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The United States and the Second World War

1939–1945

Nothing in the previous history of the world compared with the conflagration of World War II. The entire globe became engulfed by fighting, preparing to fight, or supplying combatants. The high stakes of the conflict were made clear by the attack on Pearl Harbor and reports of Nazi anti-Semitism. Nearly all Americans enlisted in the war effort, whether or not they wore a uniform. The following documents illustrate some of the experiences, at home and overseas, shared by millions of Americans during World War II and suggest the long-term consequences of those experiences.

DOCUMENT 25-1

President Franklin D. Roosevelt Requests Declaration of War on Japan

The Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor catapulted the United States into World War II. The attack erased hesitations many Americans had felt about getting entangled in another foreign war. Although the war in Europe had been under way since 1939 and the United States had aided the Allies, war was not declared on Germany until, after Pearl Harbor, Hitler declared war on the United States. President Roosevelt's speech to Congress on December 8, 1941, communicated the sense of crisis and resolve felt by most Americans on the day after Pearl Harbor.

Speech to Congress, December 8, 1941

Yesterday, December 7, 1941 — a date which will live in infamy — the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

From *Congressional Record*, 77th Cong., 1st Sess., vol. 87, pt. 9 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), 9519–20.

The United States was at peace with that Nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its Government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in Oahu, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to the Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

It will be recalled that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace. The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. Very many American lives have been lost. In addition American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday the Japanese Government also launched an attack against Malaya. Last night Japanese forces attacked Guam. Last night Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands. Last night Japanese forces attacked Wake Island. Last night the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

This morning the Japanese attacked Midway Island. Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our Nation.

As Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in this emergency will stand together to the death. I believe I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will continue to fight until we have utterly defeated the enemy and that we will make very certain that we will not permit a similar attack to be repeated.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces—with the unshakable determination of our people—we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God!

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. Why did Roosevelt call the attack on Pearl Harbor a "a date which will live in infamy"? To what extent were "our people, our territory, and our interests... in grave danger"?
2. Where else did Japanese forces attack? Why?
3. Do you think Roosevelt's speech would have been effective in enlisting Americans support for the war against Japan? Why or why not?

4. In this speech, Roosevelt made no mention of Germany and the war in Europe. Why? To what extent did Germany threaten American people, territory, and interests?

DOCUMENT 25-2
A Japanese American War Hero
Recalls Pearl Harbor

Grant Hirabayashi was one of fourteen Japanese American soldiers who fought during World War II in an elite unit that drove Japanese occupiers out of Burma at a devastating cost: a casualty rate of more than 90 percent. Their efforts opened the way for supplies to flow to the Chinese nationalists, who were also battling Japanese invaders. In an oral history interview in 1999, Hirabayashi recalled his experiences in both the United States and Japan before the war and what happened to him and his parents after Pearl Harbor.

Grant Hirabayashi
Oral History, 1999

Hirabayashi: I was born in Kent, Washington. My birth date is 9 November, 1919.... My parents are from... northwest of Tokyo.... My father came to this country in 1907, and my mother in 1915.

E: Do you know... why they came over or how they came?

H: Well, in the case of my father, he went to... a private institution where he studied, and the master of the school was... a Christian, and he did convert many of his students including my father. So my father was a Christian before he came to this country. He also was brought up with two brothers who had participated in the Russo-Japanese war in 1904. And, he heard about the horrors of war, and I believe he became a conscientious objector. Well there were from the United States, a matter of fact there were about seventy students who graduated this [school] who did come to the United States. And they were getting feedback, and some were very favorable. And my father was adventurous, and he liked the idea that he would be able to be in a country where he would have the freedom of religion. He was a very religious man....

[We were Methodist, and he was a very strict Methodist. So we were forbidden to do any of the things which our friends were privileged to do. But, it was a very close-knit family. We were very religious. We all went to church.... [T]here's eight of us. Six boys. Two girls....

I was brought up on a farm—a truck farm. And the schooling, as I recall was 50-50 in these days. 50 percent Niseis¹ and 50 percent Caucasian. And at school we got along very well, but in our social activities we were separated.

E: During school was it, uh, was it mostly... did you guys intermingle a lot?

From Grant Hirabayashi, video interview, 1999. Transcribed by Claire Cage. Go to Broke National Education Center, <http://www.goforbroke.org/default.asp>.
¹Niseis: U.S. born children of Japanese immigrants.

Well, I do know that the parents wanted us to be exposed to the Japanese language and culture. We did attend [Japanese language school], and uh... Well, I enjoyed it because I was—I had an option to play baseball [laughs]. Perhaps I emphasized more on baseball than the language... Well, I went to the Japanese language school, and I came back in 1940, and fortunately the school was open for me. So I was able to spend eight years schooling all my credits which I took in Japan. So I was able to graduate in one year in Kent High School.

I: Did you go to Japan by yourself?

H: Yes.

I: Was that your choice?

H: Well, to make a long story short, there was three of us about the same height, same age, same class. And as a matter of fact, friends called us the three chipmunks, because we were small. But, we used to go fishing on weekends, and the fishing was very poor. And so we started talking. Two of my friends and I decided to go to Japan during the summer vacation. Well, my father looked at the outsider when I went home. I did talk to my father and he said, you know, I would like to go to Japan during the summer vacation. I can't afford to send you on a summer vacation to Japan. But, I was very persistent... whenever I had a one-on-one situation with my father, I would bring up the question. And, one day, I think, at a moment, I did say to my father: Father, if you're not going to send me, I'm going to swim across the Pacific Ocean. That impressed him very much, and he said if you're that determined... I'll have to come up with a deal. And he said the deal is this: I can't afford to send you for the summer vacation, but if you'll study for two years, the Japanese language, he said, that's something there that would be acceptable to him, so which I agreed. And that is how I got to Japan...

I: Do you ever look back... [and] reflect on what would have happened if you would have stayed there [Japan]?

