

# Studs Terkel: "The Good War" - Tom Hull

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I picked up Studs Terkel's *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II* (1984; paperback, New Press) after watching Ken Burns' *The War*, although I had bought a copy a year or so earlier. I felt like I wanted to get some sense of what the war felt like to those who lived through it. In particular, I felt that coming out of discussions with my aunt, Freda Bureman. Her husband, my uncle Allen, died in a car wreck when I was a small child, but he had served in the navy for much of the war, seeing considerable action in the Pacific. Allen was only one of many in my family involved in that war: my father and two of his brothers were in the army, one shot and partially disabled in Italy; several cousins on my mother's side were also involved, one in particular winding up as a guard at the Tokyo war crimes trials. Of course, others in the family lived through the war -- my mother and one of her sisters worked in airplane factories here in Wichita. I was born in 1950, so for me the war was fresh history, but not experience. Vietnam was experience for me, and that recast everything.



The more I learn and think about World War II, the more clear it becomes what a profound shock the war was to the path of American history. It changed how we thought of ourselves and how we thought of the world, and while victory in the war was certainly better than defeat would have been, the changes it wrought weren't necessarily for the better. With victory came an extraordinary arrogance which we still suffer from -- and for that matter make the world suffer with us. It led to a romance of war that we haven't shook off even though none of the many wars the US has engaged in have been anywhere near as satisfying. The quotes I pulled from Terkel's book reflect my concerns. It's a long book, 589 pages, and fascinating. It even goes beyond the Americans-only approach Burns is limited to, although only on occasion.

In the book, short intros by Terkel are in italics. Anything not in italics is a quote from the interview, listed at the start of each quote.

John Garcia, a dock worker at Pearl Harbor (p. 20):

*There was so much excitement and confusion. Some of our sailors were shooting five-inch guns at the Japanese planes. You just cannot down a plane with a five-inch shell. They were landing in Honolulu, the unexploding naval shells. They have a ten-mile range. They hurt and killed a lot of people in the city.*

*When I came back after the third day, they told me that a shell had hit the house of my girl. We had been going together for, oh, about three years. Her house was a few blocks from my place. At the time, they said it was a Japanese bomb. Later we learned it was an American shell. She was killed. She was preparing for church at the time.*

Robert Rasmus (p. 47):

*We were aware that the Russians had taken enormous losses on the eastern front, that they really had broken the back of the German army. We would have been in for infinitely worse casualties and misery had it not been for them. We were well disposed toward them. I remember saying if we happen to link up with 'em, I wouldn't hesitate to kiss 'em.*

Robert Lekachman (pp. 67-68):

*Unlike Vietnam, it wasn't just working-class kids doing the fighting. You go to college faculty clubs today and on the walls are long lists of graduates who died in the Second World War. It was the last time that most Americans thought they were innocent and good, without qualifications.*

*There were black marketeers on the home front, people who were, as usual, hustling for themselves. But most Americans at home did observe price controls and rationing. Soldiers who came home on leave were treated with respect by the folks, unlike the Vietnam veterans. They bought war bonds: Buy yourself a tank. It was an idealistic war. People still believed.*

*The boys came home, eager to make up for lost time. Newly married, and Levittown selling homes for six or seven thousand dollars, four percent mortgages, no down payment. A postwar boom that lasted until 1969. Eisenhower was the perfect symbol of the period. It was as though a massive dose of Sominex were administered to the whole population. There was now less concern for those beyond your immediate family. Making it yourself was what it was all about in the fifties.*

*The GI Bill produced an educational explosion. If you wanted to educate yourself, you got a good deal. Like millions of others, I went back to school. I got full tuition at Columbia.*

Peggy Terry (p. 111):

*My husband was a paratrooper in the war, in the 101st Airborne Division. He made twenty-six drops in France, North Africa, and Germany. I look back at the war with sadness. I wasn't smart enough to think too deeply then. We had a lotta good times and we had money and we had food on the table and the rent was paid. Which had never happened to us before. But when I look back and think of him . . .*

