

WASHINGTON D.C. ON THE MERRY-GO-ROUND: DREW PEARSON AND THE
EXPANSION OF JOURNALISM IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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In the mid-twentieth century the investigative journalist Drew Pearson greatly expanded journalism by exposing the personal lives of public figures in Washington D.C. This paper traces Pearson's attempts to apply this standard to three men, General Douglas A. MacArthur, Secretary James V. Forrestal, and Senator Joseph R. McCarthy

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I just operate with a sense of smell. if something smells wrong, I go to work."
- Drew Pearson¹

In 1936 the journalist Drew Pearson married the love of his life, Luvie Moore, while on vacation in Venice, Italy. It was the second marriage for both, but each of them hoped to put their unsuccessful relationships behind them and start a new life together. Unfortunately, it would not be that easy for the newlyweds. The problem lay in the fact that Moore's first husband, George Abell, who was once a close friend and associate with Pearson, refused to accept what he considered to be the theft of his wife without a fight. Upon hearing of the marriage, Abell told reporters in London "when I meet Pearson, I will know how to use my fists."² George Abell was not of a very sound mind even before news of his ex-wife's and ex-best friend's wedding reached him. He came from a proud journalistic family that owned and operated the *Baltimore Sun*, but Abell began to succumb to the same lifestyle that he wrote about in his gossip column. Luvie considered his drinking and carousing inappropriate behavior, especially around their three year old son Tyler, so she filed for divorce.

¹"Querulous Quaker," *Time*, 13 December 1948; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,799488,00.html>, Internet, accessed 14 November 2007.

² Oliver Pilat, *Drew Pearson An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Harper's, 1973), 149.

Pearson happily accepted his role as father to his new step-son, but Abell wasn't as accepting of the situation. The following summer Abell kidnapped his son during a court ordered visit and fled the country. Through some amateur detective work, and by calling in some favors with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drew and Luvie tracked George and Tyler to London where they snatched the child back while he was playing with a nanny. George's ire was far from sated however, and he made several threatening remarks to mutual friends of his and Pearson's, prompting the journalist to apply for a gun permit. Eventually the entire situation blew over and the participants continued with their respective lives.

The most remarkable thing about this story is that Drew Pearson was a participant in the very same kind of melodrama that he reported about in his by-line "Washington D.C. on the Merry-Go-Round." This was the kind of town in which he lived and worked. The private and public lives of people in Washington D.C. were one in the same, and that is exactly how Pearson saw it. When Drew Pearson wrote about public officials in his articles, he did not separate their private lives from their public personas. He believed that their private lives were just as important as the image they portrayed to the public simply because the two were inseparable. In his mind, the character they exhibited in their personal lives directly affected how they carried out their duties in public office. In many ways this reflected Pearson's Quaker upbringing, but it was also an attempt by Pearson to continue the muckraking spirit of investigative journalism. Pearson's willingness to expose public figures for their private foibles was something relatively new in his day. The fact that much of journalistic world looked down upon that method did not deter him in his efforts.

Pearson developed this personal level of journalism in his ad hominem critiques of three notable people in his career, General Douglas MacArthur, the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, James V. Forrestal, the first Secretary of Defense, and Senator Joseph McCarthy, the anti-communist congressman from Wisconsin. Pearson's critiques made him popular around the country with average citizens, but were not always well-received in other quarters. Many of his fellow journalists and bitter politicians attacked Pearson in newspaper articles decrying that he was "an ignorant liar, a pusillanimous liar, a liar during his manhood, a liar by profession, a liar in the daytime and a liar in the nighttime."³ Despite these charges Pearson persevered in his efforts and sometimes even fought back. In doing so he pushed the boundaries of "acceptable journalism." He did so because he believed in what he was doing, and because he felt strongly that the public had a right to know about powerful people in government. Pearson's historical significance is that he pioneered the use of reporting on both personal and professional lives of public figures and expanded the role that journalism plays in society.

This brand of 'hard-hitting' journalism has become very popular in recent decades and can easily be traced back to episodes in the early 1970s such as the release of the *Pentagon Papers* by Daniel Ellsberg and the now legendary exploits of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in their attempts to expose clandestine events in the Nixon White House. This type of journalism is by no means a new phenomenon. As significant as those events were, they still actually built on a foundation laid earlier in the century by the journalist Drew Pearson.

When public servants, whether elected or appointed, betray the public trust with

³ Mike Wallace, transcript from interview by Terry Gross, "Mike Wallace, Interviewer: 'You and Me,'" ; available from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4992445>, Internet; accessed 14 November 2007. The quote was from a Tennessee senator named Kenneth McKellar.

inappropriate behavior, it often falls upon the journalist to expose the story to the rest of the country. Drew Pearson was notorious for becoming embroiled in several such scenarios. Some circles relegated him to the ignominy of a gossip columnist, but many average citizens around the country welcomed his particular brand of journalism. Drew Pearson's investigations and the resultant articles were so relentless, hard hitting, and laced with personal invective that they elicited dramatic responses from those individuals unlucky enough to have crossed his path.

In this paper I will analyze three incidents involving Senator Joseph McCarthy, General Douglas A. MacArthur, and Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal. Pearson's relationships with these three men are detailed here in the context of the effect that Pearson had on each of these men, and the significance of their reaction to Pearson's journalistic style. Pearson believed that each of these men had significant shortcomings in their professional lives. Because of their relative positions of power Pearson believed they had each posed a potential threat to the general welfare of the American people. In order to ensure that these men were exposed to the American public Pearson conducted extensive investigations on each of them. Those investigations not only uncovered evidence of professional malfeasance but also personal foibles as well. Pearson used this information to discredit these men even further.

Although Drew Pearson expanded the tools available to journalists by assiduously applying an ad hominem approach in his exposes, investigative journalism has a long history in America. Even before the Constitution guaranteed a freedom of the press, cases such as the John Peter Zenger trial established that a journalist cannot be sued for libel if what they report is true. That tradition was carried all the way through to the turn

of the nineteenth century in the Progressive Era when the first true muckrakers began their assault on what they considered to be unbridled capitalism caused by the Industrial Revolution. Journalists such as Lincoln Steffens dedicated themselves to various social causes and reforms in an effort to expose corporate corruption and increase governmental regulation. Some writers such as Upton Sinclair in his novel *The Jungle* famously called for governmental intervention into the meat industry. These muckrakers were willing to expose corruption but their place in history was largely relegated to only a few decades because once the reforms they called for were enacted, they served no larger purpose. They left behind no real tangible legacy that could be applied to the more general concern of investigative journalism.⁴

From the 1930s to the late 1960s many journalists were content to merely report the news in a dispassionate and unconcerned manner. There were a few exceptions such as Edward R. Murrow, I.F. Stone, and Jessica Mitford, but it was Drew Pearson that really furthered the cause of journalism during this period. It was Drew Pearson's willingness to make the private lives of public officials relevant that really expanded journalism during this time period and kept the spirit of investigative journalism alive. Subsequent journalists including Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein, and Pearson's own protégé Jack Anderson, have continued this tradition in their own pursuit to combat political corruption. Pearson's own motivations concerning how he conducted his investigations sprang directly from his upbringing and it is necessary to understand his past in order to analyze his role in the history of journalism.⁵

⁴ Mark Feldstein, "A Muckraking Model: Investigative Reporting Cycles in American History," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 11, no. 2 (2006): 108-111.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 111-113.

As a young man, Drew Pearson, the son of erudite parents who raised their son to be a conscientious and independent adult, actively pursued a wide range of experiences, and eventually translated those into his chosen profession of journalism. The decisions he made that governed his life were fairly consistent with a childhood characterized by the scholarly activities of his father and the careful attention paid to him by his mother. Many of the circumstances in which he found himself as an adult however, varied widely from the quaintness of his early life. Despite his tempered upbringing Pearson was drawn into several tumultuous events during his life. That a man whose family sprang from the cloistered traditions of the American Midwest would find himself caught up in international child kidnappings and the intrigues of the old-moneyed set of the East Coast is intriguing enough. It is evident throughout his career that the foundation of Pearson's character and his unwavering belief in what he was doing was so heavily informed by the ethics of the various religions of his immediate family and grandparents. Perhaps because he developed this strong personal code of ethics, he demanded the same from public figures.

Both of Pearson's parents hailed from the Midwest and religion played no small part in the upbringing of either of his parents. His father, Paul Pearson came from a long line of Protestants, and the senior Pearson began what would be a lifetime of public speaking by serving as a minister on a small circuit that traveled through many small towns in eastern Kansas. Drew's mother, Edna Wolfe, came from a family of successful Jewish professionals. Although at first she was hesitant to marry Paul Pearson his tenacity paid off and they were eventually married. As the nineteenth century came to a

close, the couple had their first child when Andrew Pearson was born on December 13, 1897 in Evanston, Illinois.⁶

Drew Pearson always had fond memories of his childhood years on small farm in the Midwest. That time, and subsequent summers through his teens, taught him the necessity and value of hard work. A major turning point occurred in the lives of the Pearson family when Paul Pearson received an appointment as an Assistant Professor of public speaking and English at the Swarthmore College, a Quaker school in Pennsylvania. One of the most important effects of this decision was that the entire family soon became Quakers. Although this could be interpreted merely as a shrewd career move on the part of the senior Pearson, it would have a profound effect on the upbringing and subsequent development of the young Drew Pearson.

As a Quaker, Pearson strongly believed that the way in which a person acted in their personal life was indivisible from their public persona. One Puritan explained this concept by saying that “Quaker experience began as personal and inward, but moved outward into the wider dimensions of moral, social, and political life.”⁷ This means that the same ethical standard applied regardless of whether or not someone is in the public eye. Pearson held himself to this standard and he expected the same from public officials.

⁶ Pilat, 44-45.

⁷ Douglas Gwyn, “Apocalypse Now and Then: Reading Early Friends in the Belly of the Beast,” *The Creation of Quaker Theory Insider Perspectives*, p. 133

At Swarthmore, Paul Pearson became interested in the Chautauqua movement and quickly founded a program there.⁸ Over the course of the next few decades it became his life's work and required his family's involvement and patience at a very intense level. Paul Pearson worked tirelessly to promote the Chautauqua vision of advanced education and to that end he "was known for trying to sustain the educational content of his Swarthmore Circuit when the tents becoming more and more places of entertainment."⁹ Drew Pearson eventually attended Swarthmore as an undergraduate, but as his biographer notes "Drew was demonstrably more affected by Chautauqua than by his courses, his experimental romances, or the war."¹⁰

Drew Pearson's personal investment in his father's vision was so strong that he decided not to participate in World War One. His Quaker upbringing and his desire to stay and help with Chautauqua heavily influenced his decision not to enlist for overseas duty. Even though he was not involved in overseas combat, the next milestone in his life occurred when he joined the Quaker organization American Friends Service Committee after he graduate college. Pearson discovered his wanderlust began when he was promptly assigned to a unit in Serbia to assist in rebuilding the devastation that country suffered during the war. This experience did much more for Pearson than broadening his horizons and allowing him to serve his country. It exposed him to certain progressive political leanings that were more progressive than the ones he had known back home.

⁸ Theodore Morrison, *Chautauqua* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), vi-vii The Chautauqua 'movement' was a forerunner of the public education system in that was designed to expose people to elements of education not readily available to the masses the turn of the twentieth century The program included everything from lectures on famous Americans, plays, and even religious discussions.

⁹ *Ibid* , 180.

¹⁰ Pilat, 55.

According to some of his associates, Pearson claimed among his friends and acquaintances the Beach sisters, Holly and Sylvia, and Mary Heaton Vorse, a feminist and supposed communist.¹¹

During his time in Serbia, Pearson gained confidence in his ability to identify problems quickly and to empathize with downtrodden people. At this point, his career was far from certain but he knew he must put these skills to use. For a short time he believed he could do that best as a diplomat, and following his service he used connections from an established uncle to become a sort of lecturer-correspondent. Pearson quickly concluded that his pedigree was not of the type necessary for a diplomatic life. People seemed to be interested in what he had to say about things however, so he turned to the world of journalism.

After he a gained a reputation for his interviewing and writing skills, he unknowingly found himself, in 1924, at the next turning point in his life. He obtained an invitation to a party held by. Cissy Patterson, a powerful and wealthy divorcee in Washington D.C.¹² Pearson's relationship with Patterson strongly affected his personal and professional spheres for the duration of his life. In 1925 Pearson married Felicia Patterson, Cissy's daughter from a failed marriage to Count Gizycki. Not only did Pearson gain a wife but he strengthened his bond with Cissy, even though he never felt entirely at home in the Patterson's world of high society. Felicia had had a troubled

¹¹ Ibid., 58-63. Sylvia Beach later owned the highly influential bookstore Shakespeare & Company on the Left Bank in Paris. She played a key role in the literary scene of Paris in the 1920's amongst the crowd that would call themselves the "Lost Generation." Mary Heaton Vorse would also go on to have a literary career and associated with many leftist causes. According to Pilat, Holly Beach was asked by a relative near the end of her life in 1971 if she had known Drew Pearson, and her response was that she "never knew him."