H: Well, I was not a dual citizen. As a matter of fact, when I finished high school, I was offered what they call... [an appointment as] a military cadet. And I told the officer that thanks, but no thanks. I was an American citizen. So if I were to have stayed, I'm sure I would have been treated as a foreigner, like many of my friends were.

I: [Compare Washington growing up and Japan. What one did you think you fit in more?]

H: Well, I think in Japan it was a little more full in that I was able to go to school together, also play after school together. The association was much closer.

I: Did you feel any discrimination or tension between you and [kids in Washington]?

H: Well, I think you know, when you're kids there's bound to be some, but I didn't take it seriously... I personally have not felt any discrimination as such.

I: How about when you went to Japan, did you feel any?

H: Well, when I first went there because of my inability to communicate, I did confront some situations. I may have used some, um, my first to get my point across, and which was not [always] acceptable. But, when I first went there, the teachers gave me preferential treatment, in that they let me still wear my hair long and I also wore shoes as I entered the school, which was only for the teachers. So

I did, for the first year, receive preferential treatment, and of course some of the students did object to that. But, during the second year, I was able to communicate, and I was ready to be one of them. So I had my hair cut as well as take my shoes off as I went to class...

I: Before you graduated and before your brother told you about the situation did you consider staying in Japan?

H: I had some mixed feelings because I knew I was an American citizen, and if something were to happen I would be in a very difficult situation. At the same time, I said, after eight years in Japan, I may have some difficulty adjusting myself [to the United States]—but, I did the right thing...

I: So you graduated from high school in '41? Ok, what happened then?

H: Well, I was... debating what I should do. And it was about that time that I got my draft notice. So I did report for draft, which was four days before Pearl Harbor. But in those days, you're able to enlist, and by enlisting you're able to choose your field of service. And I said to myself, if I'm going to serve, I might as well pick up... some work, a profession so to speak. So I decided to take, uh, so I decided to become an airplane mechanic. And I enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

I: What did your parents have to say about that?

H: Well before I left, my father took me aside... He said, "these are very difficult times, but I want you to take care and do your utmost..."

Well, of course the war broke out shortly thereafter. And before I left Kent, my parents said they would visit me the following Sunday. And, I was waiting, and as I was about to go to the gate, I heard that Pearl Harbor was struck. And, of course, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. So I immediately went to the pay phone to tell them that perhaps it would be advisable to not make the trip. But the phone was already disconnected. Then word came out that all leaves were cancelled—that no one [was] able to visit you. But I did go to the gate. And I waited, and there were many people. And I was very fortunate; we were able to identify each other. We waved, and we parted.

But, the following day, it was a very scary experience for me. The sergeant told us to fall out and assemble in front of the barracks, and he said, "Men, this is a rifle. It is a Springfield rifle. We have none to distribute. They all have been sent to the Philippines." He said, "Men, this is a helmet." He said, "It will be distributed as soon as we receive the supply..." he said, "Men, this is a gas mask." He said, "We have none to issue. They were all sent to the Philippines." So one GI spoke up and said, "Sarge, what would we do if there were a gas attack?" He said, "Men, you take your helmet. You dig a hole in the ground. Stick your nose in it."

And, of course, I was shaking in my boots [laughs], knowing what I had gone through training in Japan... Well, the men had wooden rifles, and doing bang, bang, bang. And I said, oh my gosh [laughs] what am I... fighting a war with... Well, in Japan, we were compelled—we had military service, or military training, for five years, and during the—uh, we had a gun... which was issued to... fourth- and fifth-graders. So between the two, we had one gun. And, in my case, I even had a saber. We had actual military training. We went on maneuvers. We had gas mask training. And, if they had drafted me, perhaps I would have been good as a soldier...

I: ... [When you heard about Pearl Harbor—what were your thoughts...?]

H: That was also a very difficult moment. I said to myself, I had just taken an oath to serve my country. I'm in a war which I did not see and against an enemy which I did not choose. Now my parents were... classified as undesirable

Wenn jüdenblut vom Messer spritzt,
Dann geht es nochmal so gut!

[When Jewish blood spurts from the knife,
Then everything will be fine again.]

The next day, in a state of high indignation, I went to see "Putzi" Hantslangel, then chief of the Foreign Press Division of the Propaganda Ministry. On my way to his office, I learned that one of the victims of the previous night's hostility had already died of his injuries. Yet, when Hantslangel told me, in his cultured Harvard accent, that the "radicals" among the Nazi Party leaders intended to "solve" the "Jewish problem" by the physical extermination of the Jews, I only half believed him. It was not much more than a year after the blood bath of Janina, and even then I could not believe that there were men in positions of power and authority in western Europe in the twentieth century who could seriously entertain such a monstrous idea.

I learned better [redacted] when the Nazi leaders openly encouraged the burning of synagogues, the pillage of Jewish homes, and the murder of their inhabitants.

One reason the Western world failed to rouse itself more promptly to the Nazi menace was surely this tendency to dismiss as impossible fantasy the many warnings the Nazis themselves gave us. We made the terrible mistake of judging the Nazis by our own standards, failing even after the war had begun to realize how completely they had renounced, if indeed they had ever espoused, those standards. Even today, after more than three years of the Nazi kind of war in Europe, and more than one year of direct experience with it ourselves, there are still far too many among us who do not understand the nature of the enemy — ~~an enemy who~~ ~~with no conscience, no sense of right and wrong, and no sense of the value of life~~ ~~and his ends are the~~ ~~of all the non-German peoples~~ of Europe and, if possible, the entire world.

