Registration Service. Lynn’s body was embalmed and shipped back to North Carolina, where it was buried with honors.

Hartley’s inclusion of photographs of the protagonist and his family and commanders like Maj. Gen. Norman D. Cota (140), together with maps of Lynn’s itinerary add to the appeal of a book designed for non-specialist readers. Maps and helpful notes and references are further enhancements.