¹² Pilat, 66-75.

childhood marked by a nasty custody battle that involved her being kidnapped at least once by each of her parents. Felicia's unstable personality and Pearson's difficulty in fitting in with her crowd put a heavy strain on their relationship. Pearson's marriage to Felicia only lasted three years, but it produced a daughter, Ellen, and a strong bond between Pearson and his mother-in-law. Following the divorce, Felicia, in an act reminiscent of her own childhood, kidnapped their daughter and spent many years traipsing around Europe before allowing Drew to see their child on a regular basis.¹³

In the late 1920s, while he was working as a diplomatic correspondent for such papers as the *United States Daily* and the *Baltimore Sun*, Pearson met two men that proved to be invaluable, both personally and professionally. George Abell's family owned the *Sun*, and through him, Pearson gained access to the young, rich, jet-setters in D.C. that were not always welcome among Cissy's more respectable crowd. At this time Pearson also met, and was quickly impressed with, another State Department correspondent who worked for the *Christian Science Monitor*, Robert S. Allen.

In 1931 Pearson and Allen anonymously co-wrote *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, the details of which are discussed later in this paper. The book lampooned and criticized many key Washington figures including Hoover's Secretary of State, Henry L. Stimson and Hoover's Secretary of the Treasury Andrew William Mellon.¹⁴ Stimson's chapter "Wrong Horse Harry" painted a picture of a man who was entirely out of his league at the State Department and who could supposedly never reconcile conflicting tendencies in his personality. The story did not attack any specific act or policy of Stimson as much as it

¹³ Pilat, 91-92.

¹⁴ Allen, Robert and Drew Pearson, *Washington Merry-Go-Round* (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1931), 103-136, 163-183.

made him out to be an ignorant boob whose most conspicuous talent was taking orders. Mellon's chapter titled "The Man Who Stayed Too Long," portrayed him as an entitled opportunist who continued to increase his personal fortune while the nation's economy worsened in the Great Depression. Pearson and Allen wrote the entire book in a very 'tongue-in-cheek' style that derided and ridiculed the subject while seemingly praising them. Although the authors lost their positions, they were soon hired by Cissy Patterson, who had recently purchased the *Washington Herald*. The by-line that carried Pearson's name until his retirement, the *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, was born.¹⁵

Pearson and Allen continued to write the column throughout the '30s, but relations with some of his other close friends and supporters began to deteriorate. The previously related story involving George Abell was followed by a falling out between Pearson and his ex-mother-in-law. Pearson's relationship with Cissy Patterson also began to deteriorate even as his *Washington Merry-Go-Round* column was becoming a huge success. He and Allen made many political enemies, but toward some politicians and issues they turned a critical but not unkind eye. Although Pearson criticized him at times, he was generally favorable to President Franklin Roosevelt. This position was not always well received by his benefactor at the *Herald*, Cissy Patterson. As it became increasingly clear that American involvement in another European War seemed likely, Pearson painted the isolationists as anti-Semites or worse. Because she was generally opposed to F.D.R., Cissy Patterson began to make increased editorial changes to the *Merry-Go-Round* that Pearson did not appreciate. Eventually Robert Allen left to join the Army, and in 1942 Pearson took the *Merry-Go-Round* to the *Washington Post*. Of

¹⁵ Pilat, 114-126.

course, Cissy did not go down without a fight and she consistently countered many of the charges that Pearson continued to make against public officials. Their relationship never fully recovered from that split.

From World War Two until the sixties, Pearson continued in his attempts to uncover abuses of power and corruption in Washington D.C. In the fifties he found a new protégé in Jack Anderson and together they continued to face down presidents, demagogues and anyone else in Washington that sought to deceive the public. Pearson died in 1969 at the age of 71 confident in the knowledge that he had done his part to expose those who succumb to the temptations of power.

Pearson believed very strongly in holding people accountable for their actions, including their private life. He remained true to his personal journalistic vision and he was unwilling merely to report passively on people that he felt had betrayed the public trust. In the course of his career as a journalist Pearson expanded the role of the journalist, and in many cases found it necessary to involve himself in the story to the degree that he actually had an effect on their outcome. These characteristics of journalism are very similar to the ones employed by Woodward and Bernstein several decades later. This paper puts Drew Pearson into the correct historical context by analyzing his investigations of key politicians, and by demonstrating that his legacy is that of a pioneering investigative journalist that refused to back down on a story.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL MACARTHUR AND THE LAWSUIT

Pearson's involvement with two investigations earlier in his career highlights the lengths that Pearson was willing to go to as a journalist, and the strong negative reaction that he would sometimes invoke. There is no doubt that Pearson's experiences with these two men prepared him for the fight that lay ahead with McCarthy. Pearson's exposés of General Douglas MacArthur and James V. Forrestal, the first Secretary of Defense, evoked such strong reactions from these men that the limits of the freedom of the press were called into question; but in reality Pearson's investigations of these men, and his refusal to back down actually served to strengthen those rights.

At around 5 P.M. on the afternoon of 28 July 1932, General Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, surveyed the ground before him and prepared his troops to advance and clear out the enemy. His amassed army numbered nearly 600 strong, and the five tanks idling at the front of the column made the gathered force appear all the more imposing. Victory was swift for General MacArthur, who routed the enemy

in less than an hour without losing a single man. This confrontation was different from the general's previous encounters with war, because this 'battle' took place during rush hour in Washington, D.C., and the opposition was comprised of veterans of the United States Army.¹⁶

Almost immediately, criticism was leveled at President Herbert Hoover because of the perceived disparity of the opposing forces.¹⁷ The members of the Bonus Army, World War One veterans who wanted early remuneration of a promised 'bonus,' were armed mainly with bricks and rocks, and although the soldiers under MacArthur's command did not fire a single shot, they were reported to have used liberal amounts of tear gas. The cavalry also used their sabers to forcibly prod the unarmed families off government land, and they set fire to the ramshackle encampment that the veterans called home during their protest. Even before the day was through, President Hoover dismissed any accusations of wrongdoing on the part of General MacArthur and his troops.¹⁸

The real story of what happened that day in Washington, D.C., has become so intertwined with a mythologized version of events that it is difficult to discern the truth. One book on the subject quotes from both Hoover's memoirs and the official orders given to MacArthur before the battle, to prove that the general disobeyed direct orders from his superiors. This is important because according to both of these sources, Hoover merely wanted him to act in concert with the police and then to proceed in a much less

¹⁶ Roger Daniels, *The Bonus March An Episode of the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971), 166-169.

¹⁷ Those who participated in the Bonus Army were W.W.I veterans who protested Hoover's opposition to the 'Bonus Bill.' The bill would have allowed veterans to collect their bonus checks earlier than scheduled. The decisions of both the veterans and the Hoover administration were motivated by the economic hardships of The Great Depression.

¹⁸ Daniels, 166-169

aggressive manner. Although MacArthur apparently did not obey orders, his actions were effective in removing the Bonus Marchers from their camp only minutes from downtown Washington D.C. Subsequent to the event, MacArthur never gave any indication that he was not completely justified in his actions. He rarely mentioned the event in public and because the majority of his papers were destroyed during the Battle of Manila in World War Two, any contemporaneous personal accounts were lost.¹⁹

Immediately following the incident, most of the resulting acrimony was directed solely at Hoover. The president continued to issue public letters in an effort to justify his decisions and the actions of the U.S. Army. MacArthur personally felt very proud of how the events unfolded. In his official report issued two weeks later he claimed that his troops acted with consideration toward the Bonus Marchers and he denied any U.S. Army responsibility for the fires, despite documentary film evidence that proved otherwise.²⁰ In this same report MacArthur specifically addressed the news coverage of the confrontation. He stated that during the disturbance he sought “to accord to representatives of the press the utmost freedom consistent with the requirements of the military task to be accomplished” and that “as a result, there appeared in the daily press, except for a few obviously prejudiced accounts, a very fair presentation as they were seen and interpreted by reporters.”²¹ Almost two years later, MacArthur’s generally amenable attitude toward the press in regard to his handling of the Bonus Army changed significantly.

¹⁹ Daniels, 166-169.

²⁰ Ibid., 172-73, 180.

²¹ Ibid., 306-307

The source of the change in MacArthur's opinion of the press was Pearson's "Washington Merry-Go-Round." By twenty-first-century standards Pearson's byline was fairly tame, but in the 1930s many readers were pleased to know that the highly 'respected' and powerful men that ran the nation were subject to the same temptations and vagaries of life as they were.²²

It was not long before most people in Washington, at least the ones with something to hide, felt the sting of Pearson and Allen's pen. It only seemed like a matter of time before a confrontation would erupt. The journalists faced their first challenge in May 1934, when General Douglas MacArthur became so incensed at the criticisms leveled at him by Pearson and Allen that he sued each of them, and their publisher for libel in the U.S. Supreme Court for \$250,000. The importance of the libel case soon grew beyond the mere matter of the money, as members of the press realized that the outcome of the case would have a significant impact on the limits of the freedom of the press.²³

The general's complaint consisted of seven separate counts, at least one of which was directly related to his actions against the Bonus Army. In the official legal brief of the general's case each count details a lengthy description of the offending remark, followed by the general's own language that answered why he found that particular comment insulting enough to be libel.²⁴ Libel cases can sometimes be defeated if the

²² Robert Allen and Drew Pearson, *Washington Merry-Go-Round* (New York: Horace Liveright 1931).

²³ "A General on "Merry-Go-Round"," *Time archive*, May 28, 1934; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,754165-1,00.html>; Internet; accessed on April 17, 2007, and Douglas A. Anderson, *A Washington "Merry-Go-Round" of Libel Actions* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1980), 99-101.

information in question is actually true. All Pearson had to do was prove that his statements that MacArthur found offensive were, in fact, true.²⁵ In his notes Pearson filtered the seven counts down to a few offensive “snippets” that were culled from various “*Merry-Go-Round*” articles about the general. Pearson found these convenient to use in his response, and highly relevant because they clearly show the elements of the case that he believed to be the most important. Two of these counts around which Pearson developed his defense described the general as a “*swaggering* Chief of Staff,” and “the famous *evictor* of the Bonus Army.” Pearson’s notes also show evidence that he was prepared to refute the claims of two other counts that the general found objectionable; that “*wire-pulling* was one of MacArthur’s greatest acts,” and that MacArthur was “the one that actually ran the War Department.”²⁶

Of course, each of these statements contained more contextual information in the original complaint, but as evidenced by Pearson’s notes he intended to build his rebuttal by refuting those particular claims first. Pearson then made lists in his own handwriting that corresponded to some of the charges. Under the ‘swaggering’ heading he listed several people that would have testified to having seen the General ‘swagger.’ Then under ‘wire-pulling,’ he listed individuals that would attest to knowledge of MacArthur making rank unfairly with the help of his connections. Pearson’s investigative notes also

²⁴ “Libel” is anything regarded as a defamatory statement made in a permanent medium. This can be differentiated from “slander,” which is made in a temporary manner, such as speech.

²⁵ This is not the case in all jurisdictions, and is actually much more complicated. The original idea of truth as defense in a libel case stems from the Zenger trial of 1735. This case is generally recognized as establishing the ‘right to a free press’ several decades before the Bill of Rights.

²⁶ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box G237, 3 of 3, MacArthur, Douglas #9. The italics are mine. They represent the actual offending word in each of the statements. The word ‘wire-pulling’ here was intended to mean that MacArthur advanced in rank not on his own merit, but through the favors of others.

include a meticulously constructed etymology of the term ‘wire-pulling’ for even further clarification. This thoroughness, especially when Pearson was the defendant and not the plaintiff, was indicative of Pearson’s investigative style. Based on his notes, Pearson probably would have continued to build his case in this same manner, if another opportunity had not presented itself.²⁷

Many journalists conjectured that if MacArthur won his case, then the new reporting style of Pearson and Allen would face a serious setback. A victory for MacArthur in the courts meant that public figures would be virtually immune from criticism, even if it was true. Pearson also realized that a case with such high stakes could also work in his favor. If the “Merry-Go-Round” prevailed against MacArthur then it was an implicit affirmation that Pearson and Allen could continue to write articles that adhered to a more ‘progressive’ interpretation of the freedom of the press. To ensure that he and his newly expanded rights were not trampled upon, Pearson developed a tactic that he henceforth utilized throughout the rest of his career as a journalist. In addition to building a strong case in opposition to MacArthur’s, Pearson undertook what the general referred to as a ‘flanking maneuver.’ In other words, Pearson intensified separate investigations of the general in order to uncover information to use as leverage. Investigations such as those were not easy, but Pearson was a patient man with a lot of friends.²⁸

As news of the impending lawsuit spread, Pearson received letters from interested parties that wanted to aid the journalist in his legal battle with MacArthur. Some of these

²⁷ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box G237, 3 of 3, MacArthur, Douglas #9.

