**1a. INT. NPR STUDIO – DAY**

(MUSIC: NPR like chime. SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**CARY ONANON:**

WFIU, Bloomington Indiana. Where you don’t need to be an expert, if you learn something new everyday.

(MUSIC: Newsbreak transition.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**

Distraction. Sometimes we hate it, sometimes we need it.

For Ernie and Jerry, where they were headed, distraction might do them some good.

This week on the Ernie Pyle Experiment; when friends in need come calling, is it okay to put our own problems aside or is it just an excuse to not look at the truth?

**MUSIC SEGUE:**

(MUSIC: WASHINGTON POST MARCH – THE ERNIE PYLE EXPERIMENT MAIN TITLE THEME.)

**ERNIE:**
Hello, this is Ernie Pyle, the Hoosier Vagabond, and this is that girl who rides with me.

**JERRY:**
And I love it.

(MUSIC: Main theme begins to fades out.)

**1b. INT. NPR STUDIO - PRESENT**

(SFX: The ambience of a recording studio fades in.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**

Welcome to The Ernie Pyle Experiment: Episode 9, A Desolate Corporation.

(MUSIC: Main theme finishes fading out.)

**CROSS TO:**

**2. INT. PYLE SECOND FLOOR APARTMENT – LATE NIGHT**

(SFX: The fireplace is lit and through the two open windows the night city ambience is mixed with the ships and a gentle breeze. W/T: Ernie is on the phone in the background near his writing desk. Jerrie is sitting on the sofa, she picks up the recorder and places it in her lap to talk to it directly. Over this... NOTE: The scene should start with the mono vintage wire recording SFX then slowly cross fade into a full stereo mix.)

**JERRY:**It’s four in the morning, we are home in Washington. An hour ago the phone rang with some very bad news. A pilot is missing...

(SFX: Door knock.)

**JERRY:**Excuse me...

(SFX: Jerry gets up, walks across the hardwood, and opens the front door. Camera perspective should stay on Jerry. Full stereo mix should be in effect by this time.)

**JERRY (CONT’D):**Come. Come in.

(SFX: Jerry ushers Phoebe in and she takes a few steps into the room. Jerry stays at the door, not closing.)

**PHOEBE:**Have you heard anything?

**JERRY:**Ernie is on the phone with someone on the hill. So, I don’t know much yet. Hello Phoebe, Is Verne with you?

(SFX: Jerry closes the door.)

**PHOEBE:**Oh, he is down in Tennessee.

**JERRY:**In town alone?

**PHOEBE:**I took a job with an advisory committee on Aeronautics with Amelia. You didn’t hear that?

**JERRY:**Oh, I knew Amelia was doing something like that... that the president himself called her in.

**PHOEBE:**She didn’t tell you about me, huh?

**JERRY:**I… don’t remember.

**PHOEBE:**That’s just like her! Keeping the glory for herself. She thinks she can beat me on the ground, but she can’t beat Phoebe Omlie in the air!

(SFX: The front door opens on “something about it” and Amelia and George enter. Over this...)

**JERRY:**Oh, I’m sure she said something about it.

**AMELIA:**(rather loudly) Can we come in?

(W/T: General shushing. ‘He’s on the phone’, ‘Ernie is talking’. SFX: George closes the behind him.)

**AMELIA:**If someone was *never* going to get it, my guess it would have to be Howard Stark. I just don’t believe it. What do we know? Hello Mrs. Pyle.

**JERRY:**Hello, Mrs…. Putnam.

**AMELIA:**Oh, don’t you dare.

**JERRY:**You started it.

**PHOEBE:**That’s risky work, calling Amelia Earhart names.

(W/T: They giggle.)

**JERRY:**Hello George.

**GEORGE:**Hello. So, come now, what do we know?

**JERRY:**Just that at some point yesterday Howard took off from Wyoming, heading for Salt Lake City and he never made it.

(SFX: Ernie hangs up the candlestick phone, sets it on his desk and crosses to meet everyone. Over this...)