The program is already far advanced. According to a report to the President by leaders of American Jewish groups, nearly 2,000,000 European Jews have already been slain since the war began, and the remaining 5,000,000 now living under Nazi control are scheduled to be destroyed as soon as Hitler's blond butchers can get around to them. Of the 275,000 Jews who were living in Germany and Austria at the outbreak of the war, only 52,000 to 55,000 remain. The 170,000 Jews in Czechoslovakia have been reduced to 35,000. The figures for Poland, where the Nazi program has been pushed very rapidly, are uncertain. There were 3,300,000 Jews in Poland at the beginning of the war, but some 500,000 fled to Russia, leaving approximately 2,800,000 behind. By the beginning of the summer of 1942, this number had already been reduced to 2,200,000, and deportations and massacres since that time have been on an ever increasing scale. In the ghetto of Warsaw, in which 550,000 Jews once dwelt, there are today fewer than 50,000. In the city of Riga, Latvia, 8,000 Jews were killed in a single night. A week later 16,000 more were led into a woods, stripped, and machine-gunned.

It is not merely central and eastern Europe which are being "purged," or rendered "Judenrein," as the Nazis like to say. The Netherlands has already given up 60,000 of its 180,000 Jews. Of the 85,000 who once lived in Belgium, only 8,000 remain today, while of the 340,000 Jews of France, more than 65,000 have been deported. Even Norway has begun to ship her Jewish citizens eastward to the Nazi slaughter houses and starvation pens.

The methods employed by the Nazis are many. There is starvation: Jews all over Europe are kept on rations often only one-third or one-fourth what is allowed to non-Jews. Slow death is the inevitable consequence. There is deportation: Jews, by the hundreds of thousands have been packed into cattle cars, without food, water, or sanitary conveniences of any sort, and shipped the whole breadth of Europe. When the cars arrive at their destination, about a third of the passengers are already dead. There are the extermination centers, where Jews are destroyed by poison gas or electricity. There are specially constructed trucks, in which Jews are asphyxiated by carbon monoxide from the exhausts, on their way to burial trenches. There are the mines, in which they are worked to death, or poisoned by fumes of metals. There is burning alive, in crematoria, or buildings deliberately set on fire. There is the method of injecting air-bubbles into the blood stream: it is cheap, clean, and efficient, producing clots, embolisms, and death within a few hours. And there is the good old-fashioned system of standing the victims up, very often naked, and machine-gunning them, preferably beside the graves they themselves have been forced to dig. It saves time, labor, and transportation. . . .

Letters, reports, cables all fit together. They add up to the most appalling picture of mass murder in all human history. Nor is it only the Jews who are threatened. Polish authorities assert that many hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish Poles have been slain with equal callousness, and soberly warn that the entire Polish people may be wiped out before this war is over. The decimation of the Greek people is a matter of record. The Nazis are evidently quite indifferent to it, if they do not actually welcome it. Thousands of French will die of hunger and cold this winter, and thousands more will never be born, either because the fathers who might have begotten them are being held in Nazi prison camps, or because the mothers are too undernourished to carry them. The same thing is true of many other countries of Europe. And by their executions of "hostages" the Nazis are systematically destroying the potential leaders of democratic movements in all the countries they have overrun.

We must face the terrible truth. ~~Even though it is true that this war has many~~ ~~at least as far as Europe is concerned. There are reports, apparently trustworthy, that the Nazis and the German army are prepared for eventual retreat, and that their plans call for the extermination of every living thing and the destruction of all physical property in the areas they may be forced to evacuate.~~ When we remember that, even after the war of 1914-18 was hopelessly lost and the German army was retreating in confusion on the Western Front, it still found time, and the will, wantonly to destroy the factories and flood the mines in its path, we may well believe that this time it will be even more thorough, go even more berserk.

If this happens, we shall be confronted with the most frightful dilemma imaginable. Every man, woman, and child in Europe will become a hostage, a means of blackmail. If we continue the war, they will die. Yet if we do not continue the war, the Nazis will have won all they can then hope to win — time. Time to regroup their forces, divide ours and strike again.

Our only course then will be to overwhelm them so rapidly that they will not be able to carry out their threats. For that we shall need all the strength we can possibly muster, and all the courage. The Nazis will certainly hope to cut off our allies one by one by threatening the total annihilation of their peoples if they continue to oppose them. We and our allies must be prepared to face the challenge unflinchingly.

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Meanwhile, there are some things which can be done now, slight as the chances are that they will have much effect in deterring Hitler and his followers from their homicidal mania. President Roosevelt could and should speak out again against these monstrous events. A stern warning from him will have no effect on Hitler, but it may impress some Germans like the officer who helped the few from Brussels to escape. A similar warning from Churchill might help, too. A joint declaration, couched in the most solemn terms, by the Allied governments, to begin to amass the facts. Diplomatic warnings, conveyed through neutral channels to the governments of Hungary, Bulgaria, and Rumania might save at least some of the 700,000 to 900,000 Jews still within their borders. The Christian churches might also help, at least in countries like France, Holland, Belgium, Norway, the Pope by threatening with excommunication all Catholics who in any way participate in these frightful crimes, the Protestant leaders by exhorting their fellow communicants to resist to the utmost the Nazis' fiendish designs. We and our allies should perhaps reconsider our policy of total blockade of the European continent and examine the possibilities of extending the feeding of Greece to other occupied countries under neutral supervision. Since there is not enough food to go now offer for destroying the Jews and Poles is that there is not enough food to feed around, we might at least remove the grounds for the excuse by offering to feed the populations of the occupied countries, given proper guarantees that the food will not fall into the hands of the enemy.

If we do any or all of these things, in every European language. There is a report, which I have not been able to verify, that the OWI has banned mention of the massacres in its shortwave broadcasts. If this is true, it is a sadly mistaken policy. We have nothing to gain by "appeasing" the anti-Semites and the murderers. We have much to gain by using the facts to create resistance and eventually rebellion. The fact that the Nazis do not commit their massacres in western Europe, but transport their victims to the East before destroying them, is certain proof that they fear the effect on the local populations of the news of their crimes.

