

# FDR's victory in the book

Miami professor writes of president's struggle with polio.

By Joe Gieringer  
Contributing Writer

OXFORD — Sporting a pair of black-rimmed glasses and dulcet tones with a vocabulary to match, Jim Tobin quietly commands the attention of his journalism students in his long form narrative class.



Jim Tobin

What most of his students don't know is that Tobin is himself a student, of the history variety. After earning a Ph.D. in history at the University of Michigan, he worked his way into becoming a journalist for The Detroit News for 12 years. He's been nominated for two Pulitzer Prizes, and provided commentary for "Reporting America at War: An Oral History" in 2003.

Tobin's most striking volume of work, however, could be the three books he's authored in the past 17 years. The first, "Ernie Pyle's War: America's Eyewitness to World War II" (1997), won the 1998 National Book Critics Circle Award for biography. Afterward, he went on to write "To Conquer the Air: The Wright Brothers and the Great Race for Flight" in 2003. And, most recently, he released his newest work last November, dealing with a more obscure topic.

"It's about (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) and his comeback from having polio," Tobin explained. "It covers just a period of 10 years of his life from 1921 to 1933."

The book, "The Man He Became: How FDR Defied Polio to Win the Presidency," got a significant amount of press upon release in late fall. NPR's Fresh Air segment spent time with Tobin in November, and the book currently holds a GoodReads rating of 4.46/5. For all of its good reviews, it seems an obscure slice of such a notable figure — something Tobin says drew him to the project. "It was a story that I grew up with," Tobin said. "My grandmother, who was a music teacher in the Detroit public schools, was a great New Deal democrat and she worshiped FDR, and as a little boy I heard stories of this heroic president who had recovered from polio, and it sort of always resonated with me."

The FDR project required two semesters of leave at Miami and the support of peers and the university, something Tobin is thankful for. He's just not sure now is the time to jump into another piece of historical non-fiction. "I'm still kind of decompressing from this last marathon with FDR."

For details on a lecture by Tobin, contact Patti Newberry at [newberpg@miamioh.edu](mailto:newberpg@miamioh.edu).