*Until the war he never drank. He never even smoked. When he came back he was an absolute drunkard. And he used to have the most awful nightmares. He'd get up in the middle of the night and start screaming. I'd just sit for hours and hold him while he just shook. We'd go to the movies, and if they'd have films with a lot of shooting in it, he'd just start to shake and have to get up and leave. He started slapping me around and slapped the kids around. He became a brute.*

Betty Basye Hutchinson (p. 134):

*When I think of the kind of person I was, a little hayseed from Oroville, with all this altruism in me and all this patriotism that sent me into the war! Oh, the war marked me, but I put it behind me. I didn't do much except march against Vietnam. And my oldest son, I'm happy to say, was a conscientious objector.*

Paul Pisicano (pp. 142-143):

*Suddenly we looked up, we owned property. Italians could buy. The GI Bill, the American Dream. Guys my age had really become Americanized. They moved to the suburbs. I think American suburbs*

*are bound by their antiblack sentiments. That's the common denominator. They're into it very easily, it seems. They feel they've achieved.*

*But they're worse off than they were before. That's the part they don't understand. They really haven't been assimilated. They're just the entrepreneurial rough-riders. They'll still take a tougher tack than most guys, getting what they want. Not one of my friends has taken an intellectual direction. The war bred the culture out of us. The opera, all the good things. My father could whistle every damn opera I ever heard. Of course, every house had Caruso records. There wasn't a family that didn't have a lift-up phonograph. Opera was like cars for us. What the automobile is to Americans, opera was for us. My friends in the suburbs know nothing about opera, nothing about jazz. Just making money.*

Jack Short (pp. 144-145):

*In a way, World War Two had a positive impact on me as an individual. I can say I matured in those three years. I certainly did want to obtain an education. I wanted to better myself rather than, say, hitting a local factory. I didn't want to be a blue-collar worker. This was basically all we had in our area. Fortunately, I was educated on the GI Bill. I obtained a nice position in the company, have a nice family. Everything in my lifetime since the war has been positive. I don't mean that war is positive. They're all negative as far as I'm concerned.*

*The war changed our whole idea of how we wanted to live when we came back. We set our sights pretty high. If we didn't have the war, in Poughkeepsie, the furthest you'd travel would be maybe New York or Albany. But once people started to travel -- People wanted better levels of living, all people.*

*I come from a working-class family. All my relatives worked in factories. They didn't own any business. They worked with their hands. High school was about as far as they went. I went to college, studied accounting, and that's all I've been doing for thirty-two years.*

Admiral Gene Larocque (pp. 190-191):

*After the war, we were the most powerful nation in the world. Our breadbasket was full. We enjoyed being the big shots. We were running the world. We were the only major country that wasn't devastated. France, Britain, Italy, Germany had all felt it. The Soviet Union, our big ally, was on its knees. Twenty million dead.*

*We are unique in the world, a nation of thirty million war veterans. We're the only country in the world that's been fighting a war since 1940. Count the wars -- Korea, Vietnam -- count the years. We have built up in our body politic a group of old men who look upon military service as a noble adventure. It was the big excitement of their lives and they'd like to see young people come along and share that excitement. We are unique.*

*We've always gone somewhere else to fight our wars, so we've not really learned about its horror. Seventy percent of our military budget is to fight somewhere else. [ . . . ]*

*Our military runs our foreign policy. The State Department simply goes around and tidies up the messes the military makes. The State Department has become the lackey of the Pentagon. Before World War Two, this never happened. You had a War Department, you had a Navy Department. Only if there was a war did they step up front. The ultimate control was civilian. World War Two changed*

*all this. [ . . . ]*

*Nuclear weapons have become the conventional weapons. We seriously considered using them in Vietnam. I was in the Pentagon myself trying to decide what targets we could use. We explored every way we could to win that war, believe me. We just couldn't find a good enough target. We were not concerned about the opprobrium attached to the use of nuclear weapons.*