Finally, and it is a little thing, but at the same time a big thing, we can offer asylum now, without delay or red tape, to those few fortunate enough to escape from the Aryan paradise. We can do this without any risk to ourselves, because we can intern the refugees on arrival, and examine them at leisure before releasing them. If there is the slightest doubt about any of them, we can keep them interned for the duration of the war. Despite the fact that the urgency of the situation has never been greater, immigration into the United States in the year 1942 will have been less than ten percent of what it has been in "normal" years before Hitler, when some of the largest quotas were not filled. There have been bureaucratic delays in visa procedure which have literally condemned to death many stalwart democrats. These delays have caused an unprecedented bitterness among Jews

My Marcellus correspondent, who is neither a Jew nor a candidate for a visa, writes that, "in spite of the Nazi pressure, which she feels more than any other neutral, and in spite too of the reactionary tendencies of her middle class, the little country of Switzerland will [by accepting 9,000 refugees from Nazi terror since

OWI, Office of War Information.

July] have contributed more to the cause of humanity than the great and wealthy United States, its loud declamations about the rights of the people and the defense of liberty notwithstanding."

This is a challenge which we cannot, must not, ignore.

QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. According to Fry, why did many people find it difficult to believe reports of the massacre of Europe's Jews?
2. What significance did he attribute to the "heirs of the humanist tradition"? What was the Nazis' view of the "Jewish problem"? Why was it a "problem"?
3. In what sense did Americans judge the Nazis "by our own standards"? What responsibilities did Fry believe the United States had to aid the victims of Nazi atrocities? What might realistically be done to oppose the massacres?
4. To what extent did the U.S. government respond to appeals such as Fry's? What accounted for government policies?

DOCUMENT 25-4

Soldiers Send Messages Home

At home, Americans built a war economy. Thousands of tanks, airplanes, and ships came off American assembly lines. Millions of uniforms, bombs, and bullets funneled from civilian plants into military warehouses. Vital and compelling as all this military production was, probably no domestic activity was more important to Americans on the home front than the post office. Letters from loved ones in uniform overseas — "V mail" — were treasured. News of the war was always welcome, but news that the soldier was still alive was even better. The following correspondence illustrates what home-front Americans learned when they opened V mail.

Sergeant Irving Strobing

Radio Address from Corregidor, Philippines,

May 5 or 6, 1942

They are not yet near. We are waiting for God only knows what. How about a chocolate soda? Not many. Not here yet. Lots of heavy fighting going on. We've only got about one hour, twenty minutes before . . . We may have to give up by noon. We don't know yet. They are throwing men and shells at us and we may not be able to stand it. They have been shelling us faster than you can count. . . .

We've got about fifty-five minutes and I feel sick at my stomach. I am really low down. They are around us now smashing rifles. They bring in the wounded every minute. We will be waiting for you guys to help. This is the only thing I guess that can be done. General Wainwright is a right guy and we are willing to go on for him, but shells are dropping all night, faster than hell. Damage terrific. Too much for guys to take.

From Annette Tapert, ed., *Lines of Battle: Letters from American Servicemen, 1941-1945* (New York: Times Books, 1987), 20-286.

Enemy heavy cross-shelling and bombing. They have got us all around and from slates from here it looks like firing ceased on both sides. Men here all feeling bad because of terrific nervous strain of the siege. Corregidor used to be a nice place, but it's haunted now. Withstood a terrific pounding, just made broadcast to Manila to arrange meeting for surrender. Talk made by General Beebe. I can't say much.

I can hardly think. Can't think at all. Say, I have sixty pesos you can have for this weekend. The big is up. Everyone is howling like a baby. They are piling dead and wounded in our tunnel. Arms weak from pounding. [radio] key long hours, no rest, short rations. Tired. I know now how a mouse feels. Caught in a trap waiting for guys to come along finish it. God a trout. Can pineapple. Opening it with a Signal Corps knife.

My name Irving Strobbe. Get this to my mother. Mrs. Minnie Strobbe, 605 Barbary Street, Brooklyn, New York. They are to get along O.K. Get in touch with them soon as possible. Message. My love to Pa, Joe, Sue, Mac, Carrie, Joy and Paul. Also to all family and friends. God bless 'em all, hope they be here when I come home. Tell Joe whenever he is to give 'em hell for us. My love to all. God bless you and keep you. Love.

Sign my name and tell Mother how you heard from me. Stand by... Strobbe

John Conroy Letter, December 24, 1942

Mare Island Naval Hospital, San Francisco

Dear Mother and Dad:

... You keep asking so I'll tell you. I have been shell-shocked and bomb-shocked. My memory is very dim regarding my civilian days. They feel that sudden shock in action now would affect my sanity. All the boys back here have received the same diagnosis. Injury to my back helps to make further combat service for me impossible. It's so very difficult for me to explain, to say the things I want to, my thoughts are so disconnected.

Of course I'm not insane. But I've been living the life of a savage and haven't quite got used to a world of laws and new responsibilities. So many of my platoon were wiped out, my old Paris Island buddies, that it's hard to sleep without seeing them die all over again. Our living conditions on Guadalcanal had been so bad—little food or hope—fighting and dying each day—four hours sleep out of 72—the medics here optimistically say I'll pay for it the rest of my life. My bayonet and shrapnel cuts are all healed up, however. Most of us will be fairly well in six months, but none of us will be completely cured for years. My back is in bad condition. I can't stand or walk much. The sudden beat of a drum or any sharp, resonant noise has a nerve-tipping effect on us.

Oh, well, let's not think, but just be happy that we'll all be together soon.

Loads and loads of love,
John

Allen Spach Letter, February 1943

[February 1943]

Dear Dad,

I think you will find this letter quite different than the others which you've received from me. My health is well as could be expected as most of us boys in the original outfit that left the States together about [CENSORED] of us are still here. The other are replacements. The missing have either been killed, wounded or from other various sources mainly malaria fever.

On May 16 '42 we left New River N.C., and went to the docks at Norfolk. On the 20th at midnight we hit the high seas with 7,000 marines aboard the U.S.S. Wakefield. We went down through the Panama Canal and past Cuba. On the 29th we crossed the international date line... Was continually harassed by submarines as we had no convoy whatsoever.

