

Interview with Studs Terkel

Date: ca. 1999

Interviewer: Judy Ehrlich, Rick Tejada-Flores

Camera Rolls: 84-85

Sound Rolls:

Interview gathered as part of “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors.” Produced by Paradigm Productions. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Interview with Studs Terkel, conducted by Paradigm Productions around 1999 for “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors.” Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors.”

00:00:11:00—00:02:10:00

Interviewer #1:

When we're ready. When we're ready.

Interviewer #2:

All right, OK.

Camera Crew Member #1:

I'm rolling.

Interviewer #1:

See if he [laughs]...

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, just tell us who you are, first.

Studs Terkel:

Say what?

Interviewer #1:

Just

Interviewer #2:

Tell us who you are. Tell us who you are.

Studs Terkel:

Oh. I'm Studs Terkel, and there's a book. And the book is called "The Good War". Now, you'll notice, there are quotation marks around it. That's for a very specific reason. I'll read you this note at the very beginning of the book. "The title of this book was suggested by Herbert Mitgang, who experienced World War Two as an Army correspondent. It's a phrase that's been frequently voiced by men of his and my generation to distinguish that war from other wars, declared or undeclared." Certainly a maladventure such as Vietnam. "Quotation marks have been added, not as a matter of caprice or editorial comment, but simply because the adjective 'good,' in quotes, and, mated to the noun 'war,' in quotes, is so incongruous. There ain't no such animal as a good war." And that was the purpose of it. However, Herb Mitgang and others of his generation and mine used that war certainly during the Vietnam adventure. In contrast to Vietnam, it was the good war, the war against fascism. Now, that was a war that was inevitable, but it wasn't good, because it made savages even of the best of young men, and that's the aspect of war itself. There ain't no such thing as a good war. It is basically insane and nutty, and as we enter the twenty-first century, even think about it, to use a bomb anywhere, in any area of the world, is looney-tune, from the year one.

00:02:11:00—00:02:32:00

Interviewer #1:

But why is it—and we should get him to—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Glasses.

Interviewer #1:

—take off his glasses now?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, take off your glasses now.

Interviewer #1:

And it, I liked it that, the camera was fine?

Interviewer #2:

It's fine—

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

—it's fine, yeah.

Interviewer #1:

So—

Interviewer #2:

Take off your glasses, now, Studs.

Interviewer #1:

But why is it that we, we're now—

Interviewer #2:

Glasses.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Glasses.

Interviewer #1:

Yes, take your glasses off, now.

Studs Terkel:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Yes, good. Unless you want to read—

Interviewer #2:

No.

Interviewer #1:

—that other thing now? We'll do that later. Why is it that here we are fifty years later and we tell people we're making a film about pacifists in the good wa—

[cut]

[end of tape]

00:02:33:00—00:07:21:00

Interviewer #1:

Go ahead.

Studs Terkel:

Take my glasses off.

Interviewer #2:

Let, let—

Interviewer #1:

Not if you—

Interviewer #2:

—not if you're—

Interviewer #1:

—want to read—

Interviewer #2:

—gonna read—

Studs Terkel:

Oh, I'm gonna read.

Interviewer #1:

—it's OK.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, go ahead, keep 'em on—

Studs Terkel:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—if you need 'em to read.

Interviewer #2:

But lift the book up.

[Studs lifts up the book]

Interviewer #2:

There.

Interviewer #1:

Good, perfect

Studs Terkel:

There's a song written by Tom Paxton during the Vietnam war. I think it applies to all wars. I'll read the lyrics of it [reads]: "What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine? What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine? I learned that war is not so bad, I learned about, about the great ones, I learned about the great ones we have had. We fought in Germany, and in France, and I am someday to get my chance. That's what I learned in school today, that's what I learned in school." And of course, there was a chance that the boy's got, during Vietnam. Now, that's where "the good war" came into being, the phrase. Some of the young draft resisters, those who opposed the war, those who fled to Canada, those who went to jail, were bawled out by their fathers, who, World War Two vets, because their fathers equated the Vietnamese adventure with World War Two. In many cases, those fathers later on understood that there was a difference, and they understood why their sons protested Vietnam. At the same time, this in no way justifies the idea of war, even the, quote unquote, good one. And that's the aspect of it that we tend to forget, because war itself, especially the

Pacific theatre of war in World War Two, made savages of the most gentle of boys who were drafted, or those who volunteered. They did things they wouldn't have dreamed of doing in the Japanese theatre of war. Race-, race was an aspect there, of course. And, though, so they chopped out with, using bar, bar-knives, they chopped out teeth, used the teeth as souvenirs. This went on, of course, on, in, on both sides. War itself is a denigrating experience. Now, I was taken with World War Two. I was fervent. The war against Hitler, the war against fascism. And I remember, one moment of shame in my life, and I'll speak of it now. Earlier, back in the early Thirties, we saw the anti-war movie "All Quiet On the Western Front," based upon Erich Maria Remarque's novel. And the hero of, the central figure, was Paul, a young German soldier, played by Lew Ayres. And there's one scene in there that tells you of the nuttiness, the looniness of war. It's this young German soldier, and it's the slaughter between Germans and the French—it may have been the battle of Verdun, we know, one of those battles. And the young German soldier, Paul—Lew Ayres—leaps into a foxhole, and there's a French poilu. And he immediately stabs him, and the French poilu is dying, staring, looking at Lew Ayres, who suddenly realizes what he did. And he looks into the guy's, man's clothes and he finds picture of his wife and kids, the man's wife. And he cries out, forgive me, forgive me! And the actor, by the way—this is a small point, 'cause I remember—the actor who played the French soldier, didn't utter a word, was played by the very great silent film clown, Raymond Griffith, who was sorta Charlie Chaplin—an opera cape and top-hat. Charlie—dressed to the nine—he didn't speak here, either, but his face showed everything. He was saying, eyes open, as he lay dead, a-, as Lew Ayres is sobbing, why? Why did you do it? Now, Lew Ayres, as a result of that movie, before, became a conscientious objector during World War Two. I was, I say, taken with the war against Hitler, and I had a radio show. It had very few people listening to it—maybe twenty-five. They're all dead, so it doesn't really matter, except it matters to me, 'cause I made a passing comment. No one ever remembers it, of the few who did hear it. The passing comment was, as I was praising some of the soldiers Ernie Pyle, the correspondent, wrote about, and speaking of these young heroes, I said, too bad Lew Ayres didn't understand this when he became a conscience objector. In a sense, it was an oblique criticism of him, for which I apologize to him posthumously. And even though no one remembers it, I do, and it's my moment of shame, that he was right.