*I was in Vietnam. I saw the senseless waste of human beings. I saw this bunch of marines come off this air-conditioned ship. Nothing was too good for our sailors, soldiers, and marines. We send 'em ashore as gung ho young nineteen-year-old husky nice-looking kids and bring 'em back in black rubber body bags. They are a few little pieces left over, some entrails and limbs that don't fit in the bags. Then you take a fire hose and you hose down the deck and push that stuff over the side.*

John Kenneth Galbraith, who participated with George Ball and Paul Nitze in a 1945 study of the effectiveness of aerial bombing in the war (pp. 208-210):

*The results were not in doubt. The bombing of Germany both by the British and ourselves had far less effect than was thought at the time. The German arms industry continued to expand its output until the autumn of 1944, in spite of the heaviest air attacks. Some of the best-publicized attacks, including those on German ball-bearing plants, practically grounded the Eighth Air Force for months. Its losses were that heavy. At the end of the war, the Germans had ball bearings for export again. Our attacks on their air-frame plants were a total failure. In the months after the great spring raids of 1944, their production increased by big amounts. [ . . . ]*

*The [atomic] bomb did not end the Japanese war. This was something that was carefully studied by our bombing survey. Paul Nitze headed it in Japan, so there was hardly any bias in this matter. It's ironic that he has since become fascinated with the whole culture of destruction. The conclusion of the monograph called *Japan's Struggle to End the War* was that it was a difference, at most, of two or three weeks. The decision had already been taken to get out of the war, to seek a peace negotiation.*

*The Japanese government, at that time, was heavily bureaucratic. The decision took some time to translate into action. There was also a fear that some of the army units might go in for a kind of Kamikaze resistance. The decision was not known in Washington. While the bomb did not bring an end to the war, one cannot say Washington ordered the attacks in the knowledge that the war was coming to an end.*

*Would not millions have been lost, American and Japanese, in the projected attack on the mainland, had it not been for the bomb?*

*That is not true. There would have been negotiations for surrender within days or a few weeks under any circumstances. Before the A-bombs were dropped, Japan was a defeated nation. This was realized.*

*This experience, as a member of the commission, had an enormous effect on my attitudes. You had to see these German cities, city after city, in 1945 and then to on to the utter horror of Japanese cities to see how frightful modern air warfare is. There is nothing nice about ground warfare: twenty thousand men were killed on the first day in the Battle of the Somme in World War One. But this didn't have the high visibility of Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, Mainz. And to see Tokyo leveled to the ground. I was left with an image which has stayed with me all my life.*

Elliott Johnson (pp. 259-260):

*We were so mixed up, Americans and Germans. People were shooting at my dear friend Ed Bostick, our forward observer. This was on the second day or third. He jumped into a ditch on the side of the road. The only thing that saved him was a dead Germany boy who he pulled on top of him. He lay there for hours until he felt safe to move. When he came back, he fell in my arms. Imagine what he'd been through, using a dead boy as a shield.*

*I went back to my foxhole and I was suddenly drained. It was about one-thirty in the morning. I had to stay on duty until two. Ed was to come and relieve me. I couldn't stay awake. I was just plain exhausted. We never turned the crank or rang the bell on the telephone. When you are an officer -- and this included the top noncoms -- you went to sleep with your headset at your head. Instead of ringing the bell or speaking, we'd just go (whistles softly), and that would waken you from a sound sleep. This voice came on and said, "Yes, EI?" I said, "Can you relieve me? I'm just bushed." He said "I'll be right over." He came walking over to where I was and for some reason he began to whistle. I'll never know why. A young artillery man, one of ours, I'm sure had dozed off. The whistle wakened him. He saw a figure and fired.*

*I was out and running, and I caught Ed as he fell. He was dead in my arms. Call it foolish, call it irrational, I loaded Ed in a jeep. I had to take him in for proper care. Now! I went to our battalion headquarters, and I was directed to this drunken colonel. He came out and said, "Get that goddamn hunk of rotten meat out of here." You have no idea of my feeling toward him. It's remained with me for a long time, hard to get rid of.*