We landed in New Zealand 28 days later and they were wonderful to us as we were the first Americans to arrive there. We lived aboard ship at the dock for about a month loading equipment on incoming ships getting ready for "The Day." After working day and night we left and went to one of the Fiji Islands for four days. I was aboard the U.S.S. Fuller picked up in New Zealand. In our convoy were about 100 ships including 3 aircraft carriers and the battleship, North Carolina. We also had air protection from Flying Fortresses coming from Australia. On August 6 we had our last dinner aboard ship and they gave us all we wanted with ice cream and a pack of cigarettes. Just like a man doomed for the electric chair he got any kind of food for this last meal. That was our last for a while. Each one of us received a letter from our commanding officer, the last sentence reading: Good Luck, God Bless You and to hell with the japs. On the morning of the 7th I went over the side with the first wave of troops as Rifle Grenadier, just another chicken in the infantry. With naval bombardment and supreme control of the air we hit the beach at 9:47. All hell broke loose. Two days later our ships left taking our aircraft with them, never to have any sea and air protection for the next two [CENSORED]. In the meantime the Japanese navy and air force took the advantage and gave us hell from sea and air. I won't say what the ground troops had to offer us yet. I can say we never once retreated but kept rushing forward taking the airport first thing.

Left to do or die we fought hard with one purpose in mind to do, kill every slant eyed bastard within range of rifle fire or the bayonet which was the only thing left to stop their charge. We were on the front lines 110 days before we could drop back for a shave, wash up. Don't many people know it but we were the first allied troops to be on the lines that long, either in this war or the last. We have had to face artillery both naval and field, mortar bombings sometimes three or four times a day, also at night, flame throwers, hand grenades, tanks, booby traps, land mines, everything I guess except gas. The most common headache caused by machine gun fire, snipers, rifle fire, and facing sabers, bayonet fighting, the last most feared by all. A war in five offensive drives and also in defense of our own lines. I've had buddies shot down on both sides of me, my closest calls being a shot put through the top of my helmet by a sniper. Once I had to swim a river when we were trapped by the enemy.

see you and your friends again. . . .

God bless the whole world and I'm looking forward to the days when Italy and Germany are licked so that the whole might of the allied nations can be thrown in to crush Japan and the swines that are her sons, fighting to rule the white race. I heard an English speaking Nip say that if he didn't die fighting, that is if he didn't win or if he was captured and later came to Japan, he would be put in prison for 17 years and that all his property would be taken over by the government. That's his point of view. Where ever we go us boys will do our best always. All the end when we don't have the strength to press a trigger.

James McMahon

Letter, March 10, 1944

March 10, 1944

My Dear Parents:

This letter will introduce my best buddy Bill Nelson. I was on Captain DeMont's crew with him. . . .

10.18.43. My first raid was a diversion over the North Sea. We had no fighter escort and got shot and ended up over Holland (Frisian Islands). I saw my first enemy fighters, four ME-109s, and they shot down a B-24. It went into a dive and no one got out. The next raid was Wilhelmshaven on Nov. 3rd (1943). The sky was

overcast, but we bombed anyway and did a good job. I only saw one other B-24 go down. My next raid was Bremen on November 13th. About 10 minutes from the target I noticed our waist gunner was unconscious and appeared to be dying (which he was). Immediately Captain DeMont dropped down to 5,000 feet and headed for home. The waist gunner (Elderly) was dying from lack of oxygen and frostbite (57 below). On the way home he came to and when we landed he went into the hospital. That day Froedle's ship and two others from our squadron went down. One of the waist gunners on his crew is safe but we believe all others are dead. It was over the North Sea they went down and you can't live more than 10 minutes in that water.

Well, my next raid was Kjeller, Norway, November 18th. It was cold as hell

Well, my next raid was Kjeller, Norway, November 18th. It was cold as hell and Bill will go more into detail for you. No flack but coming out we were about 90 miles from land and the Jerry (German) fighters jumped us. There was about 25 or 30 (maybe more) twin engine jobs. . . . Well, Bill got the first one, and then things popped. Our tail gunner Ray Russell got the next one and then (I was on the right waist gun) one popped up out of a cloud and tried to draw a bead on us. I shot his left engine off and killed the pilot and it went down in flames, its wing falling off. Bill in the meantime is having a party for himself. I looks over to see how he's going and he is firing so long at one of the bastards that his bullets are coming out red hot. He kills the pilot of this one and shoots the left wing off, and down goes number four in flames. In the meantime 12 B-24s get shot down, but the fighters leave us and we pat each other on the back. Boy what a day. Man did we have fun. Well on my next raid, Dec. 13th, I was engineer riding the top turret. The flack was bad, but again the cloud cover was with us and we didn't get any holes. . . .

Dec. 31st '5t. Angeley. Again I went to Kiel. This tin as a waist gunner. My ship was in the low element flying in "Coffin Corner." The weather was perfect over the target and we didn't even see any flack till we opened our bomb bay doors. Then all hell broke loose. The sky turned black with flack. Our control cables were shot out on the left hand side, and our 4 engine was also shot out. The top turret got about 20 holes in it, and also the nose turret. The bombardier was hit in the throat (he recovered). All at once I was knocked down as something hit me in the back. A piece of flack was sticking out of my jacket. I was so scared by now that I could hardly stand up and I couldn't see as the sweat was running into my eyes. The temperature was 45 below too. Well, we went into a crazy spin and I was halfway out of the window when he pulled it out and we headed for home. We almost didn't make it. The fighters stayed a way out and didn't attack us. After this raid my nerves were so shot I could hardly write. We were under artillery (flack) fire for 12 minutes that time. It is the most terrible experience you can have. It is just like going "over the top" into an artillery barrage. I saw 2 ships blow up this day, and one go down by fighters. It makes a guy so damned mad and you can't do anything about it. . . .