²⁸ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box G237, 3 of 3, MacArthur, Douglas #6, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Tx.

people were strong advocates of a free press, and others were primarily soldiers who served with MacArthur and were not left with a favorable impression. The evidence that Pearson gathered to prove the truth of his statements, and his witness lists, grew considerably. According to several articles in Pearson's files, the journalist gathered so much evidence in response to MacArthur's charges that the general decided that it was not in his best interests to pursue the case any further. Somewhat abruptly, after the case had gone for about a year, MacArthur dropped all charges and the lawsuit was dismissed.²⁹

There was some speculation that Pearson came across the proverbial 'skeleton' in MacArthur's closet. William Manchester, a biographer of MacArthur's says that Pearson was put in contact with Isabel Rosario Cooper, a young 'Eurasian girl' who lived in Washington, D.C. According to Manchester, Cooper had been MacArthur's mistress and had several love letters from MacArthur still in her possession. When Pearson purchased the love letters and added Cooper as a witness, it was reported that MacArthur wanted out of the libel suit immediately.³⁰

The story about Cooper's possible involvement did not make it into all of the newspapers, but the story of the dropped lawsuit was big news because of the freedom of the press implications. A January 2, 1935, article from the *Nation*, which Pearson kept in his press clippings file, quoted the "Merry-Go-Round" journalists about how they viewed the importance of their 'victory.' The article says that the journalists "also pointed out that "the abandonment of the suit emphasizes more clearly than ever the wide latitude

²⁹ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box G237, 3 of 3, MacArthur, Douglas #8

³⁰ William Manchester, *American Caesar Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964* (Boston Little, Brown, 1978), 144, 156, and Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box G237, 3 of 3, MacArthur, Douglas #8

which, under a free press, must be allowed for criticism of public officials.”³¹ In keeping with this, Pearson and Allen continued to pursue and investigate individuals in public office who betrayed the public trust by their incompetent, inefficient, and in some instances, criminal actions.

The confrontation between MacArthur and Pearson was only the beginning of a long ‘relationship’ between the two men that would last for two more decades. As evidenced by the notes in his personal papers, Pearson held MacArthur largely responsible for the debacle that occurred when the army moved in on the Bonus Marchers. Emboldened by the results of the lawsuit, Pearson never relented in his efforts to expose the shortcomings of General MacArthur. Pearson considered all public officials and politicians fair game for exposure in his column, but some cases he pursued with an almost obsessive fervor.

Pearson’s experiences with MacArthur taught the journalist many valuable lessons. In MacArthur, the investigative journalist found a major figure that was already quickly becoming an American icon. This was much to the chagrin of Pearson who felt like the general was guilty of not only being an egomaniac, but of acting in ways contrary to individual freedom. Pearson took it upon himself to expose MacArthur, and the general fought back. It was not until Pearson possibly received some questionable information concerning MacArthur’s love life that the general finally backed down. Of course, Pearson never printed the information, but the message was hardly lost on the journalist.

Where powerful people in Washington D.C. were concerned, it was sometimes necessary to probe into their private lives and see what indiscretions could be uncovered.

³¹ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, G273, 3 of 3, Nation article, MacArthur, Douglas, #9.

Pearson followed that very formula in the future. After his experiences with MacArthur, Pearson understood more clearly how far he could go, and how effective his investigations could be. The attention that Pearson paid to James Forrestal was far more intense than his previous experience with MacArthur, and the result was far different as well.

CHAPTER III

SECRETARY FORRESTAL AND THE JEWEL HEIST

At 2A.M.on the morning of May 22, 1949, James V. Forrestal was seen entering a kitchen on the sixteenth floor of the Bethesda Naval Hospital, where he was being treated for “operational fatigue.”³² Moments later his lifeless body lay inert on the pavement below, an apparent victim of suicide. The exact motivations behind the unwitnessed event were as mysterious as many of the decisions he made while he was alive, but blame for his death was quickly laid at the feet of Drew Pearson. Anyone with access to a daily newspaper was aware that Pearson was consistently critical of the former Secretary of Defense. This was particularly true for the final six months of Forrestal’s life, which included his dismissal from the Truman cabinet, and the onset of what the chief psychiatrist at Bethesda diagnosed as “involitional melancholia, a depressive condition sometimes seen in persons who have reached middle age.”³³

Pearson felt pity for the dead man, but he hardly entertained the notion that he should share in responsibility for his death. In his personal diary four days after the suicide, Pearson rebutted his critics by writing that “in the case of Forrestal my record is

³² Arnold A. Rogow, *James Forrestal A Study of Personality, Politics, and Policy* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), 19 Rogow takes this term from a New York Times editorial of April 13, 1949, which claims to quote from “Forrestal’s ‘physician.’”

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

fairly clear. There was not very much I wrote about him of a personal nature.”³⁴ Some of his fellow journalists and the much of the public at large disagreed. They believed that Pearson had crossed over an invisible ‘line’ in his reporting on Forrestal and that the very limits of the ‘so called’ freedom of the press should now be called into question. Of course the First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees the right to a free press, but the parameters of that right are often determined in the court of public opinion. In this case, journalists such as Westbrook Pegler wrote scathing articles denouncing Pearson as spreader of “fantastic lies”³⁵ and people sent telegrams from across the country to inform Pearson that his criticisms of Forrestal were “unkind unnecessary and unethical.”³⁶

Pearson even claimed that President Truman, still stinging from a previous quarrel between the two, had remarked that “I’m going to get the best of him on the Forrestal suicide. I’m going to rub it in until the public never forgets.”³⁷ An examination of Pearson’s investigations of Forrestal, conducted over two decades, proves that the journalist was not a sensational gossip hound that drove an innocent man to commit suicide. Pearson’s hard hitting investigations that exposed all of Forrestal’s shortcomings strengthened the freedom of the press by pushing the standards to their socially acceptable limits. Any challenges to the contrary were rebuffed by Pearson because he stood behind his investigative record and an unfailing sense that the public has a right to know.

³⁴ Tyler Abell, ed., *Drew Pearson Diaries 1949-1959* (New York. Holt, 1974), 53.

³⁵ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box 175, 2 of 2, folder 7, Pearson v King Features, et al , 1946 Settlement Agreement VTWOA.

³⁶ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, F175, 1 of 2, telegram from Investigations. Forrestal, James.

³⁷ Tyler Abell, ed , *Drew Pearson Diaries 1949-1959* (New York: Holt, 1974), 53

Pearson first began reporting on the activities of Forrestal almost two decades before his death, and several years before the former secretary entered public service. At that time, the late 1920s, Forrestal was a young up-and-coming banker who was being groomed for a top job with the investment firm of Dillon, Read. Forrestal's time spent at Dillon, Read was the source of numerous criticisms that Pearson would constantly dredge up throughout Forrestal's career. Usually this was done specifically to remind the public what kind of person was in charge of the nation's defense. According to Pearson's investigations, Forrestal was a ranking executive at the time that Dillon, Read made several financial deals that by their nature seemed to be improper. These deals involved things such as inciting a war in Bolivia for personal profit, and financial transactions in Germany with questionable groups during the rebuilding of Germany following World War One. Forrestal was also called to testify before a Senate hearing about some fiscal mishandling involving his tax returns in the early 1930s.³⁸

In an article written for *The Nation* in 1933, Pearson accused Dillon, Read, while Forrestal was a vice-president, of floating a loan of \$23,000,000 to the country of Bolivia for the purpose of supplying them with arms through Vickers, Ltd., in London. Bolivia and Paraguay were involved in a border dispute, but at the time of the arms deal, outright fighting had not yet begun.³⁹ Pearson also obtained some evidence that seemed to show that Dillon, Read actually fomented the fighting in the region for the purpose of then supplying the belligerents with loans to buy weapons. According to Pearson in "Merry-Go-Round," "The Commerce Department opposed the loan, said it was unsound . . . [b]ut

³⁸ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box 175 2 of 2, Forrestal, James [See also Dillon, Read, Dulles].

³⁹ "Easy Money," *The Nation* article October 18, 1933 (microfiche) Alkek Library, Texas State University Pearson's clarification was changed to make clear that no 'collusion' was overtly planned.

the State Department approved. One month later fighting started. The loan is now in default”⁴⁰ The resultant ‘Chaco War’ accomplished no real positive gains for either country, even though Paraguay did gain some territory that turned out to be devoid of any natural resources. Pearson also had a report in his files that noted that because the loan to Bolivia defaulted, all of the American investors that backed the loan were left penniless and without recourse. Dillon, Read demanded a retraction for the information in the *Nation* article that stated they were directly to blame for the war, and Pearson did eventually concede, but only partially. For Pearson the bottom line was that Dillon, Read’s actions were so egregious that the public had a right to know the extent to which they were influencing global politics for their own gain. He began collecting evidence to look for signs that the firm and individual executives might be involved in other transactions of a questionable character.⁴¹

In the 1930s Forrestal quickly rose to the highest offices at Dillon, Read and by 1937 he was president. His biography is conspicuously silent on any activity during this time other than his tax problems at the start of the decade. The particulars of Forrestal’s income tax problems are quite complex, but the general accusation was that Forrestal incorporated two shell companies into which he diverted profits that he gained from other financial transactions. The only reason that Forrestal did this was to avoid paying the requisite income tax. While this practice was not illegal per se, in the words of Forrestal’s normally laudatory biographer, they “raised certain questions from an ethical

⁴⁰ Drew Pearson’s Washington “Merry-Go-Round”, January 4, 1933, American University; available from <http://www.aladin.wrlc.org/gsd/collect/pearson/pearson.shtml>, Internet, accessed April 10, 2007.

⁴¹ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box 151, 1 of 3, Forrestal, Taxes [See also Dillon, Read, Dulles].

point of view.”⁴² When the scheme came to the attention of the Internal Revenue Service, Forrestal was subpoenaed to testify before the Senate Banking and Currency Committee Hearings chaired by Chief Counsel Ferdinand Pecora. It is not clear if Pearson was aware of Forrestal’s tax problems at the time of the hearings. There was a full transcript of the hearing in his files, but because he does not mention it in *The “Merry-Go-Round”* until the early 1940s, he probably did not receive it until then. He knew Pecora personally so it is possible that Pearson received a copy from him much later. Pearson probably planned on using this example of ethical ambiguity frequently, and he wanted to ensure that his facts were correct. There are a few investigative notes of fellow journalist Tris Coffin that related to Forrestal’s tax problems around the time that the events actually took place in 1933. This would seem to prove that Pearson was at least aware of Forrestal’s seeming willingness to engage in moral lapses of judgment even before the banker started his political life as an administrative assistant to Roosevelt in 1940.⁴³

Once Forrestal embarked on his political career in 1940, Pearson and his team began to investigate the activities of Dillon, Read under the banker’s leadership. They uncovered questionable deals that pointed to shady loans floated between Dillon, Read and Nazi cartels prior to World War Two. Pearson and company also investigated rumors that Forrestal’s former vice-president at Dillon, Read, Colonel William T. Draper used his position as the head of the Economic Division of the American Military Government in Germany after World War Two to gain improper influence among the

⁴² Rostow, p. 87.

⁴³ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box 175, 1 of 2, Investigations folder.

steel cartels.⁴⁴ Pearson often used contemporary issues in the news, such as the rebuilding of post-World War Two Germany as an excuse to shed light on the improprieties of Dillon, Read in that country after the First World War. This automatically implicated Forrester because of his former association with that banking firm. It also raised questions of conflict of interest in his current job either in the Department of the Navy, or as the secretary of defense. This is how Pearson kept decade-old information relevant in his byline. Pearson's personally cultivated sources in the State Department made sure that he was also well supplied with new information.

Pearson deftly turned an article about a Senate investigation into American activities in Germany shortly after the war into a denunciation of Wall Street's, and specifically Dillon, Read's, defaulted loans to Germany in the 1920s. One of Pearson's investigators compiled a large amount of data that detailed the exact amounts of all these transactions and that Dillon, Read had "participated in 90% of all German loans." The possible impropriety lay in the fact that the loans almost immediately defaulted and had only been made in order to take advantage of a rapidly failing German economy. This was done at the expense of American investors, and while the then secretary of defense was that firm's president. One of Pearson's investigators remarked that the inclusion of the empirical data was intended to prevent Pearson from having "to retract like you did on that Nation article on Dillon, Read in 1930."⁴⁵ Without mentioning Forrester directly, Pearson later wrote that the whole business with Dillon, Read was "the story of American

⁴⁴ Drew Pearson's Washington "Merry-Go-Round", November 23, 1946.