00:07:22:00—00:08:09:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk a little more about that. Why do you now think he was right?

Studs Terkel:

Because war is insane, that is, I, I agree with the conscientiou-, I was not one of them, but I agree with 'em today, you see. Now even more so than ever. Haven't we learned anything at all?

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Studs Terkel:

Wha— what does it solve, other than brutalize the combatants of both sides, even the good side, so-called? So, the good war, is a jokey phrase. I was thinking of a poem that to me says it all, by an American poet, Tom McGrath. Let me read, let me get this now.

Camera Crew Member #1:

I'm going to stop for a minute.

Studs Terkel:

And this is—

Interviewer #2:

OK—

Studs Terkel:

—we can always fill in, you know—

Interviewer #2:

—OK, OK—

Studs Terkel:

—but this is the one I wanna—

[cut]

00:08:10:00—00:08:44:00

Interviewer #2:

Real clo-, this one close, yeah. Go ahead.

Studs Terkel:

The, from the song of Tom Paxton. "What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine? What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine? I learned that war is not so bad, I learned about the great ones we have had. We fought in Germany, and in France, and I am someday to get my chance. That's what I learned in school today, that's what I learned in

school."

00:08:45:00—00:12:09:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, now you wanna do the other one?

Studs Terkel:

Now I want to do this. Now [clears throat]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Do you want that banging in there?

Interviewer #2:

This was—

Interviewer #1:

Is it really bad? We, we have two takes of it—

Interviewer #2:

—this was OK, but we have, we have an alternate ones.

Camera Crew Member #2:

French and Spanish?

Interviewer #2:

French and Spanish lines? Yes.

Studs Terkel:

If there is anything that sums up my thoughts about war—W, A, R, w-, war, no matter what form it takes—the poem by Tom McGrath, Thomas McGrath. It's called "Gone Away Blues." And I can just hear, perhaps, a slow blues piano, something, a how-long blues in the background. And it goes, sir—no. It goes, [reads]: "Sirs, when you are in your last extremity, when your admirals are drowning in the grass-green sea, when your generals are preparing" for "the total catastrophe—I just want you to know how you can not count on me. I have ridden to hounds through my ancestral halls, I have picked the eternal crocus on the ultimate hill, I have fallen through the window of the highest room, but don't ask me to help you

'cause I never will. Sirs, when you move that map-pin how many souls must dance? I don't think those soldiers," [pause] "I don't think all those soldiers have died by happenstance. The inscrutable look on your scrutable faces, I can read at a glance—and I'm cutting out of here at the first chance. I have been wounded climbing the second stair, I have crossed the ocean in the hull of a live wire, I have eaten the asphodel of the dark side of the moon, but you can call me all day and I just won't hear. O patriotic mister with your big ear to the ground, sweet old curly scientist wiring the birds for sound, O lady with the Steuben glass heart and your heels so rich and round—I'll send you a picture postcard from somewhere I can't be found. I have discovered the grammar of the Public Good, I have invented a language that can be understood, I have found the map.... where the body is hid, and I won't be caught dead in your neighborhood. O hygienic inventor of the bomb that's so clean, O lily white Senator from East Turnip Green, O celestial mechanic of the money machine—I'm going someplace where nobody makes your scene. Good-by, good-by, good-by, adios, au revoir, so long, sayonara, dosvedenya, ciao, by-by, by-by, by-by." [pause] That's some poem, isn't it?

Interviewer #1:

That's a great poem. [laughs]

Studs Terkel:

I mean, that's some poem. You gotta keep this in.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, I think, I guess, I think we do.

Studs Terkel:

Isn't that some poem?

Interviewer #1:

That was brilliant.

Studs Terkel:

Should I read it again?

Interviewer #1:

I think you should—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, read it—

Interviewer #1:

—just for—

Interviewer #2:

—one more time.

Interviewer #1:

And do it—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Let me do it without the limiter.

Interviewer #1:

—a wide shot.

Interviewer #2:

OK, do it without—

Interviewer #1:

Do it without the limiter, 'cause it gives—

[cut]

00:12:10:00—00:14:48:00

Studs Terkel:

—might be good for it. Maybe none.

Interviewer #1:

Jimmy Eanes.

Studs Terkel:

You decide.

Interviewer #1:

OK, yeah, but just—

Studs Terkel:

It might not need anything.

Interviewer #1:

—want a suggestion.

Studs Terkel:

Want me to start?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Yep.

Studs Terkel:

"Sirs, when" you're...

Interviewer #2:

Start again.