2:20:44. Well my next raid was Gotta. It's a wonderful trip. I was in the nose turret and I didn't even see a burst of flack. This raid is a milk run. Too bad they can't all be like that. Well now comes the next one. This one will slay you.

BERLIN! On the 6th March, I was in the tail turret and we were high element and "coffin corner." The sky was perfect, no clouds, which meant the fighters were going to come up and the flack would be accurate. On this raid I should have been

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as men was as hell, but I thought of Thiam. Henna, Fred, and all the fellows I had seen go down. I figured if I came back, O.K., but if I went down the flack was bad, and the men I felt glad. Well, all the way in to the target the flack was hell too. Well I didn't know. Gee I felt glad. Our fighters sure gave them hell too. FW-190 shoot down one of them fighters sure pushed hell. Our fighters all the target. I saw one FW-190 shoot down one of our planes which went into a dive and went straight down. Then all hell broke loose. The flack was terrible and the fighters everywhere. The group right behind us was catching hell with fighters (FW-190s) and I got in about 10 squirts at them. We kept flying through the flack and made two runs on the target which took about 20 minutes. All this time I can see Berlin, and man there are 24's and 17's all over the place. I see our bombs hit smack on the target and my heart bleeds for those damned Krauts down there. Well after that for 100 miles I can see the fires and smoke. It looks like all Berlin is on fire. Boy do I feel good. I'm laughing like hell for some reason. I guess it is because I am still there. Well after I get back to base later squinting those Jerry fighters all the way home! I go to sleep and dream of Thiam. All the time over the target I was thinking about him and Dad and Mom and Sis and . . . [eh] everything was going through my mind at once. I sure feel good, I 'cause we knocked the hell out of them. We didn't even get a scratch on the plane and Sis and . . . [eh] anything was going through my mind at once. I sure feel good, I either. And that sure is something for the books. By the time you get this letter, I will probably have 5 or 6 more raids in, but I will explain them to you myself. Except I want you to promise that you will tell about my record, 9 times over the

maybe I've been to Berlin. I am sure proud of my record, 9 times over the

I want you to know that if anything ever happens to me that I think I have the most wonderful and courageous parents in the world, and the most beautiful and wonderful sister on this earth. I am proud of you all and my brother Thom. . . . God Bless you all and keep you safe. I'll come back. I can't say I know I will, but I have as good a chance as anyone. Give my pal Bill the best you've got, 'causee he's the best the E.T.O. has. Let Joe take him down to Eddie's and give him plenty Scotch. He was raised on the stuff. God bless you. I hope this letter gives you an idea of what Bill and I have been through. So long. Hope I see you soon.

Your loving son,
Jimmie

David Mark Olds
Letter, July 12, 1945

Rosenheim
July 12, 1945

Dear family:

... Dad, you ask for my opinion and reactions and those of the CI in general about several things... For one thing everybody is mostly concerned with getting his own skin back to the States and home, regardless of what he leaves here and in what condition it is. I think this is a pretty universal feeling anyway—leave

ETO: European Theater of Operations

to the next fellow or the politicians to worry about the world. I wanna go home and get some small measure of happiness out of life. There are many of us who feel that not much good will be done with all these noble efforts. First of all, the death of President Roosevelt was almost a mortal blow. Second, the regrowth of national selfishness which we can plainly see in France, where we are no longer the saviors but annoying foreigners who interfere with their life. Thirdly, the turmoil in England, and finally the pathetic shortsightedness of those who keep hating at and whooping up talk of war with Russia. Everywhere we hear how terrible the occupying Russian forces are, how barbaric, how savage, how primitive, etc., etc., and I blush to say, many who say this are helping the American uniform, men who should realize that without Russia's help we would have surely been beaten. . . . [Slooner or later . . . the disarming friendliness and cleverness of the Germans will make us doubt if they are so bad. "After all they are a civilized nation, they have great men, etc." My own solution . . . would have a very liberal policy of passes so that men could get out of this accursed country say once a month or so, to breathe the freer air of the Allied countries. Let them change the occupying personnel every six months or so. Let the German PWs be kept in the Army and used as labor of all kinds, farm, factory, etc., instead of discharging them here while we poor bastards have to sit and sweat in the Army in a foreign hated land. I would crush every vestige of military or industrial Army in Germany. Let them be a pauper nation. They deserve it. Let the Russians take over, they have shown how to handle them — be rough with them. Of course some innocent and some helpless will suffer — too bad — in the Army you learn callousness. It is impossible I know, but I would love to personally shoot all young Hitlerites, say between the ages of 10 and 30, and have a rigidly supervised program of education for the young. I don't know if that gives you any better idea of how I feel. . . .

You also asked about the concentration camps and the mass grave victims. It is hard for me to convey all of it to you. You drive through the surrounding towns where there are happy little children at play, and people going about their business, looking like any townspeople the world over, yet within two miles of them, cremated fences harsh against the plains, its chimneys belching smoke from its charged ovens—within two miles is a concentration camp whose very existence is such a horrible thought that a man may doubt that any good can exist in the same world, let alone area, with them. The humans who, though long dead, are yet physically alive with their stick like limbs and vacant faces are so terrible a blasphemy on civilization—yet the German civilians nearby either pretend not to realize them, or what is worse, see no wrong. God, how can people be like that. The concentration camp is even worse when it is empty, and just stands there, a mute testimonial to a brutality beyond comprehension. The gas chambers, as neat and as clean as shower rooms, the cremating ovens where the odor of human flesh is yet ingrained in the bricks, the pitiful barracks and grounds enclosed by the deadly barbed wire and guarded walls. I have seen soldiers get sick standing in

The mass graves and reburials are, for brutality, even worse. Is your stomach strong? Let me tell you about Volary. The SS troopers and the civilians of the town, including some women, when the Germans were falling back in April, rounded up some 200 Jews with about 50 women in the lot. The men were emasculated, disembowelled and shot. The women were killed very simply. A bayonet was run into their reproductive organs and into their bowels. Pretty, isn't it. When they

were being dug up from the ditch where they had been thrown, placed in rude but serviceable wooden coffins, and being reburied in plots dug by German civilians and soldiers. American officers and men called all the people out of the town to witness the burial, to see the bodies, to touch the bodies, to have that memory printed on their minds of what a horrible thing they had done, only a few of them showed either remorse or sadness. They stood there, hard and sullen-faced, muttering and obstinate. They would turn away and be forced to turn back and look. These same people would have cried in anguish had this been done to their own, to Germans, but what if it happened to inferior people, to Jews, and Russians, and Poles? A shrug of the shoulders, too bad, it had to be done. And yet how quickly these things can be forgotten here. . . . I want to get out of this country while I still have it. Forgive me if this picture seems too pessimistic—I have been here longer than I want to, and it is all getting on my nerves.