⁴⁵ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box 151, 1 of 3, folder 3, Memo: RE Dillon, Read, and Co., Forrester, Taxes [See also Dillon, Read, Dulles]

dollars, collected by U.S. bankers from an unsuspecting public, and then used to buy pistols, hand grenades and even knives for Hitler's already stirring gunmen."⁴⁶

Pearson found all of this relevant throughout the 1940s when Forrestal was a member of first Roosevelt's cabinet and especially when he was secretary of defense under Truman because Pearson's

real gripe with Forrestal and what most people have lost sight of: that the same man who sanctioned loans for war purposes in Bolivia and particularly in Germany was in control of the military establishment of the United States, and followed a policy in Germany almost identical to that which his banking firm followed there from 1923 to 1930.⁴⁷

It is apparent that Pearson felt that the public had a right to know about possible conflicts of interest and ulterior motives that were potentially damaging to American interests and that betrayed the public trust. For Pearson, Forrestal simply had too many conflicts of interest to competently serve as secretary of defense.

Many times, the particular style of journalism that Pearson pioneered took on a more personal nature. This is one of the things that distinguished him from some of his contemporaries, who on one extreme felt that the private life of a public figure was 'off limits,' and on the other extreme published salacious rumors about a person's romantic life that they knew to be false. Pearson strove to find a middle ground between the two, where a politician could not have the luxury of leaving their character and ethics in their office on Friday afternoon. Pearson applied this standard to Forrestal.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Drew Pearson's Washington "Merry-Go-Round", January 27, 1948.

⁴⁷ Abell, 53.

⁴⁸ Douglas A. Anderson, A "Washington "Merry-Go-Round" of Libel Actions," p. 9 and Oliver Pilat, *Drew Pearson An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Harpers, 1973) 4-6

The story that many of Pearson's readers, fans and detractors alike, considered to be of a strong personal nature involved Forrestal's wife and an accusation of cowardice. The incident occurred when Forrestal was still president of Dillon, Read, but for Pearson, character was a life-long quality. In the early morning hour of 2:10 A.M. on January 22, 1937, Forrestal's wife, a writer for Vogue who frequently hobnobbed with high society, was accosted as she exited her car. The car had just pulled up in front of the Forrestal brownstone in the exclusive Beekman Place district in New York. Mrs. Forrestal has spent the evening at the fashionable Hotel Plaza and she still wore several diamonds and pieces of jewelry, the total value of which was estimated to be worth \$48,000. The newspaper later reported that she was followed from the party where she was singled out by a female member of the gang. According to the statements of Mrs. Forrestal and her escort, the gang followed her home and as she attempted to exit the car, two armed men forced her back in and gruffly demanded that she hand over the jewels. According to subsequent newspaper articles, this was apparently just one incident in a string of jewel heists that were perpetrated by a local gang that preyed on the elite of New York society.⁴⁹

In January 1949, over a decade after the robbery, Pearson used an investigation into the high cost of the WAVES uniform designed by Mrs. Forrestal to remind his readers of the 1937 jewel heist.⁵⁰ Pearson did not miss this opportunity to describe the supposed act of cowardice on the part of Forrestal. In the article Pearson claimed that "New York newspapers the next day featured the fact that, after hearing the police alarm,

⁴⁹ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box F175, 2 of 2, Forrestal – Jewel Robbery VIE.

⁵⁰ The WAVES were Women Accepted in Volunteer Emergency Service. The majority of the article describes a Senate hearing led by William Langer (R-ND) into the high costs of their uniforms, although as indicated, it is doubtful this was the article's true purpose.

Forrestal slipped out the back entrance of his home, vaulted the rear fence, ran down an alley, and caught a taxi to his club, where he spent the remainder of the night.”⁵¹ To Pearson this act of cowardice was unbecoming of anyone in high office, but particularly of the secretary of defense. Pearson kept several contemporaneous articles that reported on the robbery in his files. The source of Pearson’s comment in his article is a short blurb from a New York paper, the *Daily Mirror*. The relevant paragraph reported that “her husband [Forrestal] who had been waiting up for her arrival, but failed to hear the commotion incident to the holdup, clambered over a rear gate and sped in a taxicab in an effort to elude reporters and cameramen. He was heard to give the Racquet Club as his destination.”⁵² The context of the article points to responding policemen and witnesses as sources for this comment. Based on these observations it is not a stretch to imagine that cowardice played some part in Forrestal’s actions. In order to further validate the physical possibility, later refuted by Pearson’s critics, the journalist drew a blueprint of Forrestal’s residential block that demonstrated how Forrestal was able to ‘escape.’⁵³

Even though the article was ostensibly about a hearing to discuss overspending on WAVE uniforms, it is likely that the journalist’s true motive in writing the article was to include this personal slight toward Forrestal. This was the first in his byline of the heist, even though it occurred twelve years prior. Pearson also took advantage of his sources to make his accusations during key times in the political climate. On January 13, 1949, the day before Pearson wrote the ‘jewelry heist’ article, he commented in his journal that President Truman called Forrestal, his own secretary of defense, “a ‘god-damn Wall

⁵¹ Drew Pearson’s Washington “Merry-Go-Round”, January 14, 1949.

⁵² Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box F175, 2 of 2, Forrestal – Jewel Robbery VIE.

⁵³ Ibid.

Street bastard’ and other names too foul to print.”⁵⁴ According to Pearson, the president continued his rant about Forrestal claiming that “the ‘son of bitch’ came in and ‘took advantage of me and put me on the spot.’”⁵⁵ It is unclear how Pearson received this information as it is doubtful that he was present. From a careful reading of the surrounding entries the most likely source was Louis Johnson, the man who later replaced Forrestal as secretary of defense.⁵⁶

It is difficult to determine from the available evidence exactly why Pearson chose to print the cowardice story when he did, but it does not appear that it was the result of personal animosity or political posturing. The most likely reason is that Pearson realized that the political climate regarding Forrestal in the White House was acerbic at best, and for the benefit of the nation, the time was right to criticize the defense secretary on all fronts. To achieve that end it appeared as though Pearson was willing to publish everything he had that cast a negative shadow on Forrestal’s reputation. The ‘cowardice article’ was a looked at by many as a contributor to Forrestal’s breakdown and a precipitator of his suicide, which occurred only five months after the article was published.⁵⁷

There was at least one clear instance when Pearson had the opportunity to print a highly salacious but apocryphal story about Forrestal, but because the connection was so

⁵⁴ Abell, 9

⁵⁵ Ibid 9. There in no precipitating event that elicited this response other than someone just mentioning Forrestal’s name.

⁵⁶ The previous fall on November 4, 1948, Pearson wrote in the “Merry-Go-Round” that “Forrestal was one of the first who urged Truman to run, told him it would be a walk-away . . . [b]ut when the showdown came, Forrestal maintained a holier-than-thou attitude toward the campaign.” This, combined with rumors that Forrestal was going to be fired did not make for an amenable relationship between the President and his Secretary of Defense. Drew Pearson’s “*Washington Merry-Go-Round*,” November 4, 1948.

⁵⁷ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, F175, 2 of 2, Forrestal – Breakdown and Death VIH.

tenuous and unverifiable he declined to write the article. The matter was related to Dillon, Read's questionable practices in Germany, just prior to the outbreak of World War Two. This supposed controversy involved many 'world players' of that era. One of Pearson's investigators gathered certain evidence that seemed to link Forrestal, Prince Edward, the Duke of Windsor, Axel Wenner-Gren, a Swedish industrialist, and Charles Bedaux, playboy-adventurer, in some kind of mid-1930s conspiracy that revolved around Nazi Germany.⁵⁸ The whole episode was reminiscent of a chapter from a John Le Carre book, and each of the people linked to Forrestal was rumored to be involved in some kind espionage activity for the Nazis during the war.⁵⁹

The connection with Forrestal supposedly stemmed from a purported "chummy relationship"⁶⁰ between the Dillon, Read banker and the Duke of Windsor. The crux of the plot was that the Duke of Windsor used his friendship with Forrestal to protect the South American financial interests of some of his Nazi buddies like Wenner-Gren and Bedaux. Overall, it seems like a fairly bizarre story, and in the investigative memo in Pearson's file there is not a shred of evidence that points to its veracity. It does make for an interesting story though, with the future secretary of defense involved in secret meetings in the Bahamas with Nazi agents and former English royalty, but it is not grounded in reality. Pearson must have made that assessment because no mention of that story can be found anywhere in his "Merry-Go-Round" byline. As much as Pearson

⁵⁸ Available from <http://www.bedaux.com/com/bedaux/charlesbedaux.php>, Internet, accessed April 19, 2007. Most of these people have been lost to posterity, and an in depth explanation of who they were is not warranted here. Each of the three people supposedly linked with Forrestal came under suspicion of directly collaborating with the Nazi regime.

⁵⁹ John Le Carre is probably the most well known spy fiction writer of the Cold War era. The plot actually reads like a story of Eric Ambler, a British author who wrote spy novels dealing with Nazi Germany before World War Two began.

⁶⁰ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box F175, 2 of 2, Forrestal, Secretary James.

would have liked to print another story that questioned the ethics and decision-making of a man that he clearly believed was unfit for public life, he sat on this story. If Pearson only wanted to destroy the man, instead of printing reliable stories that cast him in a negative light, then the details of this conspiracy would have been printed in the “Merry-Go-Round”. That they were not is testimony to Pearson’s true aims.

Pearson may not have resorted to absolute fantasy in his attempts to bring down Forrestal, but as the winter of 1949 turned to spring, the journalist continued to hammer away at the secretary in the press. In his investigative folders on Forrestal, Pearson kept a photostat of a radio broadcast from January 16, 1949. In the broadcast, Pearson reminded his listeners once again of Forrestal’s tax indiscretions and his ‘cowardly’ actions the night that Mrs. Forrestal was robbed of her jewels. Pearson probably considered this broadcast important not just because it chronicled his continued criticisms of Forrestal, but because it contained Pearson’s initial attempt to manipulate President Truman into firing the secretary of defense. Pearson claimed that he heard from an inside source in the White House that

President Truman was about to accept the resignation of Secretary Forrestal, when last Sunday he heard Walter Winchell’s broadcast about Forrestal’s income tax finagling in the 1930’s. Whereupon, Truman sent for a transcript of the Winchell broadcast and literally hit the ceiling. ‘I’m not going to let that little so and so,’ he stormed ‘tell me who I’m going to keep in my cabinet.’ And a day later, he told Forrestal he could stay on, at least for the time being.⁶¹

A careful reading of the passage makes it clear that Winchell, a fellow journalist known more for his movie star gossip than his political investigations, did not actually mention Truman. The story is believable because the rumors of discord in the White

⁶¹ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box F175, 2 of 2, Forrestal – Publications and Materials, Re VID.

House were common knowledge. Truman knew that the increased negative press coverage of Forrestal, first by Pearson, followed by others such as Winchell, was designed with the ouster of Forrestal in mind. In this broadcast, Pearson brought these issues to the forefront of the news and directly put pressure on Truman to act.⁶²

Pearson successfully provoked the president because three days later, on January 19, the newspaperman wrote in his diary that “Truman is boiling mad over my broadcast on Forrestal. He has told a friend: “Pearson and Winchell are too big for their breeches. We are going to have a showdown as to who is running this country – me or them – and the showdown had better come now than later.”⁶³ Pearson could not have hoped for a more desirable response. Truman’s enraged response reassured Pearson that had Truman’s attention. Pearson probably smiled as he wrote that entry in his diary, secure in the belief that Forrestal would not remain in Truman’s cabinet for very long.

Throughout the first week of March, Pearson maintained his charges against Forrestal by repeating the charges that linked the secretary’s old firm Dillon, Read with Nazi cartels. On three separate occasions, March 1, 4, and 5, Pearson took advantage of the slightest development in the post-World War Two German economy to remind his readers of the secretary’s conflict of interest in regard to that country. Finally, on March 28, Forrestal resigned his position as secretary of defense, but even out of the public eye Forrestal did not find the peace of mind that he desired and his problems only seemed to intensify.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Abell, 12.

⁶⁴ Rogow, 3-6.

The exact circumstances of Forrestal's life between his resignation on March 28 and his suicide on May 22 are a combination of hearsay and conjecture. The vitriolic finger pointing that occurred after his death and contemporaneous reports that downplayed his condition, have left a record that obfuscates any real attempt to discern what happened. From all available sources the facts state that immediately following his resignation he was in a despondent state of mind. Within days he flew to Hobe Sound, Florida, to be with his wife and friends. While there, he had at least one episode of erratic behavior, and it was then recommended that he should be treated at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, and he was staying there by at least April 3.⁶⁵

The very next week, on April 10, Pearson broadcasted the events on his radio show as they were related to him by one of his sources. According to Pearson, Forrestal's 'episode,' which occurred some time in early April, involved an otherwise innocuous fire siren at Hobe Sound and a perceived Russian invasion. Pearson claimed that "when a fire siren blew [Forrestal] jumped out of bed and had to be restrained. Later—the fire siren blew a second time and Forrestal then ran out of the house in his pajamas, screaming about the Red Army."⁶⁶ According to the transcript, that is how Pearson characterized the events of that night. In the aftermath of the broadcast, the story became highly sensationalized. Soon it was widely rumored that the secretary of defense actually screamed "The Russians are coming, the Russians are coming" as he ran from his quarters. Several years later that phrase was well ensconced in the lexicon of American popular culture as a symbol of Cold War paranoia. The problem with that is there are no references in Pearson's personal papers or in his column that connect the

⁶⁵ Rogow, 7-10.