**GEORGE:**That’s it?

**JERRY:**That’s all I know, yet.

**PHOEBE:**No evidence of a crash, fire, anything?

**JERRY:**I’m sorry, I haven’t heard.

**GEORGE:**Hello, Ernie.

(SFX: Ernie finishes crossing the hardwood to join the group.)

**ERNIE:**Hi, everybody. Listen, my influence on the aviation world in this town has shifted. It’s a longer climb to the top to get to the bottom of things, anymore.

**PHOEBE:**Well, It’s worse sitting at home by yourself, waiting for word. At least we can feel like it used to be, when *your* phone was the first to get the news.

**AMELIA:**Have you called the White House?

**PHOEBE:**You can’t call the White House.

**AMELIA:**Why not?

**PHOEBE:**What does Roosevelt care about Howard Stark?

**AMELIA:**Call the White House, tell them to get Cordell Hull’s office to get some answers. Then call Claude Swanson. What do you think will happen when the President finds out I’ve been calling his entire cabinet?...What is the weather like in the mountains there?

**ERNIE:**Not good for flying..

**AMELIA:**It’s hard enough getting through the Rockies on that angle in clear sky.

**ERNIE:**When he started out the sky was clear in Cheyenne. The weather was good in Utah, as well. About four hours later Cheyenne was having snow flurries. It came over the mountain like a big wall.

**PHOEBE:**He probably set down in a clearing up there somewhere.

**GEORGE:**That’s not a good idea.

**AMELIA:**As opposed to the alternative?

**PHOEBE:**He’ll freeze his ass off up there.

**ERNIE:**Can you imagine, flying in a clear blue sky, clearing a mountain peak and seeing that big wall of dark clouds in front of you?

**PHOEBE:**I’ve seen that.

**AMELIA:**Me too.

**PHOEBE:**Well, I saw it first.

**AMELIA:**Yes, Phoebe. You were first. *We all know*… you were the first woman to cross the Rocky Mountains.

(SFX: Phone rings and Ernie leaves the group to return to the phone across the room. Over this...)

**PHOEBE:**Thank you. It’s still nice to hear. Maybe you’ll get a first one day, too.

**AMELIA:**Oh, brother.

(W/T: Everyone shushes each other. SFX: Ernie answers the candlestick phone picking it up off of his desk.)

**ERNIE:**Pyle. Uh-huh. Sure. Ervie Ballough! How are you, old man?

**PHOEBE:**Ervie Ballough.

**AMELIA:**Ervie Ballough.

**JERRY:**Have I met him?

**ERNIE:**Probably not much more than *you* know. What do *you* know?

**GEORGE:**Where is Ervie out of, now?

**AMELIA:**Oh, you’ll never get him out of Florida.

**PHOEBE:**How is that true when he’s flying for Eastern between Atlanta and Chicago?

**AMELIA:**Oh, that’s right. I always think of him as an independent.

**GEORGE:**What a swell fella. Makes me laugh.

**ERNIE:**Yeah. That’s what I know here. Say, Ervie, Where is his wife?

**GEORGE:**Ervie and I were having a drink, once?... and up comes Verne Treat. Now, Ervie is completely bald as an eagle up top, and Verne puts his hand on Ervie’s head and says, “Ervie! This feels like my wife’s fanny”!

(SFX: Ernie pushes down on the receiver cradle then dials a call out. Over this...)

**GEORGE (CONT’D):**

And Ervie puts his hand up there and says, “Well, I’ll be damned, it sure does”.

(W/T: They laugh. SFX: Door knock. The door opens then George clears his throat when he sees Doris enter.)

**AMELIA:**Shhh! Hello, Doris.

(W/T: The laughter immediately stops. SFX: Doris closes the front door then walks inside and joins the group. Everyone greets her.)