Dr. Alex Shulman (p. 287):

*I got to Buchenwald, too. Did you know that Buchenwald was a zoo? On the gate, engraved: Buchenwald Zoological Gardens. The ultimate humiliation. They didn't let us in, but we could look in. The smell and the bodies all were still there. So nobody can tell me it didn't happen. (Laughs.)*

*Americans have never know what war really is. No matter how much they saw it on television or pictures or magazines. Because there is one feature they never appreciated: the smell. When you go through a village and you suddenly get this horrible smell. Everybody's walking around with masks on their faces, 'cause it's just intolerable. You look out and see those bloated bodies. You no longer see humans, because they've been pretty well cleaned up by now. You see bloated horses and cows and the smell of death. It's not discriminating, they all smell the same. Maybe if Americans had known even that, they'd be more concerned about peace.*

Lee Oremont (p. 315):

*The Depression ended with the war in Europe. The market business at once ceased to be competitive. The problem of making money disappeared. It became automatic. The immediate concern was how to avoid taxes. All of a sudden, there was an excess-profits tax. It was avoided by increasing officers' salaries, inflating expense accounts, and handing out large bonuses. I remember salesmen coming in to sell you gadgets or systems. Their first selling point was: "It doesn't matter. Uncle Sam pays most of it anyway." You could spend money very freely. It was the government's money.*

*When we started out, our net worth was \$65,000. I told my partner, with all the problems coming up -- rationing, shortages, labor scarcity -- if we could hold on to this at the end of the war, we'd have done a good job. Instead, business jumped crazily. You could sell anything you got, it just walked off the shelves.*

*It was hard to get certain merchandise. Bags, for instance, were in short supply. You did without. Customers brought their own shopping bags. Every shortage became an added profit. If you were short of help, you did with less. You couldn't get new equipment, you used old stuff. The net result was substantial profits. During our first year, we made \$100,000 out of a net worth of \$65,000. [ . . . ]*

*It didn't take a genius to make money during the war. I know a number of people who still think it was their brilliance that made them so successful. They get pontifical and tell you how efficient they were, how hard-working and smart. Bullshit. They happened to be in the right place at the right time. All you had to do was to open a store and not get dead drunk. You had customers ready and willing and able to buy all you could get. It didn't take any brains or hard work. If it was true of smaller firms, imagine how it worked for the big ones.*

*We were offered a chance to invest in a housing development. Our stores were in the heart of the aircraft industry. We put in \$15,000. In six months, we got double. We were just small investors. The builders were getting financing from the government. They built tracts in ninety days. They started out selling the houses for \$4,000. By the time they were ready, they were getting \$6,000. That extra money was just clear profit. Right now, those houses are easily \$60,000.*

*I'm really pissed off by people who have such horror of price controls. Price controls really saved us from a devastating inflation. I don't think they went up more than five percent. In spite of being violated in a chickenshit way by black marketeers. Overall, prices didn't go up. Interest rates were down. [ . . . ]*

*I think the war was an unreal period for us here at home. Those of us who lost nobody at the front had a pretty good time. The war was not really in our consciousness as a war. In spite of the fact that I think I'm politically aware, I never had the personal worry of somebody in real danger. We suddenly found ourselves relatively prosperous. We really didn't suffer.*

John Kenneth Galbraith, who was put in charge of price controls in 1941 (p. 323):

*There is with World War Two no memory of inflation. Unlike World War One and Vietnam. It was partly due to our coming out of the Depression. There was an enormous opportunity for expanding output as distinct from raising prices. In the war years, consumption of consumer goods doubled. Never in the history of human conflict has there been so much talk of sacrifice and so little sacrifice. Another thing was the mood of the country. The war, unlike Vietnam, had almost unanimous support from the people. There was a strong objection to people who tried to circumvent controls. There was a black market, but it was small. There were troublesome moments in the case of meat, but there was a great deal of obloquy attached to illegal behavior.*