⁶⁶ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box F175, 2 of 2, Forrestal – Breakdown and Death VIH.

journalist directly to those exact words. The legacy of that phrase has become so strong that it is believed by some that Forrestal actually screamed “The Russians are coming” as he fell from the sixteenth story window.⁶⁷

As previously mentioned, Forrestal’s death immediately sparked a debate over possible limitations to the freedom of the press. *Time* magazine reported on June 6 that Forrestal remarked to a friend in January of that year that Pearson was “a high price to pay for the freedom of the press, but I guess you’ve got to do it.”⁶⁸ Of course Forrestal could not have imagined that his suicide five months later would force the quandary that he alluded to into an even sharper focus. One of the harshest condemnations of Pearson appeared in an editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* titled “Don’t Newspaper Ethics Apply to Columnists.” Tucked between advertisements for linoleum and ‘high-powered’ batteries, the article says that Pearson waged a “sadistically savage campaign”⁶⁹ that was directly responsible for Forrestal’s suicide. The article offers no specific examples of ‘lies’ told by Pearson, and even compares Pearson’s broadcast about Forrestal’s breakdown to a “dish barbequed in a heavy sauce of hypocrisy.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Examples of how the phrase is now indiscriminately applied to Forrestal can be found at the following locations. The first, at http://prairieweather.typepad.com/the_scribe/2006/05/5106_npr_james_.html, is a transcript of an interview on NPR, and contains a reference to Forrestal yelling it as he runs down the street. In a book review by Stephen J. Whitfield from the *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4.3 (2002) 127-129, Whitfield begins with an anecdote that puts the statement concurrent with the suicide. Internet; accessed April 19, 2007.

⁶⁸ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box F175, 2 of 2, contained an excerpt of the article in Pearson’s memo with the actual quote used. To gain a fuller context, I retrieved the full article on-line at <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,801912,00.html>. “The Price of Freedom,” *Time* June 6, 1949, Internet; accessed April 21, 2007.

⁶⁹ “Don’t Newspaper Ethics Apply to Columnists,” *Saturday Evening Post*; June 18, 1949, Vol 221 Issue 51, 10-12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Pearson also received numerous telegrams from the general public the night of April 10. They were in response to that night's broadcast about Forrestal's break-down in Florida and subsequent admittance into Bethesda. Of the ones that he kept two were negative, but even they took more of scolding tone rather than outright anger. One said that they "regret exceedingly Forrestal broadcast. How can any Friends be so unchristian? Is this the way Democracy lives a la Pearson?"⁷¹ Another telegram, with two names attached, said that they "think your comment on Mister Forrestal, a very great American on Sunday night unkind unnecessary and [sic] unethical."⁷² The writers of these telegrams, whether they referred to 'Democracy' or ethics, were perhaps even unknowingly expressing a view that Pearson went beyond the socially accepted purview of journalistic ethics.

Pearson's harshest critic was a fellow journalist named Westbrook Pegler. Pegler and Pearson had basic philosophical differences about the role of that the press should play in society. They were both investigative journalists of a sort, but where Pearson believed it was his duty to expose political corruption and incompetence, Pegler dedicated his time toward investigating unions for corruption and policing his fellow newspapermen. Pearson first sued Pegler in 1945 over some libelous comments made in Pegler's column, which was titled "The Way I See It." In 1946, after a long series of letters all of which were carefully maintained by Pearson in his files, the two journalists

⁷¹ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson, Box F22, 2 of 3, Forrestal, James.

⁷² Personal Papers of Drew Pearson , Box 175, 2 of 2, Forrestal – Breakdown and Death VIH.

reached an agreement, the main crux of which was that neither party could make negative comments about the other ever again.⁷³

Pegler must not have been able to control himself in the wake of Forrestal's death, because on May 23, 1949, the day after the suicide, he decidedly broke the prior legal arrangement with Pearson. Pegler described Forrestal as a victim of "wanton blackguardism and mendacity . . . a professional specialty of Drew Pearson."⁷⁴ What really angered Pearson is that Pegler made the claim that "Pearson was eligible for World War Two . . . [but] representing himself to be a Quaker, Pearson 'thee'd, and thou'd his way out of the war."⁷⁵ Eventually in 1955, Pearson sued Pegler for libel. Pearson felt that Pegler not only damaged his personal reputation, but that he could potentially to irrevocable harm to the rights that Pearson had worked hard to uphold.⁷⁶

The issue concerning Pearson's culpability in Forrestal's death was not whether or not he told the truth; although there is no evidence that what he reported was patently false. Forrestal was admitted to Bethesda Naval Hospital for some of type of condition that affected his mental state. It was clear to Pearson that the public had a right to know that one of the most powerful men in their government only two months prior was suffering from, at the bare minimum, a severe mental strain. There is no indication in any of Pearson's papers that the criticisms, as intense and damning as they were, were written solely for the purpose of exacting revenge or causing Forrestal any harm. Pearson's

⁷³ Personal Papers of Drew Pearson , Box 175, 2 of 2, Pearson v. King Features , et al 1946 Settlement Agreement VTWOA.

⁷⁴ Westbrook Pegler, *New York Journal American*, May 23, 1949, Center for American History, University of Texas

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Anderson, 229-230

rationalization was clearly stated in his journal entry on April 10, the same day he gave the infamous “Russian attack speech.” Pearson wrote that “when a man is insane while in public office, it affects millions. When a private citizen is insane it only affects a handful . . . Forrestal’s decisions affected two million men in the armed services, billions of dollars, and the future of the entire country.”⁷⁷ If Pearson had allowed the criticisms to affect him in the same way they affected Forrestal, then the freedom of the press would have suffered. He made no apology, and accepted no responsibility for Forrestal’s death.

While it is true that Pearson continued to dredge up controversial episodes in the lives of his targets, it was his intention that they still be held directly accountable for those events that occurred decades ago in their past. By linking those past events with potential conflicts of interest, Pearson hoped to demonstrate a pattern of behavior that would be obvious to even the casual reader of his column. This is why Pearson continued to vilify MacArthur for his actions against the Bonus Army, and why Forrestal’s activities as a Wall Street executive were constantly referenced in the “*Merry-Go-Round*.” Pearson refused to let the ‘sins’ of his targets fade into history.

If Pearson had kowtowed to the demands of his detractors and had not vigorously rebutted the charges made against him, then the impact of everything he had written before would be nullified. The strength of Pearson’s investigations, and his willingness to hold public servants accountable for even potential wrongdoing greatly expanded how journalist were able to conduct investigations in the mid-twentieth century. Pearson was able to expand journalism because he was consistent in his accusations, and in his journalistic methodology. He met every challenge with stiff resistance, because he understood that he was at the forefront of this kind of investigative journalism, and that if

⁷⁷ Abell, 39.

he gave in then the tools available to journalists would be curtailed. What is so remarkable is that not only was Pearson a progenitor of hard-hitting, investigative journalism but that he was successful in holding certain public figures accountable for their actions.

CHAPTER IV

SENATOR MCCARTHY AND THE LIST

Before Woodward and Bernstein confronted the Nixon administration in the 1970s there was a short, but anxiety ridden time in the early 1950s, commonly known as The Second Red Scare. At the forefront of the demagoguery was a junior senator from Wisconsin named Joseph McCarthy. Many journalists quickly grasped the threat McCarthy posed to democracy, but no other journalist reacted as aggressively as Drew Pearson of the *Washington Post*. From the very start of McCarthy's ascendancy in the public arena, Pearson used his column, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round," to expose the senator's fallacies and to inform the public at large of the threat posed by the junior senator from Wisconsin. Because of his journalistic actions, Pearson faced severe condemnation from McCarthy and his allies until McCarthy was eventually censured by the very organization that at one time condoned and tolerated his actions, the United States Senate. McCarthy's censure was a direct result of his entanglements with the United States Army, but that televised debacle was only the final battle in a war that a few crusaders, such as Pearson, had been conducting from the start of McCarthy's crusade. One of the first people to stand up to McCarthy, Pearson's relentless and aggressive journalistic style succeeded in provoking a visceral and sometimes violent response from the senator.

Drew Pearson did not begin his crusade against politicians who abused their power with articles on McCarthy. In fact, Pearson had been a thorn in the side of Congress for several decades. His unofficial biographer, Oliver Pilat, claimed that Pearson liked to say that “[h]e had more enemies to the square inch in Congress. . . than anyone else.”⁷⁸ Over the course of nine presidential terms, Pearson developed a reputation in Washington as someone who took extreme measures to uncover corruption in government and expose politicians who compromised their ethics. Through conversations with Pearson, Pilat gathered that Pearson “felt obliged to employ extreme tactics against confirmed enemies to prevent them from using extreme tactics against him.”⁷⁹ Because of his willingness to expose the truth and push the boundaries of ‘socially acceptable journalism’ to their very limits, Pearson was engaged in numerous lawsuits over the course of his journalistic career. One of the most infamous, and most expensive (at five million dollars), was his suit involving McCarthy. The lawsuit, however, was only one incident among several that occurred between these two men.⁸⁰

In order to truly understand the conflict between these two men, some background on the roles they played in the early 1950s is necessary. McCarthy’s rise to infamy was a quick one and might even be said to emerge on an exact date, 9th February 1950⁸¹. This

⁷⁸ Oliver Pilat, *Drew Pearson An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Harpers, 1973), 24.

⁷⁹ Pilat, 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-39.

⁸¹ Thomas Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joseph McCarthy*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 222-227. The factual information concerning McCarthy is largely gleaned from the following authoritative biographical sources. Even though Reeves’ account is slightly dated, from 1982, it is by far the most comprehensive source on McCarthy’s life, and the historiography written by Reeves prior to the book’s publication is testament to this fact. David Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), was also heavily referenced for background material on McCarthy. Additionally, a fairly new addition to the McCarthy historiography, Arthur Herman’s, Joseph McCarthy Re-examining

is the date that McCarthy gave his Lincoln Day speech to a group of Republican Women's Club members in Wheeling, West Virginia. The speech was meant to be just another stop on McCarthy's stumping tour for the Republican Party, and there is little doubt that even McCarthy failed to anticipate either the immediate or far reaching effects that a certain part of that speech would have for years to come. Exact transcripts or recordings of the speech do not exist, and thus it has been a source of fuel for countless scholarly flare-ups.⁸² It is generally recognized, however, that at some point in the speech McCarthy claimed to have in his possession lists that contained the names of 205 known communists in the State Department. Claims about a communist infestation within the State Department had been knocked around since the outing of Alger Hiss in 1948. But this time was different. National news outlets picked up the story of McCarthy's accusations and, in a confluence of events – the outbreak of the Korean War, Republican Party support, and a weakened President Truman – he went from obscurity to notoriety literally overnight.⁸³

Although the exact nature of how McCarthy came into the national spotlight is debatable, how he stayed there is fairly clear. Over the next three to four years McCarthy capitalized on charisma and intimidation to maintain and increase his hold on power. The number of communists on the lists that he waved above his head in several post-Wheeling speeches would continually change, from 205 to 108 and finally to 57, but the content of these mysterious lists was never fully revealed. McCarthy understood that his

the *Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* from 2000, was briefly consulted but not thoroughly examined. Any references to it will also be specifically mentioned

⁸² Reeves, 225

⁸³ David Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, (New York Oxford University Press, 1983), 110-112.

lists, and the secrets he claimed they kept, gave him the means by which he could garner enough public support—enough to possibly run for his nation’s highest office.⁸⁴

McCarthy took advantage of an apprehensive political climate to accuse numerous individuals and institutions of being associated with the Communist Party, while at the same time using the ensuing publicity to advance his own political career. The result was an atmosphere of distrust and paranoia that pervaded all levels of government. The press was faced with the difficult decision of whether or not to report the facts of McCarthy’s behavior, and thereby tacitly contribute to his efforts, or to look into the veracity of what he was saying. Many considered the latter to be outside the purview of their responsibilities as journalists, and those that did attempt to challenge McCarthy often quickly found themselves the latest victims of his accusations.