Studs Terkel:

"Sirs, when you are in your last extremity, when your admirals are drowning in the grass-green sea, when your generals are preparing the total catastrophe—I just want you to know how you can not count on me. I have ridden to hounds through my ancestral halls, I have picked the eternal crocus on the ultimate hill, I have fallen through the window of the highest room, but don't ask me to help you 'cause I never will. Sirs, when you move that hat [sic] pin how many souls must dance? I don't think all those soldiers have died by happenstance. The inscrutable look on your scrutable faces I can read at a glance—and I'm cutting out of here at the first chance. I have been wounded climbing the second stair, I have crossed the ocean in the hull of a live wire, I have eaten the asphodel of the dark side of the moon, but you can call me all day and I just won't hear. O patriotic mister with your big ear to the ground, sweet old curly scientist wiring the birds for sound, O lady with the Steuben glass heart and your heels so rich and round—I'll send you a picture postcard from somewhere I can't be found. I have discovered the grammar of the Public Good, I have invented a language that can be

understood, I have found the map of where the body is hid, and I won't be caught dead in your neighborhood. O hygienic inventor of the bomb that's so clean, O lily white Senator from East Turnip Green, O celestial mechanic of the money machine—I'm going someplace where nobody makes your scene. Good-by, good-by, good-by, adios, au 'voir, so long, sayonara, dosvedenya, ciao, by-by, by-by, by-by." That's the poem.

00:14:49:00—00:19:28:00

Interviewer #1:

That's great.

Studs Terkel:

You gotta end with that.

Interview #1:

That is great. That's—

Interviewer #2:

That is—

Interviewer #1:

—fabulous—

Interviewer #2:

—good.

Interviewer #1:

—fabulous. Now that you're onto this, we'll come back to that in a—no, we've—

Interviewer #2:

Glasses off.

Studs Terkel:

Mm?

Interviewer #1:

—those—glasses off.

Studs Terkel:

Ah ha. [removes glasses]

Interviewer #1:

Can you paint a picture of what it was like to be on the home front in World War Two?

Studs Terkel:

The picture of the home front in the United States, World War Two, was in such contrast to pictures of the home front of all the other combatants, Axis or Allies. We, surrounded by the Pacific ocean on one side, the Atlantic on the other, is the only combatant, the only combatant in World War Two that was neither in-, bombed, that was neither bombed nor invaded. Think of the Allies. England was blitzed. We know what happened to Coventry, to London. You name the, the cities, the towns. France was occupied. Half of it, half collaborationist, half resistance. Italy, we know they had to hide some of those paintings in North Italy in basements. Italy, of course. You name the... Japan. Need we mention the fire bombings of Tokyo, nor need we mention Hiroshima, Nagasaki, August sixth, August ninth, 1945. As far as the Allies—oh, well, no. I mixed it up. Let me start again. Let's start with the Allies. Our allies. England—the blitz. Coventry. London. Birmingham. You name what happened to the various cities, and the loss of lives. France—invaded. Occupied, half collaborationist, half resistance. Italy—north Italy, for that matter, south. But Italy, paintings were hidden in basements, you know, bombed, of course. Armies there. Russia, Soviet Union, twenty million dead. The Axis powers, Germany. Hamburg, Dresden, the open city, down the line. Italy, too, was, of course, Axis power. And Japan, you men-, need we mention Japan? The fire bombings of Tokyo, and, of course, those two moments, August sixth, August ninth, 1945, words that are part of our vocabulary today: Hiroshima, Nagasaki. We, United States, were the only country untouched in that respect. Therefore, to us, war is something different than it, to the others, no matter who they are in the world. Admiral Gene La Rocque, retired—war hero, by the way—was, formed something called Center for Defense Information, which is, which monitors, it consists of o— officers in all the services—admirals, captains, commanders in the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines. And Gene La Rocque, Admiral La Rocque, says, we, the United States, have engaged in more military adventures elsewhere than any empire in the history of the human species, ever since the Cold War began, ever since World War Two ended. So, to us, war is something that happens elsewhere. As a result of which, except for those—you've asked about the home front—those whose families lost sons, in some cases, daughters, grieved inconsolably. But the rest of us—don't kid ourselves, we did not suffer that much at all. There were shortage, rationing here and there. Hardly anything that mattered really. There was some black market, it wasn't that big to begin with. A, John Kenneth Galbraith worked for Leon Henderson of the office of, OPA, he speaks of that, of course. And others speak of the home front, now and then there're blackouts. We don't know! Now, the question I ask, and it's a tough one: must we suffer a horrendousness, a catast— you know, to understand this is insane and loony and

catastrophic? That's the question we ask ourselves. I'll tell a story. [beeping] Big Bill Broonzy's a blues singer, [beeping] and Big Bill was probably the greatest of all country blues singers. Sang of his boyhood as a sharecropper, as a little kid—

00:19:29:00—00:21:26:00

Interviewer #1:

You were, yeah. Start the story again.

Studs Terkel:

Big Bill Broonzy sang of his childhood, helping his father sharecropper. And one day, the mule died. It was so tragic, the mule died. And he sing, called "Plow Hand Blues." I remember, I was the emcee. It was a nightclub, and I was the master—and Bill sang that. And I was so deeply moved by this blues, the mule dying, meaning their livelihood. In the middle of that song, a couple of hipsters—the word hipster used back in those days—one was white, one was black, kids about seventeen, eighteen. Got up and scraped their chairs, walked out, middle of the song. I was caught unawares, so I couldn't tackle 'em, you know, [growls] give it to them. And I was so furious at myself, and at them. At the bar, during intermission, Bill is laughing at my fury. I says, those little bastards, they walked out—Bill says, why do you blame them? What do they know about a mule? They never heard of a mule. You see? I says, Bill, are you telling me—and then Bill says, you know, when I went to Europe, for example, after the war—he and Alan Lomax, the collector, went to Europe, one of the first guys to sing the blues, long before Muddy Waters and the others, long before we celebrate today. We should celebrate them, but Bill is the one forgotten. He sang for the first time in North Italy in Milano, and he sang in England, and he sang in Paris. And he, s— he saw bombed out places. He says, what do I know about a bomb? The only bomb I've seen was in the pictures, in movies. So I says, Bill, are you trying to tell me that people have to experience something horrendous in order to understand how horrible it is? He's, yes. Well, that's a hell of a note, if that's true. Must we experience war ourselves, and suffer inconsolably, and grieve, and die, in order to understand how loony the damn thing is?

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

That's the lesson we haven't learned yet here in the United States.