**GEORGE:**Doris, How are you?

**DORIS:**Does anybody know anything definitive?

**GEORGE:**Not yet.

**JERRY:**Ernie is on the phone with...I don’t know *who* he’s talking to now.

**GEORGE:**Ervie.

**JERRY:**No, he just hung up with him and called someone else.

**PHOEBE:**Tubby at Hoover.

**DORIS:**What?

**PHOEBE:**Probably Tubby down at Hoover airfield. He’s a mechanic. He sleeps there.

**AMELIA:**Tubby has a dozen phones lined up on a bench, they’re all smeared with grease. Each line dedicated to another airport across the eastern seaboard. So, he can track what’s happening by who knows what and where. All the damn phones are black, so you can’t see the grease! One time I picked one of them up to make a call and-

**DORIS (INTERRUPTING):**-Does anybody know Howard Stark’s wife? Where is he out of?

**PHOEBE:**A lot of places, dear.

**AMELIA:**Last I knew of it was...Chicago?

**GEORGE:**I thought Newark.

**PHOEBE:**That’s a good guess.

**DORIS:**But, where does his wife make home?

**PHOEBE:**Beats me.

**AMELIA:**Me too.

**DORIS:**A lot of folk might not think it, but this is the right time to call her and make sure she knows she’s not alone…Folks get afraid talking to the dead’s next of kin. But, it’s a ...

**AMELIA:**Nobody said Howard was dead. (BEAT)

**PHOEBE:**Yeah, we don’t know anything like that. (BEAT)

**DORIS:**Jerry, can you tell Ernie to find Howard’s wife’s phone address for me?

**JERRY:**Yes. Of course.

(SFX: Jerry crosses to Ernie. Over this...)

**PHOEBE:**We haven’t met.

(SFX: Jerry stops at Ernie’s desk and picks up a sheet of paper and writes a note to Ernie asking for Howard’s wife’s phone address so as to not interrupt his conversation.)

**AMELIA:**You haven’t? I apologize, allow me...Phoebe Omlie, this is Doris Messick. Doris, Phoebe.

(SFX: Phoebe shakes Doris’s hand.)

**DORIS:**Nice to meet you.

**PHOEBE:**Messick?... Charlie Messick?

**DORIS:**That’s right.

**PHOEBE:**Oh, I’m sorry, dear.

**DORIS:**That’s OK.

**PHOEBE:**March of ‘34?

**DORIS:**Yes.

**GEORGE:**Oh, boy. Roosevelt should have left well enough alone, I tell you.

**PHOEBE:**How was he supposed to know all that would happen?

**GEORGE:**Well, it happened. I could have told you it would. Plenty of us said it would.

**AMELIA:**Oh, please. Everyone knows better after the fact.

(SFX: Ernie finishes his conversation, hangs up and starts dialling another number.)

**GEORGE:**You don’t take a perfectly functioning Air-Mail system, with pilots that know the routes like the backs of their hands, and just let any Tom, Dick, and Harry replace them.

(SFX: Jerry begins to walk back to re-join the group.)

**GEORGE (CONT’D):**

If you do you get 1934, and that’s what happened.

(SFX: Jerry continues to walk up, talking as she walks re-joining the group. Over this...)

**JERRY:**Ernie is asking around for Mrs. Stark’s phone address, Doris.

**DORIS:**Thank you.

**JERRY:**What happened in 1934?

**AMELIA:**Army Air-Corps took over the Air-Mail and forty pilots were killed in a month.

**GEORGE:**Slaughtered! (BEAT)

**DORIS:**I’ll be outside.

(SFX: Doris walks to the front door and opens it. Over this...)

**DORIS (CONT’D):**

Come find me when Ernie gets that number.

(SFX: Door closes. (BEAT) Footsteps recede down the hall behind the door. Over this...)

**AMELIA:**Nice work.

**GEORGE:**Sorry.

**JERRY:**What happened?

**PHOEBE:**Charlie Messick was one of the forty.

(SFX: Ernie hangs up and starts dialling another number.)

 **MUSIC SEGUE:**

3a. INT. NPR STUDIO - DAY

(SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**

Later that night.

 **CROSS TO:**

**3b. INT. PYLE SECOND FLOOR APARTMENT - LATER**

(SFX: The fireplace is lit and through the two open windows the night city ambience is mixed with the ships and a gentle breeze. Over this.)

**GEORGE:**Oh, baloney!

**PHOEBE:**…and those routes were just given to the big companies. And if a guy wanted to keep flying he had to join one of them, which has its benefits. You get a nice plane out of it, taken care of by someone else. You just show up and take-off.