McCarthy used his considerable skills to build on the anti-communist tradition laid by a number of his contemporaries. Many politicians who were associated with the House Un-American Activities Committee, from Martin Dies (R-TX) and Richard Nixon (R-CA) to McCarthy’s contemporary Pat McCarran (R-NV), were just as fervent in their zeal to persecute communist subversives, or anyone who disagreed with HUAC. McCarthy’s methods were unique, however, because in public he would vehemently make vague claims about communist affiliations and rely on the echo effects of the resultant innuendo. Only when he was protected from libel on the floor would he make any specific claims against an individual. The result of these machinations was the rampant spread of fear and suspicion because no one knew for sure who was involved. If

⁸⁴ Reeves, 422-430. These pages show the support that McCarthy had during his 1952 reelection campaign, almost Two years after the Wheeling speech. Later when Reeves describes McCarthy’s role in the 1954 mid-term elections, 529-535, it is clear that he still has strong support, enough even to openly criticize President Eisenhower.

McCarthy named an individual, then the senator could not legally be held responsible, even if that accusation proved false. Pearson would repeatedly use his column in an attempt to expose these tactics. The fact that McCarthy thought it necessary to respond to Pearson, and often the extremes he took in doing so, reveal that Pearson routinely rattled the senator.⁸⁵

The points of conflict between Pearson and McCarthy were intricate and convoluted. Over the relevant time period, roughly 1950-1953, several contentious factors overlapped and waxed and waned in importance. The following events could be read as merely anecdotal narratives that relate a power struggle between two strong-willed men who fought for dominance in the arena of public opinion. Placed within the proper context, however, a pattern emerges showing that McCarthy reacted to Pearson's charges and attacks in an increasingly irrational and belabored manner. McCarthy soon realized that Pearson posed a serious threat because the journalist refused to be cowed by McCarthy's methods. For the duration of the time that McCarthy captivated the nation, Pearson kept up a relentless series of investigations aimed at exposing the senator as a man devoid of ethical principles. McCarthy's reactions to Pearson and his column were very telling of the effect they had on the senator. The evidentiary factors to establish Pearson's effect on McCarthy include an examination of the Owen Lattimore case, the efforts to explain McCarthy's finances, the Senator's mishandling of the Malmedy Massacre case, the Sulgrave incident, McCarthy's condemnation of Pearson in the Senate, and finally, the lawsuit *Pearson v McCarthy*.

⁸⁵ Oshinsky, 182-185. These pages outline how McCarthy typically dealt with members of the press. Reeves, 267 has a concise definition of 'McCarthyism' in its earliest stage.

Almost immediately following McCarthy's Lincoln Day speech in February of 1950, Pearson published an editorial questioning exactly to whom McCarthy was referring when he claimed that the State Department was replete with communists. At this early date, such claims were hardly unique, but Pearson knew that the situation would soon get much worse. In a diary entry for 21 March 1950, Pearson remarked that "[s]entiment for McCarthy seems to be building. People forget that none of the people he has named so far are actually in the State Department. They tell me with all earnestness: 'Don't you want to get the Communists out of the State Department?'"⁸⁶ Here Pearson reflects on the idea that many people in power were not willing to ask probing questions about McCarthy and his methods if it meant that America was safer. For many people it was inconceivable that what McCarthy was saying was even remotely false, and even if it were, the stakes were too high not to believe him.

Only a few days later McCarthy made his first solid accusation. Pearson reacted to the news in his diary, on 25 March, writing that "McCarthy has now stated that he would stake his whole case against the State Department on one man . . . Owen Lattimore." This realization was the first step in the conflict between Pearson and McCarthy. As he points out the following day, "I finally decided to mention Lattimore's name on the air. No other newspaper had done so for fear of libel."⁸⁷ McCarthy's accusations against Lattimore typified his practice of using innuendo to condemn people.⁸⁸ Lattimore was an American academic who had lived and studied in China for

⁸⁶ Tyler Abell, ed *Drew Pearson Diaries, 1949-1959*. (New York: Holt, 1974), 116.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 116. The rest of the March 26 entry is just as illustrative of the growing conflict between McC and DP, and towards the view that many people had of DP: "I am now being called unethical by other members of the press. Actually the AP sent out an FYI message to clients that they had Lattimore's name but were worried about libel. When I take the risk of libel, however, I am unethical."

many years, a few of which included work for the United States government. Because of Lattimore's close relation to Asia, and his sympathetic nature toward the 'Far East' found in many of his writings, McCarthy branded Lattimore America's "top Russian spy."⁸⁹ As he would do in countless examples to follow, Pearson accepted the "challenge" and began to make efforts to look into the truth of the matter.⁹⁰

From the Lattimore case, Pearson learned that the direct attack did nothing to affect McCarthy's credibility, and Pearson realized that undermining McCarthy's legitimacy was the only way to make people stop listening to him. Fear and anxiety that communists might somehow be embedded within the American government were already prevalent ideas that had taken hold over much of the population. The more that Pearson defended the accused, the closer he came to playing right into the hands of people like McCarthy who branded anyone that disagreed with them as being at least 'fellow travelers,' if not full communist agents. In order to discredit McCarthy, Pearson thus chose indirect strategies. A crucial part of Pearson's plan was to show that McCarthy was not actually the anti-communist that he claimed to be, but was instead merely a political opportunist. Pearson utilized two very different methods to make this point. The first method was one that would hopefully resonate with many Americans: following

⁸⁸ The entire case against Owen Lattimore can be found on the F B I 's website at <http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/owenlatt.htm>.

⁸⁹ This is a very famous assertion that originally came from the *Tydings Committee Hearings*, but that I took from the Reeves book.

⁹⁰ Abell, 199, 123. On these pages of the *Drew Pearson Diaries*, April 13, 1950 and April 20th respectively, DP opines on McCarthy's strategy to attack Lattimore, particularly the testimony of Louis Budenz, a 'converted' former Soviet agent. Specifically concerning Budenz's testimony against Lattimore, Pearson remarks "I am also reasonably certain that he perjured himself," 123. The next day in his "Merry-Go-Round" article of April 21, 1950, Pearson insinuates that Budenz only considered Lattimore to be a spy when it was politically and financially expedient for him to do so. Drew Pearson's Washington Merry-Go-Round, April 21, 1950, American University; available from <http://www.aladin.wrlc.org/gsd/collect/pearson/pearson.shtml>; Internet; first accessed May 2006

McCarthy's money trail. Pearson hoped to show that McCarthy was funded by organizations and individuals with radical and hidden agendas not always in line with the government of the United States. Pearson also sought to expose McCarthy as unpatriotic by resurrecting rumors, later substantiated, that McCarthy had been a communist dupe during the trial of the Nazi soldiers responsible for the Malmedy Massacre at the end of World War Two.⁹¹

As McCarthy's power snowballed, the Senator's financial troubles became common knowledge in Washington circles. In particular, McCarthy had run into trouble with his tax returns. The most serious problem was his 1949 Wisconsin State Income Tax Return, which he was asked to resubmit at least twice that year.⁹² Most reporters simply downplayed that story, some with the implication that McCarthy was merely careless with his personal funds possibly because he was so busy carrying out his campaign to root out the communists. Pearson, however, exploited a different angle. The investigative hound in Pearson took a closer sniff at how McCarthy was getting paid prior to his stint in Congress and why during his first three years in the Senate he registered "none" for the amount of his taxable income. Pearson reasoned that the only amount of money that McCarthy could have earned in '49 came from his claim of \$15,172.54 in interest payment. McCarthy wrote "see attached" to explain from where this money came, but nothing was attached. Pearson used these financial details to demonstrate the basic dishonesty of the Senator.⁹³

⁹¹ Pearson papers (G221, 1 of 3).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Pearson papers (G222, 2 of 3).

In a more serious charge, Pearson attempted to tie McCarthy's lack of finances in '49 to influence peddling for Lustron, a post-war manufacturer of affordable prefabricated homes. In a Merry-Go-Round article dated 9 April 1950, Pearson charged that McCarthy wrote an article on housing for which he was paid \$10,000 by Lustron's president following a cross-country trip to assess the nation's housing situation. This payment was a grossly excessive amount of money, but the real problem was that "Lustron [was] almost wholly financed by the federal government." This claim essentially meant that McCarthy was paid \$10,000 of taxpayer's money by a private company to write a report on a government-sponsored trip, also financed by the taxpayers.⁹⁴ It was also highly unethical for a government official to write a glowing review in support of a private company that was under a federal contract at the time. Pearson's article made it clear that this behavior was vintage McCarthy.

Adding further intrigue to the situation, Pearson apparently obtained information that on the day McCarthy received the \$10,000 check from the president of Lustron, the senator had been at the horse-track all afternoon with that very same president. Supposedly McCarthy did not let his losing streak prevent him from borrowing several thousand dollars from Lustron's president, and soon the senator found himself in an all too familiar situation, deeply in debt. According to Pearson's source, the president of Lustron returned from a final pay out at the end of the day and claimed that he placed some bets in McCarthy's name, and they had won big.⁹⁵ Pearson wrote about the Lustron

⁹⁴ Drew Pearson's Washington Merry-Go-Round, April 9, 1950, American University; available from <http://www.aladin.wrlc.org/gsd/collect/pearson/pearson.shtml>; Internet; first accessed May 2006. Later, in a June 21 article of the same year, Pearson goes on to reveal "that McCarthy had done a terrific job for the real estate lobby prior to receipt of the fee."

⁹⁵ Pearson papers (G222, 2 of 3).

scandal in a 21 June 1950 article, but he did not mention the details of the gambling fiasco, possibly because they were unsubstantiated.⁹⁶ Had he done so, they would have been helpful in supporting the basic assertion of most of Pearson's articles on McCarthy's finances: that the senator was a fundamentally dishonest person who could easily become beholden and financially indebted to special interests. McCarthy's gambling issues only made him even more vulnerable. McCarthy caused enough damage pursuing his own agenda. It was difficult to image what might happen if McCarthy were beholden to radical special interests. Even more hypocritical of McCarthy was the fact that gamblers and debtors faced constant accusations from the anti-communists because of their vulnerabilities to blackmail. Pearson's article carefully insinuated that McCarthy might fall into that category as well.⁹⁷

In his second tactic to prove McCarthy's disingenuousness Pearson dug deep into McCarthy's past. The idea was to find something that might discredit him as the great champion of the anti-communists. McCarthy's handling of the Malmedy Massacre presented one possibility. If all indications were correct, McCarthy had been duped by the communists into setting a lax precedent on war crimes at a time when the country was nearing war with North Korea. The charge contradicted the tough, no-nonsense image that the senator was trying to convey.⁹⁸

The story went back to an episode that took place following the Battle of the Bulge in the waning days of World War Two. Several American units were surprised and overrun by a final effort of the German Army as the Allies neared their march toward

⁹⁶ Drew Pearson's Washington Merry-Go-Round, June, 21, 1950

⁹⁷ Pearson papers (G222, 2 of 3).

⁹⁸ Pearson papers (G221, 1 of 3)

the German border. In the small town of Malmedy, Belgium, several unarmed American soldiers were apparently massacred by their German captors. The Germans responsible for the war crimes were brought to trial in 1946, but there were subsequent accusations that they had been tortured into confessions. Eventually in 1949 the Senate investigated the matter with Joseph McCarthy as the lead representative. In Pearson's investigation of McCarthy's handling of the matter, he uncovered evidence that McCarthy "browbeat. . . cajoled. . . [and] pounded"⁹⁹ not against the accused German soldiers, but against the American soldiers who made the accusations. McCarthy's actions were a response to numerous letters that he had received from individuals who claimed to have special insight into the disputed events of the massacre.¹⁰⁰

After McCarthy ruled that the soldiers should not receive the death penalty, a subsequent Army investigation of McCarthy's decision uncovered that the information relied upon by McCarthy had come from Communist front operations. The Communists' apparent goal was to make the American justice system appear lenient toward war criminals. This reputation was probably not in America's best interests when taken in light of the impending war in Korea. Many soldiers expressed their displeasure with McCarthy's handling of the case as evidenced by the letters they sent to Pearson, praising him for his article.¹⁰¹

Soon, McCarthy began to feel threatened by Pearson because his subsequent reactions to the journalist belied his self-righteous and seemingly impenetrable façade. Nothing is more dangerous to a demagogue than an exposé. McCarthy first responded to

⁹⁹ Pearson papers (G221, 1 of 3).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Pearson's aggressive journalism with his usual baseless accusations that whoever criticized him had a long, but previously secret, history of membership in the Communist Party of America. This proved to be difficult in Pearson's case because even though he had made many enemies on Capitol Hill over the years, he had also made very well documented attempts to thwart the actions of the Communist Party by reporting on their misdeeds as well. There was no love lost between the Communist Party of America and Drew Pearson. Eventually, a desperate McCarthy took advantage of a seemingly innocuous bit of reporting that Pearson did concerning MacArthur and Korea and labeled it as treasonous. Just days before McCarthy went through with that plan however, the opportunity arose for "Tail-Gunner Joe" to express his anger at Pearson in a more forthright and violent manner.¹⁰²

The various accounts of what took place at the Sulgrave Club on the night of December 12, 1950 are disputed. Pearson's version can be found in the brief of the lawsuit he filed after McCarthy's accusations against him from the Senate floor. In that version Pearson explained that he was seated with friends around a table when McCarthy approached him from behind and grabbed the journalist's neck. Pearson then claims that the senator squeezed tightly, but eventually relented. Later in the evening, as if by accident, Pearson and McCarthy met each other in the cloakroom where, according to Pearson, McCarthy wheeled him around by the arm and proceeded forcibly to knee him in the groin.¹⁰³ Pearson never mentioned the assault in his diary, but the next entry was written on December 19th, and it would have been natural for Pearson to be preoccupied

¹⁰² Pearson papers (G221, 1 of 3). This is a list that has all of McCarthy's accusation against Pearson on one side and a corresponding communist accusation on the opposing side.