00:21:27:00—00:23:33:00

Interviewer #1:

Hmm. Could you put a little bit more meat on these bones about people's attitudes during, on

the home front during the war? Attitudes that would, reflected on—

Studs Terkel:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer #1:

—conscientious objectors as well as—

Interviewer #2:

Well—

Interviewer #1:

—soldiers—

Interviewer #2:

—but specifically let's talk about, you know, there, again on one level, the country was all going the same way. There was a sort of a unity of purpose there that people don't have a sense of what that meant. Talk a little bit about what that meant, and who was going the other way.

Studs Terkel:

The difference between World War Two and all the adventures that followed is there was a unity of purpose at the time. There was Hitler, there was imperial Japan, there was Pearl Harbor; there was—eventually it came out, of course—the Holocaust, the horrors of that. Lebensraum, on his way to his Canaan land, Hitler. So there was a unity of purpose, except for groups of the Bund and the various others here and there, as well as conscientious objectors—wholly different entirely. There was a tremendous fervor for it, and there was, of course, enlisting as well as drafting. Citizen soldiers, of course. And so that aspect was true. It was there. But we still come back to, to the ultimate question today, the year 2000 coming up. Is war, any war, inevitable? Is any war necessary? Are there no other means? That's the question we still haven't solved. We have to solve that, or else we'll, either we live, remember what Martin Luther King says, we live together as brothers or we die together as fools.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Studs Terkel:

That's basically, he's basically right. He was talk— not something about race. He was talking

about w— remember he came out against the Vietnam War itself. That caused him a great deal of trouble at the time. And so, there was, it was different, wholly, of course. The atmosphere was wholly different than it was with previous adventures, or certainly those subsequent.

00:23:34:00—00:23:33:00

Interviewer #1:

You just brought up a good point, how hard it is to be a pacifist at any time. How hard it was for Martin—

Studs Terkel:

Oh.

Interviewer #1:

—Luther King, how, you know—what was it like to be a pacifist in—

Studs Terkel:

Well—

Interviewer #1:

—World War Two?

Studs Terkel:

I have no idea what it's like to be a pacifist, I wasn't. I, I'm, perhaps some would say I didn't have the courage to be one, let's put it that way. At the same time, I did believe in this war against fascism, so I, I was fervent about the war. And I, thing I said about Lew Ayres, something which I apologize again, and again, and again, though no one remembered my saying it, but I do. And what I said, I should have bitten my tongue at the moment, and I didn't. It must have taken a great deal of courage, as those, whom we'll see in this movie, have, to do what they did, to suffer the obloquy from fellow Americans throughout and because they believed something—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—that's basically right and true.

00:24:34:00—00:25:14:00

Interviewer #1:

Did you personally have any experience with conscientious objectors at that time, or know, hear any stories about people who ran into them, or were, were, mean—

Studs Terkel:

I'd, I had, I had no personal experience with a conscience obj—yeah, I spoke of a couple, one of whom, John Abbott, you will have met or will meet during this film, who I found great—

Interviewer #2:

You didn't, you didn't know him then.

Studs Terkel:

Huh?

Interviewer #2:

Did you know anyone then, during the Forties?

Studs Terkel:

No, I, I just heard—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—of some Quakers—do you know, and respected, of course I respected them, Quakers and others who, for—

Interviewer #2:

Mm.

—religious reasons—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—and others—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—objected to the war, but—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—I had none, I was not personally acquainted with any, just heard about them.

00:25:15:00—00:27:49:00

Interviewer #1:

Let me just—

Interviewer #2:

But, you know the—

Interviewer #1:

—oh, go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

—the, but, you know, the popular conception, when people in general who supported the war, heard about people who wouldn't fight, was, they were cowards, they were not patriotic, they were shirkers. Did you hear that, or, how did that conversation play out?

Studs Terkel:

Oh, I, I think now, as I look back, I'm sure that conversation was there, what was, saying,

what conversation was that some of them were slackers, or shirkers, or cowards—feathers, white feathers. You know the, these phony British films of World War I, those phony patriotic films with white, you know, feather, the, the girl, looking sweet and beautiful and fair, would hand a feather to the coward, you know. Even the movie, the movie and the play called “Journey's End.” I was so moved by that movie—by the play, too. Colin Clive was the hero, captain. It was about these British troops in a certain battle of San Quentin, and the dugout. And he's, and this is about class as well as about war. And these are upper class guys. Colin Clive went to a certain school, it might have been Cambridge, or the, or Harrow, one of these high schools. Public schools, they're called, private schools here. And he was heroic, and so was this young disciple of his, and that, and that teacher, the gentle teacher, and both, and they speak of, they'd read, “Alice in Wonderland.” And there was another guy, he was a cowardly guy, of indeterminate class. And then there was a cockney officer, cockney officer, which is a, a, an anachronism, I think. But the, the, they look down upon this guy, because there's these two officers—Colin Clive and the Lieutenant, Osborne, this older guy—were talking about “Alice in Wonderland,” this guy didn't know what they were talking about. A kid book. And they ridiculed him, and I thought to myself, boy. At the time, I was moved by these guys, but then I met this cockney waitress years later who loved Bruegel, you know. What she'd have thought about these guys is, oh, they're not so marvelous after all. But you see, there's that aspect of it, too. But mostly it's this fight-or-else, you know, and, you know, fight or else you're a coward. And so, conscientious objectors took all those slings and arrows.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

Not outrageous fortune, just outrageous behavior. And I look back again and say, I wish I could've defended them, but I didn't have the courage to do so, I suppose, or the will, or whatever it might be. Or the knowledge.

00:27:50:00—00:33:07:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you feel that your title has been misused? That the, when people read "The Good War," now, they don't read the iron-, irony of the quotes—

Studs Terkel:

Well, I wish, I wish they'd read the, I wish they'd read the title in full. The quotations, the quotes are what it's all about. It speaks of the heroism of these guys—on all sides—speaks of the heroism of these guys, but the quotat-, speaks of the savagery that is, very nature, part of it. Let me read you one little bit about the—may I?