*We greatly feared we'd hold the prices and see a decline in quality. It didn't materialize. Manufacturers, protecting their trademarks, were unwilling to risk reducing quality. There was a certain flow of shoddy goods, but it was unimportant.*

John Houseman, worked for the Office of War Information (OWI), which did propaganda, ran Voice of America (p. 352):

*We were all civil service, so everyone was investigated. Sometimes it took up to six months. One of our best writers was fired because he'd been with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain. Among the investigators were many who had worked for Henry Ford as union busters. They invented the term "premature anti-fascists," PAF. It was used in adverse reports that we received on people.*

Erich Lüth, of Hamburg, Germany (p. 433):

*We were afraid at home, with every chime of the clock. All the time. I was afraid they'd find out my real opinions. One of my brothers was already in a concentration camp. He had been a bookseller. You know, before the millions of Jews were thrown into the camps, there were hundreds of thousands of German democrats, poets, ministers, students, labor people, thrown into the camps.*

Vitaly Korotich (pp. 434-435):

*I was seven years old when I see my first terrible war poster. Jews of Kiev, you must be on Lvov Circle. Those who will not be there will be killed. It was September 1941. Kiev was a multinational city. We have up to two hundred thousand Jews. The German army invaded Russia June 22, and on September 19 they were in Kiev.*

*They kill people from the third day of their occupation. It was Yom Kippur, Jewish holidays. They throw them in Babi Yar. It is an abyss, a very, very deep hole in the ground.*

*Nobody believed this would be done. It was done so easy. I ask those who came from Babi Yar. They say they believe these people are quite normal and they take you somewhere to nice places. Some people believe they will go to Palestine. Nobody believed a first they will be killed. [ . . . ]*

*In 1943, nobody can believe it. When we start to open documents. The prisoners from other camps, who burned these bodies, they were killed too after two weeks of their work. Each evening, they were kept in old house standing near to Babi Yar. They dream about escaping. They looked in the pockets of those dead bodies for keys. The people who were killed in Babi Yar, they take keys with themselves. They think they are going back. For me, this is the metaphor! Keys for freedom in the pockets of the dead.*

*More than three hundred war prisoners run away. Only fifteen escaped. SS men killed all the others. Six of them still alive. I know five Jews who survived Babi Yar.*

*They tell me the story and I filmed it. They speak about such details: two or three trucks with children's shoes, which Germans take from Babi Yar in two weeks. How many children must be killed to fill one truck with shoes? They speak of looking for gold teeth, those who try to smash bones. Fascists do this in very practical way. They are very orderly. [ . . . ]*

*After the war, all German documentary film come to Soviet archives. In every German battalion, there will be one movie operator, who'll take miles and miles of these films. Sometimes, they never opened them. When we start to open them, it was terrible for me. It all came back to me. We work more than*

*two years with those movies. I became crazy looking through it and looking. Sometimes it looks like the world after the neutron bomb. Because there are only things, no people Everybody dead. Like Babi Yar.*

Telford Taylor, chief prosecutor at 11 of 12 Nuremberg trials (p. 459-465):

*For most people my age, the war and its aftermath were the most intense experiences of our lives. So many crises that overtook me were directly due to the war. I was in no way a military person when I went into the army. I don't think I'd ever seen an American officer in uniform -- except on the Fourth of July -- until shortly before the war. After Pearl Harbor, all officers in Washington were required to wear uniforms. It became a common sight. There could have been none more unmilitary than my generation. The military seemed a world apart.*

*Through all those years -- the normality of Harding, the boom, the bust -- the army was less than a hundred thousand. It just wasn't part of a normal person's experience. The Pentagon had not yet come into existence. The military budget was, of course, much smaller, The war ballooned the whole thing and it became a major part of everybody's life. The voice of the military, after World War Two, became very strong. [ . . . ]*