**AMELIA:**And your pay is taken care of by someone else too. And they give you half for the effort, or whatever they want.

**GEORGE:**Well, it costs money to run a company.

**AMELIA:**Which was run just fine by an individual pilot before.

**GEORGE:**Who was stealing money from the taxpayer by weighing down the mail-bags.

**AMELIA:**I never knew anybody that did that! That’s hogwash! If some damn stuff-shirt politician wants something he makes stories up out of thin air.

**PHOEBE:**We all heard it happened, fellas weighing down the bags, but I never knew anybody, either.

**GEORGE:**Alright. You never heard of honest pilots doing it, but they still agreed to take as much junk mail as they could. A man’s honesty has a threshold, if you ask me. It’s the system that eats away at a man’s threshold and it’ll change a guy if he thinks the sin won’t come sit on his house.

**PHOEBE:**But it was working. A lot of pilots that were working for themselves, and doing well for their effort, are now making a lot less.

**JERRY:**We are all making a lot less.

**PHOEBE:**Yes, but that’s not the same thing. Hoover *allowed* this.

**AMELIA:***Companies* carry the mail now when individual pilots, citizen businessmen, used to do it just as well.

**PHOEBE:**It’s Washington’s fault. *It’s dirty pool when an individual has no seat at the table*.

**AMELIA:**Yes! It tells you someone is getting paid off.

**GEORGE:**So, in comes Roosevelt to clean up this corruption...and while patting himself on the back about it he kills 40 pilots. (BEAT)

**AMELIA:**There’s a bit more to it than that.

**GEORGE:**I don’t see it that way.

**JERRY:**Why not?

**GEORGE:**It’s a mistake on a mistake on a mistake. That’s what giving societal rules to industry does.

**PHOEBE:**Right. So stay out of it and everything would be fine. Let it be what it wants to be.

**GEORGE:**We agree on something.

**JERRY:**But, if the legislation of 1925 was created FOR industry, your theory doesn’t make sense.

**GEORGE:**It was meant to put things into the hands of the people and not the post office.

**JERRY:**Only it turns out the *people* were the boards of directors of all these airways, and the hands it took things from was the individual contractor pilots. Right?

**AMELIA:**Right.

**JERRY:**You can put it any way you want and Hoover still comes out a crook.

**GEORGE:**No. I’m getting ganged-up on here. Hoover had nothing…

**JERRY:**Hahaha! I start talking about Hoover and I put my hand on my gun!! HAHAHA!!!

I’m staying out of this horse-spit conversation.

(SFX: Jerry walks to the bar. Over this...)

**JERRY (CONT’D):**

Who wants a drink?

(SFX: Jerry proceeds to mix drinks for the group and herself then she drinks throughout the rest of the scene.)

**AMELIA:**If you don’t think Hoover learned corruption from Harding and Coolidge, you’re crazy. He was setting society up to be run as a business, handing out favors at a profit.

**GEORGE:**Oh, come now.

**JERRY:**

I’m serious, let’s have drinks.

**AMELIA:**I’d bet my eyesight he was on hand for Teapot Dome.

**GEORGE:**Let’s get back to the point; *the idea is* that private operation of society...

**JERRY:**

Blah, blah, blah.

**AMELIA:**...is corrupt.

**GEORGE:**And federal operation of society is even more corrupt! Which we are seeing...

**AMELIA:**Except only one is on the side of the ordinary man.

**GEORGE:**Ordinary men run businesses!

**PHOEBE:**And ordinary men run for Congress...

**JERRY:**

And ordinary men and women have drinks.

**PHOEBE:**

...get compromised by power and money, and become ordinary politicians making decisions against their own conscience.

**AMELIA:**Interesting how a man can make moral decisions for another that he wouldn’t make for himself.

**JERRY:**That’s how religions are made!

**PHOEBE:**Uncle Sam, who art in heaven!

**GEORGE:**

It’s also interesting that such zealotry can lead to the deaths of innocent pilots. Roosevelt wants to undo each and every movement made by the past three republican presidents.

In his lunatic fever to give the federal government the control to make the model of rule...

**JERRY:**

Aren’t you thirsty?