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, sure.

Studs Terkel:

This is from a teacher named E. B. Sledge, known as Sledgehammer.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

E. B. Sledge is an ornithologist, bird-lover, gentle guy. He's the antithesis of John Wayne. He was a Marine hero, and he teaches at the University of, at an adjunct of the University of Alabama, outside Birmingham. And let me read you a part of his memoir. This is the best.

Interviewer #1:

Did you do this over a long period of time, these interviews?

Studs Terkel:

What's that?

Interviewer #1:

Did you do this over a long period of time, or did you do them all around the same—

Studs Terkel:

These guys?

Interviewer #1:

—yeah, all these.

Studs Terkel:

Oh, off and on. I don't know.

Interviewer #1:

Uh-huh.

Studs Terkel:

No one—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Studs Terkel:

I just want to read this guy, though. Let me read just part of this, and I'll find things as we're going on. This is Eugene B. Sledge, and he wrote a book called "With The Old Breed: At Peleliu"—it was an area in the Pacific theatre—"and Okinawa." He's small-boned, slim, gentle in demeanor, professor of biology at the University of Montevallo, a subsidiary of University of Alabama, forty-five minute drive from Birmingham. [reads] "My main interest is ornithology," he says. "I've been a birdwatcher since I was a kid in Mobile. Do you see irony in that, interested in birds, nature, a combat Marine, front lines? People think of birdwatchers as not macho. Nothing macho about this war at all. We were a bunch of scared kids that had to do a job. People tell me I don't act like an ex-Marine. How's an ex-Marine supposed to act? They have some stereotype in mind, Hollywood. No, I don't look like John Wayne. We were in it to get it over with, so we could go back home and do what we wanted with our lives." But then he goes on to write here. "I got so tired of seeing guys get hit and banged up, the more I felt like taking it out on the Japanese. The feeling grew and grew, and you became more callous. You ever read the poem by Wilfred Owen?" The British poet who was killed in the war. "The World War I poet? Insensibility—and he shuts his eyes he recalls snatches of the poem and interpolates. 'Happy are the men who yet before they're killed can let their veins run cold; and some cease feeling even themselves or for themselves. Dullness best solves the tease and doubt of shelling.' And then you develop an attitude of no mercy, because they had no mercy on us. It was a no quarter, savage kind of thing. At Peleliu, first time I was close up to see one of their faces. This Jap had been hit. One of my buddies was field-stripping him for souvenirs. I must admit it rather bothered me, the guys dragging him around like a carcass. I was just horrified. This guy had been a human being. It didn't take me long to overcome that feeling; a lot of my buddies hit, fatigue, the stress. After a while the veneer of civilization wore pretty thin. This hatred toward the Japanese was just a natural feeling that developed elementally. Our atti—toward the Japanese was different from the one we had toward the Germans. My brother, in the Second Infantry Division, the Battle of the Bulge, wounded three times, said things were hopeless for the Germans, they surrendered. Heard many guys who fought in Europe who said the Germans were damn good soldiers. We hated the hell, we hated the hell, we hated the hell of having to fight with them. When they surrendered, there were guys just like us. With the Japanese, it wasn't that way. At Peleliu, my company took two prisoners, at Okinawa we took about five. We had orders not to kill the wounded, to try to take prisoners. If they surrendered, they'd give you

information. But the feeling was strong. Some guys you meet, they just didn't kill any wounded, some guys you meet say they didn't kill any wounded. They weren't up there living like animals, savages. Our drill instructor at boot camp tells us, you're not going to Europe, you're going to the Pacific. Don't hesitate to fight the Japs dirty. Most Americans, at the time their kids, are taught not to hit below the belt, it's not sportsmanlike. Well, nobody taught the Japs that, and war ain't no sport. Kick him on the balls, before he kicks in yours. I've seen guys shoot Japanese wounded when it really was not necessary, and knock gold teeth out of their mouths. Most of them had gold teeth, you know. Remember one time, at Peleliu, I thought I'd collect gold teeth. One of my buddies carried a bunch of them in a sock—"

[cut]

[end of tape]

00:33:08:00—00:35:47:00

Studs Terkel:

OK?

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead.

Studs Terkel:

[reads] "I've seen, I've seen guys shoot Japanese wounded when really it was not necessary, and knock gold teeth out of their mouths. Most of them had gold teeth. I remember one time at Peleliu, I thought I'd collect gold teeth. One of my buddies carried a bunch of them in a sock. What you did is you took your Ka-Bar"—it's a seven inch knife—"a fighting knife, we all had one because they'd creep into your foxhole at night. We were on Half-Moon Hill in Okinawa about ten days, it happened every night. The way you extracted gold teeth was by putting the tip of the blade on the tooth of a dead Japanese—and I've seen guys do it to wounded ones—and hit the hilt of the knife to knock the tooth loose. How could American boys do this? If you're used to savagery by a situation, anything is possible. When Lindbergh made a trip to the Philippines, he was horrified, the way American GIs talked about the Japanese. It was so savage. We were savages." And there's this paragraph. [reads] "I saw this Jap machine-gunner squatting on the ground. One of our Browning Automatic Riflemen had killed him, took the top of his skull right off. It rained all that night. This Jap gunner didn't fall over for some reason. He was just sitting upright in front of the machine-gun. His arms were down at his sides, his arms are wide open. It had rained all night, and the rain had collected inside his skull. We were sitting around on our helmets, waiting to be relieved. I noticed this buddy of mine just flipping chunks of coral into the skull about three feet away. Every time he'd get one in there, it'd splash. Reminded me of a child throwing pebbles into a puddle. Just so unreal. There was nothing malicious in his action. He was just a mild-mannered kid who was now a twentieth century savage." That one—

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

Studs Terkel:

—might be a good paragraph.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. I think that—

Studs Terkel:

And then the glorification of it—

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

Studs Terkel:

—in movies.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

We'll find Dellie Hahne here, and then we'll find Pauline Kael. Yeah, Dellie Hahne, we've got to find Dellie Hahne. Yeah, she's very fun...

