

Europe, the story reveals the roots of the kind of racial hatred that fueled the Holocaust. The armistice, or truce, between the two American characters at the end of the story seems unsatisfactory and temporary, just like the armistice signed by Germany and the allied European and U.S. forces at the end of World War I.

On December 7, 1941, Japanese bombers struck the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, killing approximately 2,000 sailors. This tragedy, which brought the United States into the war, is the occasion of Joan Didion's "Letter from Paradise." Didion describes her feelings as she visits Pearl Harbor a quarter of a century later, views the still-submerged battleships, and recalls the young men who died in the Sunday-morning sneak attack. Dwight Okita's poem "In Response to Executive Order 9066" recalls the reaction of the U.S. government to the fear engendered by Japanese aggression: the rounding up and banishing to internment camps of thousands of Japanese Americans.

The U.S. entry into the war turned the tide in favor of the Allies, but it was a long, hard fight. Two selections in this part of the unit deal with the experience of ordinary combat soldiers. Randall Jarrell's jolting poem "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" recalls the terror of aerial warfare, in which combatants felt painfully vulnerable under the fire of a faceless enemy. The prize-winning novelist John Steinbeck, whose work always speaks with sympathy for the common people, also reflects the point of view of the fighting soldier in his essay "Why Soldiers Won't Talk."

## Voices from the TIMES

from

"The Good War": An Oral  
History of World War Two

by Studs Terkel

We were on our way to the movies on Sunday afternoon. I was twelve at the time. My dad loved Abbott and Costello. We were going to a matinee. We saw them all. On the way to the theater, the car radio was on. "Oh, my God!" my father said, "Pearl Harbor!" I said, "What's a Pearl Harbor?"

"We can't go to the movies," he said. He turned around right away. There was an outcry from the back seat: "We wanna see Abbott and Costello!" My two sisters were eight and six.

Jean Bartlett

On the morning of December 16, we were suddenly under a fantastic barrage. Every tank in Europe came over the hill, all the panzers in the world. We had no tanks at all. The weather was such that we had no air support. They went over our rifles like they weren't even there. We were completely cut off and surrounded. We ran through the hills, firing at anything. . . .

So there I am wandering around with the whole German army shooting at me, and all I've got is a .45 automatic. There were ample opportunities, however, because every place you went there were bodies and soldiers laying around. Mostly Americans. At one time or another, I think I had in my hands every weapon the United States Army manufactured. You'd run out of ammunition with that one, you'd throw it away and try to find something else. One time I had a submachine gun, first experience I ever had with one.

Richard M. "Red" Prendergast  
remembering the Battle of the Bulge

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 1073





# Remembering the Wars

## World War II



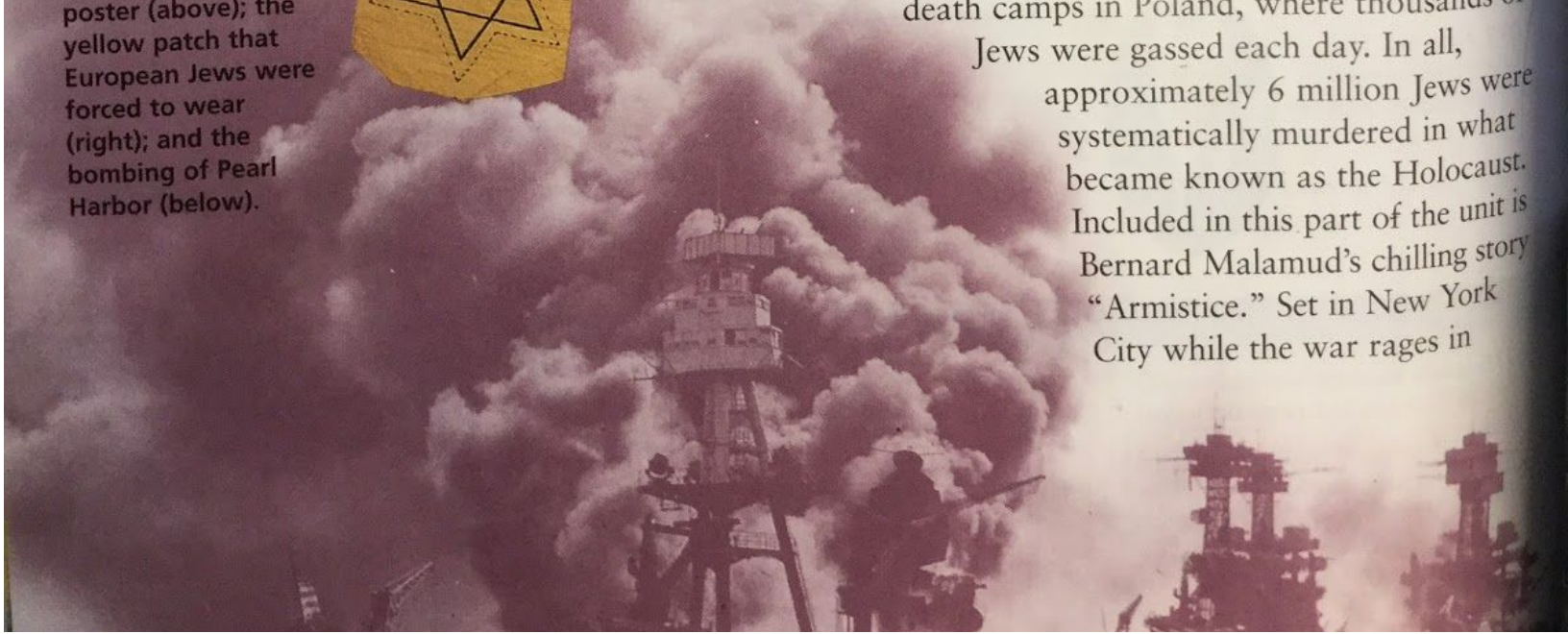
**World** War II was a catastrophe of epic dimensions. Never before had so many soldiers fought. Never before had such wholesale slaughter occurred. When the war finally ended in 1945, more than 78 million people had been killed or wounded. For the first time in history, more civilians than soldiers had died in a war. Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers' party, commonly called the Nazis, came to power in 1933, at the height of the Great Depression. Full of passionate intensity, Hitler set out to avenge Germany's defeat in World War I and to create a new German state called the Third Reich. He told his followers, "Close your eyes to pity! Act brutally!" Like a tidal wave, the German army overran Europe. By June 1940, British troops had retreated from Dunkirk across the English Channel.