Love,

David

QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. How did the war affect these soldiers? Did it change their attitudes toward themselves, their families, and the meaning of the war?
2. What did these soldiers think about their fellow soldiers and their enemy?
3. How might reading these and other such letters from Americans in the service have influenced the views of people on the home front? To what degree did these private letters reinforce or qualify official, public accounts of the war?

DOCUMENT 25-5

Rosies the Riveter Recall Working in War Industries

The all-out mobilization of the American economy to build ships, tanks, airplanes, weaponry, and every other form of military equipment created millions of jobs, and women rushed to fill them. Industries eagerly hired women for work previously done only by men. Popularly dubbed Rosies the Riveter, these women made a major contribution to the war effort. Wartime industrial work was also a new experience for the women and it often changed their lives, as the following brief memoirs demonstrate.

Rosie the Riveter Memoirs, ca. 2004

Susan E. Page, Journeyman Welder

I was born . . . in San Francisco, the second child of Danish immigrants. . . . I was attending San Mateo [California] High School when the war broke out. I was 14 years old. I had come down the stairs that morning and I saw my mother,

from "Rosie the Riveter: Women Working during World War II," <http://www.mps.gov/pwmo/collection/website/story.htm>.

father & brother huddled around the radio in the kitchen. I could hear the familiar voice of our President, Franklin D. Roosevelt saying that the Japanese had just attacked Pearl Harbor. Where was Pearl Harbor, I wondered? And why were they attacking us?

My brother was saying quietly that he would enlist and hopefully be accepted as a pilot. I was full of questions, but not yet realizing what this would mean to our little family and our nation. Right away most of his friends and mine . . . began talking about the war and the service, knowing that they would be called to serve our country. They did not want to wait for that call and a group of them agreed to sign up as soon as possible. Events happened so fast after that—they were all leaving their homes and families, including my dear brother. They were sent to different boot camps all over the country. . . .

It seemed that our lives had changed overnight. My father was trying to get into the service even though he was in his forties. I was losing interest in school. It somehow didn't feel as important as it once had. I begged my father to give his release for me to leave school. He was finally convinced by my promise to find a job right away. Dad persevered in his efforts to join up until, at last, he was accepted into the Navy, and was soon gone. My mother was working long hours and our house felt so empty. I began working as a waitress in a creamery. But I knew this was not what I wanted to do. I was just marking time.

One night my friend Bonnie called me and said she had heard that Western Pipe and Steel in South San Francisco was hiring and she was going there in the morning. I said I wanted to go with her and apply for a job there also. We met the next morning to figure out how to get there. Neither of us had a car, so we decided to hitch hike. We were both hired that very day. Oh my, we really lied about our ages! We put down that we were 18 years old, but I was not quite 17 yet! No one raised an eyebrow!

My friend was sent to class to learn how to become a "Burner." I went to welding classes, held right across the street from the shipyards. Completing the required two-week classes, I became a "bucker" for a shipfitter named "Pucinelli." His English was not perfect, but we worked well together and his sense of humor helped the long days pass quickly. After a couple of months working with Pucinelli, I became a journeyman welder. That involved more complicated and challenging work, but I loved it. I felt like I was finally doing something that would bring my brother and others home again. I went to work every day with enthusiasm and dedication. . . .

Donna Jean Harvey, Riveter and Radar Installer

I was born in Casper Wyoming. . . . [and] was raised and educated there. . . . I married Lewis Early Harvey in January 1941. He was drafted when the war broke out. . . .

Labor force was critical at that time so I went to United Modification Plant and learned how to rivet, [and] do installations of various kinds. . . . When the "new" radar system was implemented, I asked to be put on that crew. The FBI investigated me and found me to be worthy and I proceeded to install radar along with my riveting duties, while waiting for the next shipment of planes to come in. They were sent here from the factory, literally as "shells" and we put them together and sent them on their way to Europe and other points where the B-17's were

needed. I installed relief tubes occasionally, did some aerial installations, loaded the shells in the magazines, installed Pyrex glass for the rear gunners and etc. When the next shipment came in we had plenty of mending to do and a time allotment to get them ready. I was awarded the Army-Navy E Award and was presented with a pin. I've always been very proud of that!! I certainly got educated in more ways than I ever expected, being a very young girl. . . .

My feeling about the war in most instances was a conglomerate of mixed emotions. I had lived a fairly sheltered life, but I listened and learned and managed to survive, but I must admit, it left a scar on my memory that can never be erased. . . .

The government was asking for rubber donations so my mother and I gave them our rubber girdles!! We liked to think that our girdles helped win the war!!

My life took on a totally new perspective the longer I worked there. I saw many tragic accidents, none of which I care to talk about which haunt me to this day.

I couldn't do much socializing as I had a small infant at home to care for when off work and besides I was really pooped. Those midnight shifts were "killers." . . . I tried to write weekly letters to my husband in between my other duties. . . . I did enjoy sharing stories with my co-workers as most of them were "war widows" also and we gave each other a shoulder to cry on when needed and a hug whether we needed it or not just to get ourselves through the shift.