[nearby crash]

[production discussion]

Interviewer #1:

Do you need some water? Do you need a gla-, Studs, do you need a glass of water?

Studs Terkel:

No.

Interviewer #1:

You OK?

Studs Terkel:

Yeah, let, let's see. I gotta find Dellie Hahne. Ah, here! Dellie Hahne, page 108, Rosie, Rosie the riveter. [pause] Pauline Kael.

Interviewer #1:

[unintelligible] that thing, I felt like—

Interviewer #2:

What?

Interviewer #1:

[unintelligible] thing about the American first, or—

Interviewer #2:

No.

Interviewer #1:

Just because that was—

[cut]

00:35:48:00—00:37:48:00

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead.

Studs Terkel:

The movies, World War Two movies were in a class by themselves when it came to cliches, when it came to half-truths, when it came to phoniness. And Dellie Hahne, was a schoolteacher, her husband was a GI, and she remembered, she said, [reads] "There were some movies we knew were sheer bullshit. There was a George Murphy movie where he gets his draft induction notice. He opens the telegram, and he's in his pajamas and bare feet, and he runs around the house and jumps up and down, and jumps over the chairs, screaming, yelling gleefully. His landlady says, what's going on? He says, I've been drafted, I've been

[laughs] drafted. Well, the whole audience howled, 'cause they knew you can feed them only so much bullshit. If a guy in the movie was a civilian, he always had to say, what was it? Gene Kelly in "Covergirl?" That may have been it. I remember this line. Well, Danny, why aren't you in the Army? Hell, I was wounded in North Africa, and now all I can do is keep people happy by putting on these shows. They had to explain why the guy wasn't in uniform. Always. Always a line in the movie, well, I was turned down. Oh, tough luck. There were always soldiers in the audience, and they'd scream. So we recognized a lot of crap when we saw it." And then Pauline Kael, one of the best of our, of our movie critics, spoke of that dehumanization—

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

Studs Terkel:

—of the other—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—and throughout, there was one exceptional movie, one great one. Aside from "All Quiet On the Western Front," the great anti-war film, was "Grand Illusion," directed by Jean Renoir, and that of course was a beauty. Aside from that and a few others, I, I quote Dellie Hahne, bullshit.

00:37:48:00—00:40:08:00

Interviewer #2:

Well, you know, Studs, it wasn't just the movies. You remember all the posters, link, loose lips sink ships; kill a Jap, you know, save tin foil, kill a Jap, that—

Studs Terkel:

Oh.

Interviewer #2:

There was a tremendous propaganda machine.

Studs Terkel:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

Talk about that if you would.

Studs Terkel:

Oh, oh the phrases we heard, we see that on—

Interviewer #1:

Glasses.

Studs Terkel:

—streetcars—

Interviewer #2:

Take the...

Studs Terkel:

—the phr-, the phrases were th— yeah, the catchphrases. Loose lips sink ships. The various phrases throughout, catchphra— ad agencies put them out, you know, and for, watch out next door, it might be a Jap. Jap, if, you know, the derogatory word, of course, was Jap, you know, Nip. And by the, when it came, since we're on the subject of Japan, and Germany, and Italy, might as well talk about that horrendous, this, most shameful moment in our history, one of the most shame-, were the Japanese internment camps. The interning of all the Japanese-Americans along the west coast—California, Washington, Oregon, and all the camps in which they were put, because—they were taking them, many cases of, just taking them—there were farmers, merchants, taken away that very night. That, one remembers his father, a big shot in the Japanese-American community, in his tuxedo, best man at a wedding, arrested, handcuffed at the wedding, taken away in his tuxedo to it, and the end of his life, the humiliation, of course. Now, the Axis were Japan, Germany, Italy. I don't recall German-American internment camps or Italian-American internments, so it had to be race, didn't it? It was. That's one of the shameful aspects of it. But throughout, this matter of, loose lips sink ships, and a million of those phrases throughout. But again, I come back to the whole subject, war, the war itself. That was an impertinence of war, of course. Once you have a war, everything goes. But the point I'm trying to make is that we, the United States, of all the combatants, did not suffer inconsolably, except for the families—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—who lost their sons, in some cases their daughters. They grieved inconsolably. As for the rest of us, don't kid me.

00:40:09:00—00:41:31:00

Interviewer #1:

In fact, could I just—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—I was just thinking, in fact, you've got a lot of interviews in "The Good War"—

Camera Crew Member #2:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer #1:

—about people who became much, that the, that economically they were, they gained from the war considerably—

Studs Terkel:

Oh, well, of course, then—

Interviewer #1:

—their lives were changed for the better. Could you talk—

Studs Terkel:

Well—

Interviewer #1:

—about—

Studs Terkel:

—of course—

Interviewer #1:

—how for many people the war was, you see, someone—

Camera Crew Member #2:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer #1:

—you interviewed talked about it being fun, someone else talked about how much better, many talked—

Interviewer #2:

Well, just—

Interviewer #1:

—how much better—

Interviewer #2:

—getting a job—

Studs Terkel:

Yeah. Oh, well—

Interviewer #2:

—during the Depression.

Studs Terkel:

—one of the aspects of the war—here's the perverse benefit, you know. One of the asp— was women, of course, having jobs for the first time in their lives, in the defense plants, as they were called, making bullets, and shells. And Peggy Terry speaks of that, other, Sarah Killingsworth speaks of that, a black woman. And for the first time, women worked—but then, when the war was over, the boys have come back home. You have the girls, you know, Rosie the riveter was the phrase. Rosie, go back to the kitchen, go back to the kitchen, the bedroom, go back to being the gentle, sweet housewife. The guys are now back. Well, some of course didn't, and, but that was the beginning, you might say, of the seeds of the feminist

movement that came into flower during the Sixties. So for the first time, women were working. And many young women thought, geez, this is fantastic, you see? It was that aspect of it, of course.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

And so—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—many, so many peripheral aspects to the war itself, and that was one.