¹⁰³ Pearson papers (G221, 2 of 3).

with what transpired on the Senate floor on the 15th. In his biography of McCarthy, Reeves writes that McCarthy actually “kneaded him twice in the groin, and took a swing at him.” Reeves explains that even though Pearson at some point expressed the belief that the senator was drunk at the time, according to others who were present, “Pearson was undoubtedly incorrect.”¹⁰⁴ Though there were witnesses, there has never been a definitive account of what actually occurred. The general consensus of McCarthy’s account, however, is that the senator later claimed that there was no actual knee involved with an actual groin, and that he had merely slapped Pearson across the face.¹⁰⁵

Regardless of what actually happened, it was an important milestone in the ever growing feud between the two men. There is no indication that McCarthy had successfully intimidated Pearson. To the contrary, it presented the journalist with an interesting opportunity. The trick for Pearson was to play up McCarthy’s role as the aggressor as strongly as possible without making himself out to look weak or even ‘unmanly.’ There are indications that this balancing act was a very important for Pearson. As mentioned before, versions of the event do not occur in any of Pearson’s writings, personal or public. The important relevance of this event is that it very clearly shows the effect that Pearson had on McCarthy. Here was the case of a United States Senator physically assaulting a nationally renowned member of the press in front of several witnesses. Pearson must have comforted himself with the knowledge that he was

¹⁰⁴ Reeves, p. 348-49.

¹⁰⁵ This account can be found in the respective biographies of both men. In Pilat it is on p. 27, and in Reeves on p. 349 the author claims that McCarthy was later forced to admit under oath that he had only ‘slapped him on the cheek.’

successful in his attempts to have such a strong effect on the senator. How to play it up was the challenge.¹⁰⁶

Three days later McCarthy continued his attack against Pearson, this time from the floor of the Senate. On 15 December 1950 McCarthy delivered a speech that he intended to be a final blow against Pearson and his nagging newspaper column. McCarthy began by comparing Pearson to a skunk that must be rooted out of the chicken coop. He claimed that this task was a nasty job, but that it he was willing to sacrifice himself for the good of America because the dirty jobs “are so often left undone [and] are often the most unpleasant jobs.”¹⁰⁷ (The irony of this statement, of course, is that the inverse was probably true, with McCarthy in the role of the skunk and Pearson as the person left with the job that no one else was willing or able to accomplish.)

McCarthy then filled several pages with statements made by his fellow congressmen, both past and present, concerning Drew Pearson. As mentioned, Pearson had made many enemies on Capitol Hill, so it was no surprise to anyone that there would be an endless supply of acrimonious statements concerning the journalist. McCarthy must have felt it necessary to use these condemnations to bolster his own accusations that would follow. Closer to the point, however, they highlight the fact that McCarthy believed his accusations against Pearson could not viably stand alone. McCarthy attempted to shift the personal nature of his tirade against Pearson into a context that seemed to suggest that all politicians, and by proxy the American people, had reason to fear Pearson. Finally, McCarthy leveled his own predictable charges, repeatedly labeling

¹⁰⁶ Pearson papers (G221, 2 of 3).

¹⁰⁷ Pearson papers (G221, 2 of 3), U S. Congress. Senate. Senator McCarthy statement on Drew Pearson. 81st Cong , 2nd sess. *Congressional Record* (15 December 1950), 16799.

Pearson as a communist. Specifically, McCarthy claimed that Pearson was an agent of the Soviets, who was tasked with the assignment of taking down Chiang Kai-shek, Secretary Forrestal, and General MacArthur. McCarthy even went so far as to say that “[h]e and the Communist Party murdered James Forrestal in just as cold blood as though they had machine-gunned him.”¹⁰⁸

According to McCarthy, it was Pearson’s criticisms of those individuals that solidified his disloyalty to America. McCarthy’s goal was to discredit Pearson in the eyes of America, and remove any influence that Pearson might have with the public. To further that end, McCarthy called on all patriotic Americans to stop buying newspapers that printed Pearson’s column, and in an even more sinister move against the sponsor of Pearson’s radio show, McCarthy asked Americans to

Notify the Adam’s Hat Co., by actions, what they think of their sponsoring of this man. It should be remembered that anyone that buys an Adam’s Hat, any store that stocks an Adam’s Hat, anyone that buys from a store that stocks an Adam’s Hat, is unknowingly and innocently contributing at least something to the cause of international communism by keeping this Communist spokesman on the air.¹⁰⁹

Pearson lost their sponsorship the next day, but that was the only real effect of the entire speech. Other advertisers eventually took their place.¹¹⁰

McCarthy ended his vituperative rant with a challenge to Pearson that was meant to weaken Pearson’s inevitable response. The senator claimed that he was willing to repeat any or all of the statements made in the speech at the time and place of Pearson’s

¹⁰⁸ Pearson papers (G221, 2 of 3), U.S. Congress Senate Senator McCarthy statement on Drew Pearson. 81st Cong., 2nd sess. *Congressional Record* (15 December 1950), 16806.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 16805.

¹¹⁰ Oshinsky, 181-182

choosing, which would remove the immunity from libel. This statement would turn out to be as untrue as the rest of McCarthy's accusations.¹¹¹

Pearson responded to McCarthy by filing a lawsuit against the senator. For Pearson, the lawsuit served a dual purpose. It allowed Pearson to satisfy his need to portray himself as an amateur lawyer and, more importantly, it acted as a safeguard against wild accusations from the victims of Pearson's column. Usually it had a deterrent effect, but Pearson had enraged McCarthy to such a point that the senator was willing to go to any length in order to silence his harshest critic. The lawsuit was unique because it combined the incident at the Sulgrave Club with the accusations from the speech for a total of five million dollars in damages. Pearson's legal team felt that the statements made by McCarthy were subject to libel because they had been printed in pamphlets for distribution prior to the speech. In the end the lawsuit was never settled, but Pearson never really hoped to get all of the money anyway. The point was to prove to McCarthy that there was nothing the senator could say or do to Pearson that was going to prevent him from continuing his investigations. The lawsuit was Pearson's declaration to keep fighting.¹¹²

There is little doubt, given McCarthy's reactions, that Pearson effectively rattled McCarthy with his articles. Most of the key events mentioned took place within the first year and a half of McCarthy's time in the national spotlight, from roughly early 1950 to mid-1951. The fact that many of these key events occurred at the beginning of McCarthy's tenure in the spotlight only serves as a testament to Pearson's ability to

¹¹¹ Pearson papers (G221, 2 of 3), U.S. Congress. Senate Senator McCarthy statement on Drew Pearson. 81st Cong., 2nd sess *Congressional Record* (15 December 1950), 16806.

¹¹² Pearson papers (G221, 2 of 3).

recognize political opportunism early, while most journalists couldn't see through the haze of fear. Pearson began asking probing questions about McCarthy at a time when many people were afraid to do so. There were as many reasons behind this fear as there were people afraid. Many politicians lacked the political power necessary at the time to even criticize McCarthy, and Republicans in particular were happy to allow McCarthy to continue his anti-communist tirades if he was able to garner public support for the party. For their part, most other journalists were afraid of the recriminations they would face from McCarthy, possibly because of a tenuous relationship to a questionable group, or because they could not face the prospect of getting fired or sued.

For Pearson, none of these factors were relevant. He simply did not care what McCarthy said about him. Pearson had built up a loyal following, but his willingness to criticize McCarthy went beyond his reliance on them. He felt a strong conviction that McCarthy was fundamentally no different than numerous other opportunistic politicians that Pearson had seen come through Washington and, as was his wont, exposed. His attack on McCarthy was just another, albeit more publicized, example of Pearson's willingness to do whatever it took to hold people in power accountable for their actions.

Even after McCarthy hurled insults at Pearson from the Senate floor, and repeatedly accused him of being a communist, Pearson continued to investigate many aspects of McCarthy's life prior to his election as senator. Pearson's investigations explored the senator's questionable judicial practices in Wisconsin, the accuracy of McCarthy's military record, a possible disbarment, and even a likely personal scandal that called into question the senator's sexuality.¹¹³ In his comprehensive biography of McCarthy, Thomas Reeves mentions that "Joe also claimed in 1952 that he was 'hounded

¹¹³ Pearson papers (G222, 3 of 3)

to death by Communists,' meaning Drew Pearson."¹¹⁴ Pearson and his investigators, including Jack Anderson (a former friend of McCarthy's), left no stone unturned in their effort to take down the senator. The search engine of *Drew Pearson's Washington Merry-Go-Round* yields 650 documents that contain references to "McCarthy." A cursory examination does not reveal even one that is even slightly neutral in tone towards the Senator, unless intended for ironic effect.¹¹⁵

Despite Pearson's seeming invulnerability to McCarthy's attacks, the senator continued to make the journalist a priority of his paranoia. McCarthy rarely responded to any criticism, but he never ceased to get angry at everything Pearson wrote. McCarthy never railed against another journalist on the Senate floor in the same manner as his statement on Pearson, nor was he ever known to physically attack another critic. McCarthy felt so threatened by Pearson that had his own team of investigators working diligently to dig up anything on Pearson or members of his staff. At the head of this team was usually Don Surine, an ex-F.B.I. agent who had been fired from that organization because he consorted with a prostitute in his custody while investigating her pimp boyfriend.¹¹⁶ Reeves also claims that while McCarthy was in Seattle, on the campaign trail for the 1952 election, McCarthy was required by the television station's lawyers to prove allegations against Pearson's staff or he could not go on. He was unable to make his speech that night. Just one year before, and in the absence of Pearson's efforts, this challenge to McCarthy was unthinkable. This anecdote strongly suggests that Pearson

¹¹⁴ Reeves, 197. Reeves took the part in quotations from McCarthy's book *McCarthyism, The Fight for America*, and it was made on p. 2 indicating that it must have been of great importance to the senator.

¹¹⁵ Drew Pearson's Washington Merry-Go-Round, April 9, 1950, American University; available from <http://www.aladin.wrlc.org/gsd/collect/pearson/pearson.shtml>; Internet; first accessed May 2006.

¹¹⁶ Pearson papers (G222, 3 of 3).

had a very tangible and palpable effect on McCarthy and that the journalist's relentless efforts were finally paying off.¹¹⁷

Even though it cannot be said that Pearson was single-handedly responsible for the downfall of McCarthy, by the fall of 1953, Pearson was deeply involved in what had become a personal crusade against the senator. The journalist's investigations into McCarthy's staff provided Pearson with a final scandal that would eventually lead to the senator's undoing. Pearson had been reporting for months on how David Schine and Roy Cohn, McCarthy's youthful top advisors, had avoided the draft board. As Pearson relates the issue in his August 28, 1953 Merry-Go-Round column, Schine, a playboy with a privileged upbringing, had "been pronounced 4-F partly because of a 'schizoid personality.' This condition is described in the dictionary as 'disintegration of personality.'" ¹¹⁸ Pearson's investigators worked on this story for several months, and Pearson's unrelenting demands that the Army do something about the situation resulted in the draft board at Ft. Dix reopening his case.¹¹⁹ In referring to this event, David Oshinsky writes that ". . . Pearson would not quit. He was so persistent, so typically obnoxious."¹²⁰ Unbeknownst to Pearson at the time, his tenacity on the subject, and the lengths that he went through to keep it in the public eye would be the spark that would eventually engulf McCarthy's house of cards in flames.

¹¹⁷ Reeves, 441

¹¹⁸ Drew Pearson's Washington Merry-Go-Round, Aug 28, 1953, American University, available from <http://www.aladin.wrlc.org/gsd/collect/pearson/pearson.shtml>; Internet; first accessed May 2006.

¹¹⁹ Reeves, 441.

¹²⁰ David Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World Of Joe McCarthy* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 363.