**GEORGE:**

he has to upend a perfectly working order. Which he did, illegally I might add, and without democratic control of the branches no committee would have ever allowed it.

**AMELIA:**If the Hoover administration handing out contracts to the highest bidder...

**GEORGE:**How is that wrong?

**JERRY**(OFF): I’m mixing drinks over here! In case anybody wants to shut up…

**AMELIA:**How is it a free market when the government chooses one airway over another?

**PHOEBE:**I’ll take two.

**GEORGE:**Regulation should be about making institutions modern.

**AMELIA:**Republicans are the ones *against* regulation, George, you don’t make any sense. And modernity is just a concept they use to pull the wool over the voters eyes.

**GEORGE:**Open markets make open commerce. That is the truth no matter who is in office.

**AMELIA:**And who gets to make those markets is also true, no matter who is in office.

**GEORGE:**Well, nobody should be making those markets.

**JERRY:**

Come on everybody.

**AMELIA:**You just said you’re *for* regulations!

**GEORGE:**Amelia, for god sake!

**AMELIA:**You’re an idiot.

**PHOEBE:**The flying industry came out of nowhere. Pilots made it.

**JERRY:**

You are all idiots.

**PHOEBE:**

Then Government took it from them...

**GEORGE:**And when government handed it back it was a disaster.

**AMELIA:**How is the Army running the Airmail handing it back?

**GEORGE:**Yeah. That’s true.

**PHOEBE:**Two airways competing in an open market and one gets a contract, sending the other into bankruptcy? The republicans touting less government and more business is a laugh! They get their seat through democracy and help themselves to all the federal powers it comes with,

**AMELIA:**...then chop at the democrats feet when the democrats do it.

**JERRY:**OK. Everybody shut up!! What’s the point of talking if nobody is willing to change their mind?

 **MUSIC SEGUE:**

4a. INT. NPR STUDIO - DAY

(SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**

It was the first light of morning when Doris Messick was given the telephone address of the wife of Howard Stark, the missing pilot.

 **CROSS TO:**

**4b. INT. PYLE SECOND FLOOR APARTMENT - LATER**

(SFX: The fireplace is lit and through the two open windows the night city ambience is mixed with the ships and a gentle breeze. The group is quiet, respectful and anxious as Doris speaks on the candlestick phone. Over this.)

**DORIS:**…And where are you now, dear? You’re at home? Is anybody there with you?...just the kids?...mmmhmmm...have you called your folks?...mmmhmmm...Well, Just as soon as we are off the phone here why don’t you call your mother. Is she nearby?...oh, Dear. That far? And you are in Secauacus?

Junie Baker is in Bayonne, I will call on her...mmmhmmm...now listen, it’s no bother. None at all. Junie Baker I’ve known for ten years, her husband Tom and my Charlie served in the Army air corps together and...all right...yes, of course...Just don’t turn her away if she shows up on your doorstep. I know. Listen, take the help, dear. There’s a time to take the hand extended to you...you will find a way to be grateful later. Howard is well loved...just know that everybody here is a friend...

(SFX: Doris cries as she hangs up the phone and places it on Ernie’s desk beside her.)

**DORIS:**She hung up.

(SFX: Doris takes a few steps toward the group. Over this…)

**DORIS (CONT’D):**

Will anybody drive me to New Jersey?

(SFX: George takes a step forward. Over this...)

**GEORGE:**I think I can get you there.

**PHOEBE:**I can get you there faster in Tubby’s Stinson down at Hoover.

**DORIS:**I don’t fly. (BEAT)

**AMELIA:**Yes, George. You drive her.

(SFX: Doris and George walk to the front door, open and close it as they leave.)

 **MUSIC SEGUE:**

**5. INT. PYLE SECOND FLOOR APARTMENT - NIGHT**

(SFX: The fireplace is lit and through the two open windows the night city ambience is mixed with the ships and a gentle breeze. Ernie finishes writing on the typewriter then rips the page from the roll without using the paper release. Ernie holds up the page and begins to read aloud. Over this.)