00:41:32:00—00:43:24:00

Interviewer #2:

I, I want to go to back to, you know, you raised the issue of the Japanese and the camps. Well, I don't think there's a parallel, but, but America was not very good at dealing with its problems in the Forties. They had a Japanese problem, they put 'em in camps. They had conscientious objectors, they put 'em in camps. It's like... was there a mindset of, let's just pretend these problems don't exist and get them out of the way?

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

See, the, the—Roosevelt was my favorite president of the century, of course, but the one blot—one of the blots—is his saying OK when it came to interning the Japanese on the west coast. And they speak of being in those camps throughout. One—ironically enough, some of them became soldiers on the American side in the European theatre of war, and became the most heroic. Even when they came back it wasn't much. At, one is going to Europe, his name is Peter Ota. And Peter Ota was arrested. He was an intern—he was an internee, and his mother— let me read that, just a minute. That's here. Let me get him. This guy's very moving. Peter Ota. 'Cause reading this guy's is better than my saying it.

Interviewer #1:

That's nice for him—

Camera Crew Member #3:

Judy, when you hear that squeak—

Studs Terkel:

Peter Ota.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, I—

Camera Crew Member #3:

—that's from him—

Studs Terkel:

O, T, A.

Interviewer #1:

—I don't think we caught it that time—

Studs Terkel:

Got to find him here. O, T, A.

Interviewer #1:

[unintelligible]

Studs Terkel:

Peter Ota.

Interviewer #2:

They do.

Studs Terkel:

Where is he?

Interviewer #2:

I hope they do.

Interviewer #1:

Oh, but we can go. We need to do, little more, do something or, [unintelligible], good. OK. Do you want him to read that? You wanna—

Interviewer #2:

I think, I, he can't hear it, really, the—

Studs Terkel:

Crime and punishment.

Interviewer #2:

—proper questions, 'cause I—

Studs Terkel:

Crime and punishment. [long groan] Peter Ota...

Interviewer #1:

—I—

Studs Terkel:

"Chilly Winds"...

Interviewer #2:

I—

Interviewer #1:

I think—

Interviewer #2:

—I—

Studs Terkel:

He's here somewhere, I gotta find him.

Interviewer #2:

—not giving him questions—

[cut]

00:43:25:00—00:46:55:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

—is the book...

Studs Terkel:

Peter Ota.

Interviewer #1:

[unintelligible]

Studs Terkel:

[reads] "He's a fifty-seven year-old nisei—that is, first generation American-Japanese. His father'd come from Okinawa in 1904, his mother from Japan. He's an accountant. His father'd worked on farms, and in coal mines in Mexico. After thirty-seven years building a fruit and vegetable business, become a successful and respected merchant in the community, leader in the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles." And Peter Ota remembers: [reads] "On the evening of December seventh, 1941, my father was at a wedding. He was dressed in a tuxedo. When the reception was over, the FBI agents were waiting. They rounded up at least a dozen wedding guests and took 'em to county jail. Few days, we don't know what happened. We heard nothing, then we found out, my mother, my sister, myself went to jail. I remember waiting in the lobby. My father walked through the door. My mother was so humiliated. Didn't say a thing. She cried. He was in prisoner's uniform, with the denim jacket, number on his back. The shame, humiliation just broke her down." And he speaks of being in Missoula, Montana, and others were at Santa Anita, the racetrack. They were in stables, horse stables. But here's the part. I'll come to it a minute. [pause] He, [reads] "finally I turned draft age after being in camp, so I had to register. It's ironic," he said, "here I am being drafted into the Army, my mother, my father, and sister in concentration camp waiting for the war to end. I was in the reserve, not yet in-, inducted, not yet inducted, in the middle of 1944, when I received a wire from my father, saying my mother was very ill. I immediately left Chicago for Amache, Colorado, to get my clearance from the Western Defense Command. It took several days. While I was waiting, my mother passed away. Since

we wanted her funeral to be at the camp where my father and sister were, I decided to go to California, pick her up, pick up her remains. At Needles, California, I was met on the train by an FBI agent. He was assigned to me. He was with me all the times during my stay there, whether I went to sleep at night, whether I went to the bathroom, he was by my side. As soon as we stepped off the train at the Union Station in Los Angeles, there was a short patrol, and the military police, who met me. They escorted me through the station. One of the most..." He finds it difficult to talk here. "I don't know how to describe it. Any day now I'd be serving in the same uniform as these people who were guarding me. The train stations at the time were always filled. When they marched me through, people recognized me as being oriental. They knew I was either an escaped prisoner or a spy. Oh, they called out names. I heard, dirty Jap, very distinctly. After we got to the hotel, the FBI agent convinced the military that it wasn't necessary for them to stay with me. But he had to. He was disgusted with the whole situation. He knew I was in the reserve, I was an American citizen, he can see no reason for him to be with me, but he was on assignment. We spoke personal things. His wife was having a baby, he couldn't be with her. He thought it was ridiculous." And then he goes on. But the humiliation—

Interviewer #1:

Mm. Hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—throughout.