There is very little information in Pearson's personal papers concerning the military hearings which spelled the end of McCarthy. Pearson had very little direct involvement in the actual proceedings, but as previously alluded to, the facts brought to light in his previous investigation of David Schine would be invaluable. McCarthy's problems with the Army started when he and Cohn investigated allegations of a Soviet spy ring at Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey.¹²¹ In typical McCarthy fashion this inquiry led to a condemnation of the Department of the Army's security system, and soon McCarthy found himself against a formidable foe. In the resultant hearings McCarthy was particularly brutal towards the highly respected war hero, Brigadier General Ralph Zwicker. His brash disrespect did not sit well with Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens, and possibly even people in higher offices than his. Stevens eventually took a stand against McCarthy but chose not to defy or challenge him directly. Instead, Stevens brought up the issue of Schine's military deferral that Pearson had written about in the past year. This time McCarthy was at the receiving end of accusations from his own government and rebuttal cries of "communist!" were not going to work. The junior senator from Wisconsin had begun a fight with the Army that he now knew he could not win, and he quickly realized that censure lay just around the corner. It came on 2 December 1954.¹²²

The role that Drew Pearson played in the rise and fall of Joseph McCarthy is one that has been previously understated in the McCarthy historiography. The downplaying of Pearson could be in part because McCarthy went after so many different people in a short period of time, that in retrospect it is difficult to imagine him with a main adversary.

¹²¹ The following details are culled from Reeves, 450-454, and Oshinsky, 360-367.

¹²² Reeves, 662.

The same can be said of Drew Pearson as well. His aggressive style of journalism made many enemies in Washington over the course of several decades. There can be no doubt, however, that Pearson was one of the first people to really challenge McCarthy, and that McCarthy was forced to respond to the journalist. Pearson made sure that even if his constant criticism did little to affect McCarthy's daily routine; he would keep up the assault through any means necessary, until it became impossible for others in higher positions of power to ignore. Eventually this proved to be the case. After McCarthy's censure the senator quickly fell into an alcoholic daze until his death on May 2, 1958. In the days leading up to McCarthy's death, Pearson remarked in his diary that McCarthy was suffering from severe delirium tremens, and the journalist gave indications that he intended to report on his condition in his article. Upon hearing of the senator's death however, Pearson became reflective. He wrote in his diary:

In some respects I am sorry to see him go. He caused this nation all sorts of pain and setbacks in the field of foreign affairs. But toward the end I couldn't help but feel sorry for him. He was a lonesome guy. All the glamour that once surrounded him was gone.¹²³

It was probably the only kind sentiment that Pearson ever had regarding his adversary, and it was an appropriate end to the intense struggle they had engaged in during the first half of that decade.

¹²³ Abel, ed., 379 This entry was on May 2, 1957

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

It was reported in a *Time* Magazine article shortly after his death in 1969 that “disclosures in Pearson's column sent four Congressmen to jail and led to the resignation of officials from Sherman Adams on down.”¹²⁴ That same article proclaimed that “last week's TIME-Louis Harris Poll showed him to be the best-known columnist in the U.S.”¹²⁵ Despite the popularity and large audience he once commanded the memory of Drew Pearson is all but completely forgotten. Even more importantly, his influence on journalism is rarely given its proper credit. After all, his personal journalistic style that was the bane of many politicians in Washington D.C., has now become common practice.

Throughout the mid-20th century, Pearson often found himself surrounded by controversy. He chose not only to pursue public figures that he felt had violated the public trust, but he also used unorthodox methods in breaking down the veil of impenetrability that surrounded public figures and exposing these men for what they truly were. During the so called Age of Consensus in the 1950s, and even in previous decades, this was not considered common practice among a majority of journalists. Pearson felt that public figures should be held to the same standards as the rest of American society

¹²⁴ “The Tenacious Muckraker,” *Time*, 12 September 1969; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,901423,00.html>; Internet, accessed 14 November 2007. Sherman Adams was Eisenhower's White House Chief of Staff.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

and they should not be immune from criticism in the personal areas of their lives simply because they were in positions of importance.

The style employed by Pearson went beyond mere “muckraking.” His articles were not merely scathing reports aimed at a faceless industry. These were personal accusations aimed at popular and respected leaders in their various fields. These men, believed by many people to be virtually infallible, held considerable influence, among both the circles of power in Washington D.C. and with the American people throughout the country. Pearson had numerous connections throughout D.C. society. He had friendly contacts that held powerful political positions, and he also knew people that attended lavish affairs, the kind sponsored by the most affluent in high society. Pearson also had direct contact with some people that traveled amongst a seedier element in the underbelly of the city. Through these people, and his own investigations, Pearson was able to determine the true nature of many people entrusted with the public good in Washington. When these people abused their power or acted in ways that were contrary to how they presented themselves, Pearson exposed them for what they really were. The resultant articles made him a very unpopular person in D.C., but it also expanded the tools available to investigative journalists.

Pearson was his own man when it came to his column, the “Washington Merry-Go-Round.” When he went after McCarthy he ended up losing his primary radio sponsor, Adam’s Hats because of specious claims made by the senator. This did not deter him from continuing to confront McCarthy. Also, as briefly mentioned in the introduction to this paper, Pearson took his column to another newspaper, the *Washington Post* when it became apparent that his old friend and benefactor Cissy Patterson was

exercising too much editorial control over Pearson's non-isolationist stance in the years leading up to World War Two. Pearson was actually rebellious in many aspects of his professional life. The publishing of the first *Merry-Go-Round* books with Robert Allen was a consummate act of rebellion not only against Washington D.C. society and the governmental elite, but against the established newspaper practices of the day. Reporters in the mid-twentieth century rarely exposed personal deficiencies of politicians, even if those flaws could somehow affect their job performance. Although he was certainly aware that the books could make him famous, it was not a prime motivation in his co-authoring of them. They were in fact originally published anonymously. For that act of rebellion both Pearson and Allen were fired from their respective papers once their names were made public.

One of Pearson's primary motivations in exposing abuses of power in Washington was to demonstrate how those individuals had betrayed the public trust. Pearson felt that it was not just the individual Bonus Marchers harassed by their own army in the 1930s that were affected by MacArthur's brash attacks, but that if that abuse of power was glossed over then it could potentially happen again. This was particularly true during the Second Red Scare in the 1950s. Pearson's dogged pursuit of McCarthy was at least partially motivated by a desire to protect society from the harms produced by years of suspicion and paranoia.

Pearson often became so involved in pursuit of a story that his exploits became newsworthy themselves. When he and McCarthy had their infamous physical confrontation at the Sulgrave Club it was immediately gossiped about all over town, further dividing people in support of one combatant over the other. Because of the

freedom of the press implications, the news coverage of MacArthur's lawsuit against Pearson far eclipsed the original story, and probably kept it alive far longer than it would have had the lawsuit never been filed.

Pearson faced charges of unethical journalistic practice. Fellow journalists such as Westbrook Pegler, leveled this charge against Pearson concerning the Forrestal scenario.¹²⁶ Critics particularly reacted harshly to Pearson's insinuations about Forrestal's manhood stemming from the jewel heist outside the Secretary's home. In this instance Pearson may have gone too far. A contemporaneous article in *Time* that summed up the circumstances of Forrestal's death noted that several other newspapers, these perhaps more credible than Pegler, also denounced Pearson. The article notes that

In the *New York Times*, Hanson Baldwin wrote: "Drew Pearson...maligned and traduced and attacked [Forrestal] in various commentaries...for which the radio and press must bear the burden of shame." Cried the *Hartford Courant*: "[Americans] are sick at the stomach over the cur-pack that long yelped at the heels of this man..." The *New York Herald Tribune* deplored their "juvenile savagery"; [and] the *Washington Post* berated them for "below-the-belt" blows.¹²⁷

Of course, even these comments do not justify accusations that Pearson was responsible for Forrestal's death. However, they do suggest that Pearson stepped over a line that his fellow respectable journalists considered to be sacrosanct. All of the other accusations against Forrestal, especially the ones involving conflicts of interest have a lot of merit, but Pearson's continued harping on the jewel heist is an example of overreaching. In that one instance he demonstrated his capacity to go too far.

¹²⁶ Westbrook Pegler, *New York Journal American*, May 23, 1949, Center for American History, University of Texas.

¹²⁷ "The Price of Freedom," *Time*, 6 June 1949; available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,801912,00.html>, Internet; accessed 14 November 2007.

There are numerous ethical quandaries in the profession of journalism. While it is important for journalists to maintain and adhere to a set code of ethics, they must also be willing to be flexible in those standards relative to a particular situation. When Pearson chose to dig into McCarthy's past in order to discredit him, he determined that it was necessary given the potential danger that McCarthy's demagoguery posed to the well being of the nation. If it had been Pearson's strict ethical code passively to report on events and not expose damaging professional and private information from the past, then McCarthy would have gone largely unchallenged much longer than he actually did.

This is not meant to be an exculpatory rationalization that allows journalists to apply a sense of relativism to all ethical decisions. Pearson had a strong moral code that was influenced by his Quaker upbringing and which actually motivated him to expose the ethical shortcomings in others. Unlike some of his fellow journalists to whom he is often compared, like Walter Winchell, he checked his sources and if they were unverifiable he did not print the story. When Pearson heard of McCarthy's supposedly drunken afternoon at the horse races with the president of Lustron he exercised journalistic restraint and did not write about the money that possibly changed hands between the two. The fact that McCarthy was there should have been damning enough.¹²⁸ Similarly, Pearson chose not to publish the numerous rumors floating around Washington concerning the senator's supposed homosexuality.

Even when Pearson was pushing the boundaries concerning what was acceptable to publish about a person in public life, he did so consistently and confidently. Pearson's adherence to both an absolute set of ethics and a rational, higher calling that he felt was necessary in the world of politics and journalism motivated him to conduct his

¹²⁸ Pilat, 163.

investigations. While he felt sympathy upon hearing of the passing of some of his greatest adversaries such as McCarthy and Forrestal, he was in no way apologetic for his treatment of them in his column. For Pearson, there was simply nothing to apologize for. He felt it was necessary to expose those men and he was willing to go to great investigative lengths to make sure that happened.

The responsible journalist does not adhere solely to a pre-conceived set of ethics, but instead can sometimes rationally apply a relative standard of ethics if the situation dictates. Drew Pearson was just such a journalist. He personified both the maverick and rebellious journalist that was willing to lose his job to say what he wanted to, and the tireless, indefatigable writer who works within the system and felt responsible to society. It is clear that Pearson held true to an absolute set of ethics, but he was also willing to apply a relative standard if he felt it was absolutely necessary, and still comported with his higher sense of what was right. Drew Pearson drew criticism from many quarters but he acted consistently within his own set of ethics.¹²⁹

Drew Pearson does not figure very prominently in an overview of the history of journalism. It is not that Pearson did not actively try to continue his legacy. He groomed Jack Anderson as a protégé and as heir to the *Merry-Go-Round* byline. However, in the time since his death in 1969, Drew Pearson has all but faded into complete obscurity. That is very surprising because of the popularity that he enjoyed during his long and

¹²⁹ In his book *The Dialectic in Journalism. Toward a Responsible Use of Press Freedom*, John C. Merrill contends “what the journalist must realize is that ethics contains both absolute principles and relative considerations.” This means that while it is important for journalists to maintain and adhere to a set code of ethics, they must also be willing to be flexible in those standards relative to a particular situation. John C. Merrill, *The Dialectic in Journalism: Toward a Responsible Use of Press Freedom* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1989), 175.

storied career, not to mention the cloud of controversy that dogged him for most of his life.

Pearson never fled from that controversy nor did he shirk the responsibilities that he felt he had toward his readers to provide them with important information about their public officials that they would otherwise not be privy to. Pearson kept extensive and comprehensive investigative files. In addition to the numerous sources he had planted around Washington D.C., he had a loyal fan base around the country that consistently wrote to him about possible political scandal, whether it concerned a local controversy or the arrival in their town of a known adversary of Pearson's such as General MacArthur. These people trusted Pearson to uncover and expose the truth about those people entrusted with the power of government. To that end, Pearson worked tirelessly, and sometimes employed extreme measures to achieve those goals.

As related in this paper, the nature of Pearson's journalistic style is most clearly illustrated through his entanglements with Senator Joseph McCarthy, General Douglas MacArthur, and Secretary James Forrestal. Through his pursuit and eventual articles on these men, Pearson greatly expanded journalism especially concerning press coverage of a public person's private life. In order to show the American public just who these people in government really were Pearson was willing to pull out any skeleton in their closet, even if it was only tangentially related to the original supposed wrongdoing. The idea was to show a pattern of deceitful and possibly illicit behavior that led straight to their time in public office. Investigations such as this had not really been done quite to this extent except for maybe in the tabloids. In his pursuit to hold government officials

accountable for their actions Pearson made a lot of enemies, both in government and among his fellow journalists.

Despite accusations that he was unethical Pearson was actually a journalist ahead of his time. His steadfast and unwavering commitment both to his personal journalistic vision and his readers made him a responsible journalist. In modern journalism the press is expected to delve into the private lives of governmental officials. Sometimes they go to far, particularly when they over-moralize on frivolous issues. However, when there is a hint of hypocrisy or conflict of interest, then the media will usually force those politicians to publicly answer for themselves. This concept started not with legendary coverage of the Watergate break-in but with Drew Pearson and his infamous byline, the *Washington Merry-Go-Round*.

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