**ERNIE:**They are a strange corporation of loneliness and close kinship, the women of aviation who sit at home and hear that their husbands are dead. Death comes to other women’s husbands too. But no people in this world are so closely linked together as the people of aviation, and it is the long and very real shadow of death that links them.

When a woman’s husband dies violently, the wives of the living shudder a little for themselves, though not much; and the wives of the already dead come quickly with their sympathy and their memories.

I have tried to analyze the attitude toward death among aviators. I have even tried to analyze my own, for it became in time the same as theirs. Vaguely I feel it is something like this: the pilot knows something might happen, but-oh, well, he’s escaped so far, probably he will this time too. The wives have a greater faith and conviction of their husband’s superiority.

I have never known an aviation wife who didn’t consider her husband the greatest pilot in the world.

**ERNIE (CONT’D):**

It’s too bad when other pilots are killed, she thinks, but that won’t happen to my man; he can handle any emergency.

Those who have picked up the receiver and heard the awful news know better than that. Among them have been women whose husbands actually were the greatest pilots in the world.

One night my phone rang, and a hurried voice said, “what do you know about Howard?” I started to make a funny answer to the effect that I knew a lot about him, but something in the voice stopped me. I said, “What do you mean”? “The paper says he’s been missing for 17 hours out west. I can’t get any information. Can you help me”?

There wasn’t any information. In the next few weeks hundreds of men, on snowshoes and skis, on horses, and airplanes, hunted the western mountains over, but there was no trace. The missing man was Howard Stark, known to many countries as the greatest blind flyer of his day.

Missing—that is aviation at its worst. Sudden news of death is like a knockout blow: it hurts and bewilders and then it gradually diminishes. But missing—that is the torture-screw, with each hour that passes giving the screw another turn. You can’t resign yourself to grief; you must hang alone by the tips of your hope—dangling, imagining, lying to yourself, waiting.

**ERNIE (CONT’D):**

The night after Howard Stark disappeared, another woman called me. “Is there any news”? She asked. “I couldn’t sleep last night. All night I was thinking of Mrs. Stark, and living over my trouble again”. Her “trouble” had been

on the night mail. Three years earlier her husband had crashed and died, half an hour after kissing her goodbye at the airport.

I have been on hand many times when word of a crash came in. There is nothing romantic about aviation then, to hear pilots cussing with tears in their eyes, to see women wild with grief, or dazed. And dry-eyed and staring.

One girl I knew was hysterical and pounded her head against the wall. Her grief never really left her. She was gone in less than a year. The doctors would say something else, but I knew she died because she didn’t want to live.

Another night I sat in the operations office with a woman whose husband had just been burned to death. Instead of going home, she sat, because at that point sitting or going home or anything else was equally unimportant to her. She did not cry. To this day I am proud of myself for having the courage and common sense to ask her if she didn’t want a drink of whiskey. She wasn’t a woman who drank, but at that moment a drink of whiskey was exactly what she did want. And we got it for her.

**ERNIE (CONT’D):**

Almost always the women who are left go back to where their lives entered aviation.

(SFX: We should move from the stereo mix slowly cross-fading back into the mono sounds of the vintage wire recording.)

They take their children and their loneliness back to the home town, and you don’t hear from them again until another woman of the clan knocks for admission to their desolate corporation, and they both are in, and pray for her.

**MUSIC SEGUE:**

**6a. INT. NPR STUDIO - DAY**

(MUSIC: Continues to play under this.)

(SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**
Next week on The Ernie Pyle Experiment: **CROSS TO:**

**6b. MONTAGE**

(A preview cuts and sound bites from episode 10.)

 **CROSS TO:**

**6c. INT. NPR STUDIO - DAY**

(MUSIC: Continues to play under this. SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT (CONT’D):**

Back next week with more stories from The Ernie Pyle Experiment. I’m Dan V. Prescott, reminding you that the good road never ends, if you can only stay on it.

**FADE TO:**

(MUSIC: “THE WASHINGTON POST MARCH”.)

CREDIT ROLL

(MUSIC: Continues to play under this.)

**CARY ONANON:**

WFIU, Bloomington, Indiana. I am now, was before, and will forever be Cary Onanon.

**FADE MUSIC**