*Why did they do these things? Because it had become the thing to do. People most of them were followers. Moral standards are easily obliterated. Take Eichmann: a minor electrician in Vienna. He joins the SS and he becomes an officer and a gentleman. He likes that. He gets promoted. He never got beyond lieutenant colonel, but that was pretty good for a Viennese electrician. They so very easily fall into the pattern that their superiors set up for them, because that's the safe way. They may be loving husbands, nice to their children, fond of music. They have been accustomed to moral standards prescribed from above by an authoritarian regime. The safe way to be comfortable in life is that way: following orders.*

*After I came back, I was quite often asked to talk about Nuremberg. Early in 1950, I addressed the membership of a Jewish synagogue in Brooklyn. I said, The idea that these Nazis of the Holocaust were all a bunch of abnormal sadists is not so. Most of them are very ordinary people just like you and me. You should have heard the uproar that went up from that audience. The same thing happened to me last spring. I told the rabbi that my views are a bit clinical and might not be the right thing for his congregation. He said it's a very sophisticated group. Exactly the same thing happened.*

*If our general population were subjected to the same trends and pressures that the Germans were, a great many of us would do the same. Maybe not as many, because we're not quite as authoritarian as the Germans. But a lot of us would. I think we do still have some built-in political safeguards, but they're not ironclad. If the depression gets worse -- things are already getting more bitter than they were a few years ago -- I can see some of the same things developing.*

Arno Mayer, born in Luxemburg, came to US in 1940, future historian, worked in Army intelligence (pp. 465-467):

*At Post Office Box 1142, I became the morale officer for German generals who had been captured and flown to Washington. They were from the regular Wehrmacht and from the Waffen SS. They all had one thing in common: they had fought on the eastern front. I was to get as much information as I could with regard to only one thing: the battle order of the Red Army. About Germany, not one blessed thing. Even at that time, a few months after D-Day, the thoughts of the American government were*



already on the next phase of the confrontation.

*I was not to do any interrogation. I was to keep these fellows happy, to put them in a good mood so they would readily talk about stuff. With liquor, with newspapers. One day I was misguided enough to bring them *The Nation* and a copy of *PM*. I thought it was perfectly legitimate fare in a free country. When my officers found out that I was handing them literature of that nature, I was told in no uncertain terms that I could give them *Life* magazine and the *New York Times*, and *Reader's Digest*, but for God's sake, not any of that other stuff. [ . . . ]*

*I also became the morale officer for Wernher von Braun and three other big scientists that were brought here. Of course, by then we were in a dead-heat competition with the Soviets for the personnel that had worked at Peenemünde, the installation where the German rockets were developed. The Soviets, of course, got their own Germans. Everybody had his own Germans, getting ready for the next big bang.*

This is followed by a story about Mayer taking the Germans shopping for presents to sent back home (pp. 467-468):

*I had the fiendish thought that it would be nice to take them to a Jewish department store. So I took them to Landsberg Brothers. We started on the main floor and bought the usual stuff: cocoa, sugar, coffee, all the stuff that was in very short supply in Germany. Where next? "We'd like to send our families some underwear." They wanted panties for their wives. I was all of nineteen years old and had never gone to buy panties. We went to the lingerie department. Imagine these four odd characters, with long leather coats and green Tyrolese hats, at the panties counter. Accompanied by ein kleine Judenbube [the Germans' nickname for Mayer].*

*The saleswoman said, "What size?" Almost by reflex, out came their slide rules. Centimeters into inches. She came back and held up a panty made of nylon. My four charges, as if it had been orchestrated, threw up their hands: "Aber nein, Unterhosen aus Wolle und mit langen Beinen." Woollies with long legs, 'cause it's going to be very cold. We didn't get out panties. What next? They would like to get some brassieres. The lady was rather puzzled with the four odd men moving up to her. Again, the slide rules came out. At that moment the military police came and took the five of us to jail. The powers that be finally cleared us and we got back to Post Office Box 1142. All of this was in service to the nation.*

*The Germans considered me a pretty stupid fellow, which I was supposed to be. I remember their trying to convince me that the only reason they mucked around with these rockets is that they wanted to improve the airmail service between Berlin and London. They wanted to get it down to eight minutes. (Laughs.) At that moment, I cracked up, which I wasn't supposed to do.*