As the Nazis surged across Europe, Hitler targeted certain groups for extermination—political dissenters, homosexuals, mental patients, Gypsies, Poles, Slavs, and especially Jews. Sometimes Jews were confined in squalid ghettos, but most of the time they were herded into cattle cars for removal to concentration camps. By late 1942, the Nazis had set up six

death camps in Poland, where thousands of Jews were gassed each day. In all,

approximately 6 million Jews were systematically murdered in what became known as the Holocaust. Included in this part of the unit is Bernard Malamud's chilling story "Armistice." Set in New York City while the war rages in

Images from World War II: U.S. troops roll through Europe (far right); a U.S. war propaganda poster (above); the yellow patch that European Jews were forced to wear (right); and the bombing of Pearl Harbor (below).





The only thing that kept you going was your faith in your buddies. It wasn't just a case of friendship. I never heard of self-inflicted wounds out there. Fellows from other services said they saw this in Europe. Oh, there were plenty of times when I wished I had a million-dollar wound. [Laughs softly.] Like maybe shootin' a toe off. What was worse than death was the indignation of your buddies. You couldn't let 'em down. It was stronger than flag and country.

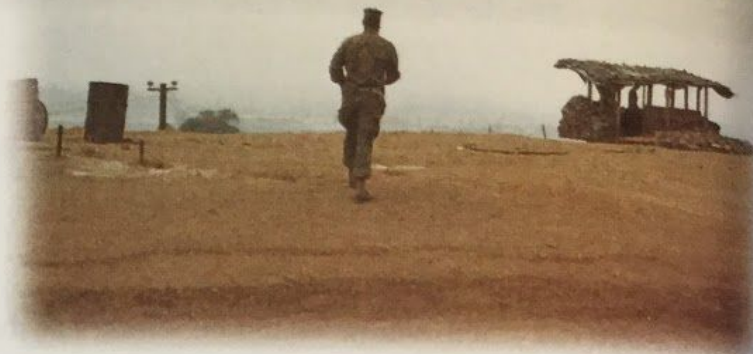
With the Japanese, the battle was all night long. Infiltratin' the lines, slippin' up and throwin' in grenades. Or runnin' in with a bayonet or saber. They were active all night. Your buddy would try to get a little catnap and you'd stay on watch. Then you'd switch off. It went on, day in and day out. A matter of simple survival. The only way you could get it over with was to kill them off before they killed you. The war I knew was totally savage.

E. B. "Sledgehammer" Sledge  
remembering the war in the Pacific

I first became aware of it when I was twelve or thirteen. It was one of the most important experiences of my life. In the school library, I was looking at photographs of the Holocaust. They were oversized books. I can still see the bindings and the mottled green cloth. It wasn't an assignment. Why was I doing this? It was a new library, new furniture, clean floors. The sun was coming through on the Appalachian hills. In contrast to the photographs, which were grainy, fuzzy. Parents wouldn't want their children to see these photographs.

In those grainy photos, you first think it's cords of wood piled up. You look again, it shows you human beings. You never get the picture out of your eye.

Nora Watson



A U.S. soldier in Vietnam

## Traditions Across Time: War in Vietnam

Most Americans supported U.S. participation in World War II. Twenty years later, however, the Vietnam War split the American people into so-called hawks and doves—supporters and opponents of the war.

The United States intervened in South Vietnam to help that republic resist the Viet Cong—South Vietnamese Communist rebels—and the North Vietnamese army. The U.S. government wanted to stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, whereas the Vietnamese soldiers fighting U.S. troops wanted an independent nation free of foreign interference.

The war in Vietnam bred a degree of domestic conflict unseen since the Civil War. As the war dragged on and more U.S. soldiers died—approximately 58,000 in all—many Americans at home began to doubt the wisdom of continuing the U.S. presence in Vietnam. Indignant students, pacifists, and some returning Vietnam War veterans marched in the streets, calling for an end to the war. The literature of the time reflects the conflicts within the country, as well as within the ranks of the U.S. military. From Tim O'Brien's "Ambush," with its painful memory of an encounter with the enemy, to Denise Levertov's poem "At the Justice Department," a participant's account of an antiwar protest, these selections introduce the troublesome issues plaguing the people who were involved in the longest war in American history.