Our community gathered together and collected scrap metals and such to help in the war effort and thanks to a good neighbor, who was growing a victory garden, we managed to get gifts of potatoes and lettuce etc. The government issued coupon books that allowed us two bananas a week, one pound of sugar and so many gallons of gas. We traded back and forth depending on our individual needs. . . .

The day the war was over, I gathered up my young son and my parents and we went to town and danced in the streets with everybody else, waved our flags and just generally whooped it up!!! Praised the Lord, it was over!! And yes, the war changed my life. . . . It also taught me that war is hell, pure hell. . . . I pray that once and for all. . . . people will learn to live in peace and respect each other for who they are and just get along. . . .

Delana Jensen Close, Machinist

I spent two years of the war in a small town in the San Francisco Bay Area, at the Yuba Manufacturing Company, making 155 millimeter howitzer field guns. . . . When I arrived in California from Utah, I was told that a war plant had opened up in the town of Benecia and was hiring women, so. . . . I applied for work. After a battery of tests I was put to work operating one of the large boring lathes. . . .

I was later told that when I applied for a job, the plant had been testing women to find out if they were capable of running one of the big machines. I was hired and was the only woman to ever operate one of them, and in six months time I was training men for the job.

My machine was thirty-five feet long and rested in an oil pan that was thirty-eight feet long. The oil constantly lubricated and cooled the machine as it bored down on the section of the barrel that I was working on and be able to reach the

part of the operation which I performed. My job was to bore out the inside of the barrel where the breach lock fit. It had to be perfect, the measurement within 1/1,000th of an inch.

While my girl friends worked in the shipyards at Vallejo for 65 cents an hour, I was among the elite: I made guns at Yuba, and was a machinist second class. I joined the union, paid my dues, and earned \$1.31 an hour. And on that grand amount, with the help of three housemates, I bought a house and furnished it. . . .

But we were living in a special time and place. There was an energy in the air and in the people. We were wanted and needed and important to the war effort. V-E Day, on May 8, 1945 was a day of celebration, but one of mixed emotions for us. We lost our jobs. Yuba would no longer make guns. We said our good byes, and when the foreman of my section shook my hand and said goodbye, he added, "You were the best man I had."

Louille Ramsey Long, Sheet Metal Mechanic and Riveter

It was on December 7, 1941. Our family. . . heard on the radio. . . . President Roosevelt sadly gave the news of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. I went outside and looked up at the stars with a thought of how can I help? I was 18 years old, I was one of the eleven children of my parents who were farmers in Oklahoma.

In two months I took a bus to California to live with my sister in Clovis, California. I worked in a dime store a short time, then I heard that the government wanted women to sign up to be trained to work at ship building and aircraft repairs to replace men who were being called to services. My friend and I went to Fresno and signed up for training.

We were sent to Santa Barbara and lived in a big house with many other women, daily we were taken to a shop and were taught how to use tools in sheet metal work in ship building. . . .

About two months later we were told we were to be taken to Sacramento. We arrived and stayed in old Army barracks. We had an Army cook and lived there and were bussed to the Fairgrounds to learn our trade in a big shop. We took lessons on both sheet metals for aircraft and ship building.

Our instructor, Mr. Lloyd told me and my friend, Maxine Landtrip, he wanted us to go to Mather Field and to do repairs on airplanes, he was boss of all civilian workers there. . . .

The guys at Mather pulled many tricks on us such as being sent to a tool room for female and male tools, but we did fine. At first there were only trainer planes, later came the bombers. . . . We worked shift work all days and hours. . . .

We noted the crew would look real anxious when they saw girls working on their plane. They looked like "We don't know if we will make it to our destination," sometimes one of the crew would wait and watch what we were doing, we understood! We riveted in many tight spots with space only for a hand and a metal bucking block. It took both of us one to run the rivet gun and one to buck the rivets. . . .

We worked on B-24's, B-17's, and many others. One day we had a meeting of all workers, we were told that Mather had been chosen. . . . to receive, check, and work on the new bombers, the B-29's. We were told it was to be a secret and kept that way for the rest of the war with Japan. If we told anyone other than our people at the base we would be put in jail.

We were very excited one day to see many B-29's hitting the runways, taxied up and formed a long line. Each plane was assigned a guard with a high powered rifle. When we got assigned a job on a B-29 the guard was to check our tool box and see each tool taken in and out of the plane. . . .

One day I was in the shop working and I looked across the hanger I saw a B-29 taxi up to the hanger and turn around on the side of the plane its name printed as the "Enola Gay." . . . We didn't know at that time the mission of the "Enola Gay" until recently I read a book that said it was to drop the atom bomb.

QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. What motivated these women to work in war industries?
2. Donna Jean Harvey reported that, "my life took on a totally new perspective the longer I worked." What new perspectives did she and the other women mention?
3. Delana Jensen Close recalled that "we were wanted and needed and important to the war effort." Do you think the many women who did not work in war industries had such attitudes?
4. According to these memoirs, how did working in war industries influence Rosies, their coworkers, and their home lives?

COMPARATIVE QUESTIONS

1. How did the experience of the Hirabayashi family compare with the policies of the governments the United States fought against?
2. To what extent did soldiers' letters home contain evidence of the meaning of official wartime goals in their own daily experiences? How did the soldiers' concerns about the home front compare to the experiences of Rosies the Riveter?
3. In what ways did the war intensify racial and gender identities and stereotyping, according to the documents in this chapter? Who were the exceptions to these stereotypes?
4. Judging from the documents in this chapter, was World War II a just war? Why or why not?

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After World War II, the Cold War shaped American policy. The United States and its allies—Soviet Union, China, and others—contained Soviet influence in the Pacific found a new threat. The Korean War was a victory and contained threats that changed the world.

In November 1949, the Soviet military leader Joseph Stalin could no longer contain the war. The war required a major feat. The Soviet Union expressed a consistent fear of the society could be destroyed.