*They tried to give the impression that they never really approved of the Nazi regime. They worked exclusively as scientists in the interest of advancing the cause of science and research. And one fine day we'd get to the moon. They pleaded complete political ignorance. They knew very well when they scrambled away from Peenemünde they'd be a hell of a lot better off being captured by the Western armies than they would be by the Red Army.*

Hans Massaquoi, currently an editor of *Ebony* magazine in Chicago, but born 1926 and raised in Hamburg, his mother German, his father Liberian; his is as interesting as any story in the book, especially as he tries to fit in with the Nazis and gets rejected (pp. 498-499):

*In that same year, '36, Max Schmeling went to the United States to do battle with Joe Louis. I was rooting for Schmeling. In '38, when Louis beat him, I was crushed. That's how much I identified with the Germans. It was not a matter of Hans Massaquoi, black. I was a Hamburger and Schmeling was my man.*

*It's clear to me that had the Nazi leadership known of my existence, I would have ended in a gas oven or at Auschwitz. What saved me was there was no black population in Germany. There was no apparatus set up to catch blacks. The apparatus that was set up to apprehend Jews entailed questionnaires that were mailed to all German households. The question was: Jewish or non-Jewish? I could always, without perjuring myself, write: non-Jewish.*

*My mother was now reduced to day work. She was so popular in the hospital where she had worked that doctors were kind enough to employ her as a cleaning lady. That's what she had to do in order to survive.*

*My scholastic records entitled me to go to the Gynmansion, the secondary school. A sympathetic teacher called me aside and said, "You have to be a member of the Hitler Youth movement to qualify. You're not accepted as a Hitler youth. So . . . I'm sorry." [ . . . ]*

*Many of the German youth that followed the call to arms weren't moved by any political considerations to kill Jews or Poles or Russians. It's the old quest for adventure. Hitler made it very attractive. He put the fancy uniforms on his troops. Had I not been constantly rejected, there's no telling how enthusiastic a volunteer I might have been.*

Eventually this rejection becomes an identity for Massaquoi, as he moves into an anti-nazi "swing boy" counterculture (pp. 499-500):

*Their affinity was for English and American records. Jazz especially. If they caught you playing these records, they'd confiscate them or take you to jail and keep you overnight. They'd give you a lecture or a beating. I became part of that group. We were just seventeen, eighteen, We'd meet at certain nightclubs. You could look at us and know we were anti-Nazi.*

*The Nazis hated our guts. Any chance they had, they would kick us in the pants or make life miserable for us. There was nothing ideological about us. We were nonpolitical, just anti Nazi regimentation. It was a total turnoff. We didn't want to be bothered by this nonsense.*

Then the war came home (pp. 500-501):

*The first bombings of Hamburg started in 1942. The raids increased. In 1943, Hamburg was practically demolished. In three nights, forty-one thousand people were killed. My mother and I were right in the middle of it. On the street where we lived, there was a public air-raid shelter. Every street had to have a shelter, which you could reach in five minutes.*

*I remember one night, about nine o'clock, the siren started wailing. We grabbed our suitcases and made it down. We'd been in this same shelter many, many, many, many nights before. The shelter was packed. There must have been two hundred, most of them neighbors we knew. There was not a moment when there was no Allied aircraft over Hamburg. It was an around-the-clock affair. The British would attack us at night and the U.S. air force in the daytime.*

*That night, about midnight, we heard the bombs dropping. It lasted about an hour. When it was over, we tried to get out, but we couldn't. The building over us was hit by an incendiary bomb and was on fire. The outside walls had collapsed and had blocked the exits. People were running around, getting hysterical. Nobody gets out, they were shouting.*

*About eight the next morning, we heard digging outside. They were removing the walls. We were half suffocated. We couldn't breathe. When we reached the street, that part of Hamburg where I lived was totally burned down. My mother and I made it to an overpass of an el train. All the survivors went there. We were picked up by trucks and taken out of the city. In those days, refugees -- and we were all refugees now -- could use the trains without paying.*

Massaquoi moved for a while to the Harz Mountains, near Peenemünde, where the V-1 and V-2 rockets were made. He later returned to Hamburg. When the British occupied Hamburg, his black skin turned into an advantage, as nobody expected there were any black Germans. One more comment (pp. 503-504):

*My biggest disappointment, for those who've really suffered under the Nazis, is the benign treatment of those Nazis by the Allies. We had assumed a housecleaning would follow the occupation. That the British and Americans would come in -- as the Russians did -- and, first of all, round up the Nazi suspects. And make sure that those who had been in power would not get back in power. Quite to the contrary, within a very short time we saw these same people who terrorized the neighborhoods in charge again. The wardens, the block leaders, all these Gruppenführer, all the ex-functionaries, were back in the saddle. A lot of my friends were so disillusioned they left Germany. One particularly brutal Nazi I worked for at a rubber plant. This went on everywhere.*

*Another phenomenon occurred: the disappearance of Nazis. You saw pictures of thousands of them screaming and hollering "Heil Hitler." If you asked anyone, Were you ever a Nazi? Oh no, not me. Just about all these former functionaries appeared in their old positions.*

*I think Americans were the worst in this respect. They fraternized so readily. The American brass that came over, in an ostensible effort to have things run smoothly, immediately became pals with these old Nazis.*

*I think it filtered down from Washington. We'd rather deal with the Nazis and have them on our side. Let's not be too serious about this denazification. Go through the motions, but don't step on too many toes. We ultimately will need them.*

Victor Tolley, a marine in the first group to occupy Nagasaki (pp. 544-545):

*I may be carrying a touch of radiation myself. If a person picks up one rem it can linger in your cells all your life. It may lay dormant and nothing may happen to me. But when I die and I'm cremated and my ashes are scattered out over some forest, that radiation is still alive. Twenty-seven thousands from now, somebody might pick up that rem of radiation from those ashes of mine and come down sick.*

*I believed in my government. Whatever Roosevelt said, by god -- and he was God -- we believed it. When I was in the Marine Corps, I was totally dedicated. They gave me a rifle and when they said go forward and kill that enemy or be killed, you did it. You didn't question it, 'cause you're doing it for your country. Now I'm sixty-eight years of age and I've had a chance to reflect back on my life. I've*

*had a chance to sit down and do a lot of reading and a lot of studying. Now, I question. I question my government and I think every American should. I don't think that any individual can say Mom, apple pie, and the President of the United States is it and stop thinking. Whatever the government says is not always right.*

*Caspar Weinberger and I went to high school together. I sat right next to him for four years. We were friends and we've corresponded. But I can no longer believe in Cap Weinberger and what he stands for. I don't give a damn what Cap or the President or what anybody says, I have to think for myself. And I saw what I saw.*

*We didn't drop those two [atomic bombs] on military installations. We dropped them on women and children. The very minute I was jumping up and down and hugging my buddy and was so elated, there was a little baby layin' out in the street charred and burned and didn't have a chance to live. There was seventy-five thousand human beings that lived and breathed and ate and wanted to live that were in an instant charred. I think that is something this country is going to have to live with for eternity.*

Paul Edwards, who worked with UNRRA on relief and refugees after the war (p. 573):

*While the rest of the world came out bruised and scarred and nearly destroyed, we came out with the most unbelievable machinery, tools, manpower, money. The war was fun for America -- if you'll pardon my bitterness. I'm not talking about the poor souls who lost sons and daughters in the war. But for the rest of us, the war was a hell of a good time. Farmers in South Dakota that I administered relief to, and gave 'em bully beef and four dollars a week to feed their families, when I came home were worth a quarter-million dollars, right? What was true ther was true all over America. New gratifications they'd never known in their lives. Mass travel, mass vacations, everything else came out of it. And the rest of the world was bleeding and in pain. But it's forgotten now.*