00:46:56:00—00:48:31:00

Interviewer #1:

You've—

Studs Terkel:

Yurikia [sic], Yuriki [sic] Hohri. I know her. [reads] "Yuriko Hohri. I know her, and her husband, Bill. She, at the time, lived in Chicago when I saw her. Her husband's a national chair of the Council of Japanese-American Redress. The war became real for me when two FBI agents came to our home in Long Island, few months after December 7th. It was a rainy Saturday afternoon. My three sisters, my mother, and myself were at home doing the chores. I was twelve. A black car came right up the driveway. One man went into the kitchen. As I watched, he looked under the sink and looked into the oven. He went into the parlor, opened the glass case where our most treasured things were. There were several stacks of sakuhachi [sic] sheet music—it's a bamboo flute, shakuhachi. My father played the shakuhachi, my mother played the koto. At least once a month their friends would come over and just enjoy themselves playing music. The man took the music. I followed the man into my mother's and father's bedroom. Strangers don't usually go into our bedrooms when they first come. As I watched he went through the closet, brought out my father's golf clubs. He turned the bag

upside down. I was only concerned about the golf balls, 'cause I played jacks with them. He opened the tansu—a chest of drawers. Mother, sisters we— were weeping." And then speaks of her father. This, [pause] every Japanese-American who was in camp shares a similar experience throughout.

00:48:32:00—00:48:51:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. Read this and see, and comment on that. We just got, this was a letter that was forwarded to us by a conscientious objector who—

Studs Terkel:

This is Eleanor Roosevelt—

Interviewer #1:

—wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt after she wrote an article in the, the Saturday, in “The Lady's Home Journal” about [unintelligible]

Studs Terkel:

[clears throat] Want me to read this letter out loud?

Interviewer #2:

No, no—

Interviewer #1:

No—

—just read it and—

Interviewer #1:

Read it and—

Interviewer #2:

—then see what you think of it.

Interviewer #1:

—te-, think—

Interviewer #2:

—tell us what you think of it.

Interviewer #1:

—what you think of, ha-, if that—

[cut]

00:48:52:00—00:49:50:00

Interviewer #2:

—her attitude of, COs—

Studs Terkel:

—remember, she was—

Interviewer #2:

—didn't do what the country wanted them to do.

Studs Terkel:

She was saying [reads quickly] "I feel sorry for the objectors who are obliged to live up to their religious convictions— one knows— dislike— Nevertheless, one does not look upon— same grat— admiration one gives these men who answer the country's call." Well, it was a certain moment in history. She was the president's wife, even though she was highly enlightened, enlightened woman. Certainly if the word, first lady applies to anyone, it does to her. Even she had to, at that moment, adjust. I doubt very much whether she, and others, her, would have said, "one does not look upon them with the same gratitude or admiration as one look, as gives those men who answer the country's call."

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

And now, I think there's a certain moment even she had to withdraw her own, had to restrain her own humanity at that moment—

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—to fit a certain situation, the war. It's sad.

00:49:51:00—00:50:19:00

Interviewer #1:

We, we heard the rumor among COs—

Interviewer #2:

Glasses. Talk louder, Judy.

Interviewer #1:

—is that—oh. The rumor among COs is that one of the Roosevelt's sons—and we think it's Elliot—

Studs Terkel:

I don't know that—

Interviewer #1:

—re—

—yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—refused, want-, wanted to be a conscientious object—

Studs Terkel:

Well, that I don't know about.

Interviewer #1:

[unintelligible]

Studs Terkel:

It, it probably would've been Elliot. It certainly would not have been Franklin, Jr.—

Interviewer #2:

No.

—not by a long shot, nor John.

Interviewer #2:

No.

Studs Terkel:

So it probably was Elliot.

Interviewer #1:

But you never heard that?

Studs Terkel:

But I don't remember that, no.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Studs Terkel:

He, I knew he was different. He hated Madam Chiang Kai-shek, I know—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

—that, I remember that.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

00:50:20:00—00:50:49:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about, what did you do in the war, Studs?

Studs Terkel:

Mine was very limited service. I was not within 5,000 miles of the front. I was pretty much like Ronnie Reagan, that far away from the front as he was. I didn't play the role of soldiers in World War Two, though.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

Mine was limited service 'cause I have this perforated ear-drum. Now there are two perforations, and as a result of which, it's called Limited Service Three. Stuff stateside. Not much, but was there for a year or two.

00:50:50:00—00:51:14:00

Interviewer #1:

But you were in uniform?

Studs Terkel:

What's that?

Interviewer #1:

You, you were in the military?

Studs Terkel:

Oh, yeah, when I, when they couldn't, when I finally re— discharged me because, the kids I was with were going overseas, I t— I was a fervent believer in it, and I was sort of unc— sort of avuncular to these kids who were ten years younger than I was. So, we were very close, and so... [laughs] George Murphy [laughs]. I mean, in any, any event, mine, nothing.

00:51:15:00—00:53:22:00

Interviewer #2:

Studs? I want to talk a little bit about the time after the war, and the guys whose stories we're telling, the COs like Dave Dellinger, people like that—Bayard Rustin. They didn't have much of, they didn't stop the war, but they did important things to America after the war in

civil rights and fighting—

Studs Terkel:

Mm.

Interviewer #2:

—Vietnam. Wha— I want—

Studs Terkel:

Right.

Interviewer #2:

—to talk about, you know, did that, did that validate them? Did that make them—

Studs Terkel:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—right?

Studs Terkel:

You know, some of the conscience objectors we heard about publicly after the war, notably Bayard Rustin. Bayard Rustin and Dave Dellinger. And they've always lived by their beliefs, especially Dave, whom I came to know, and respect very much indeed. He was a man of conscience from the very, from the year one— as for, as, when it comes to macho, machismo, he was the athlete of the half-century of his town, Worcester, Massachusetts. He came from a very conservative background. His father was a lawyer, I think, quite conservative. And his father, I know—well, Dave tells this many t—father was humiliated when Dave became a CO during World War Two and during Vietnam, but toward the very end, his father said, Dave, perhaps you were right. But it's something else that—it should be Dave to tell you this rather than I. His father was a remarkable man. Even though he was, to use the phrase, right-wing politically, he was very humane when it came to individual relationships. And Dave describes the moment, they were having dinner somewheres and, a mother in a fine dress, father in a good, good new suit, and a nervous young waitress spills stuff, creamy stuff over the suit and the mother's dress, and the father's first reaction was, it's my fault, I did it, I tipped her hand. And Dave said he wasn't within ten feet of the waitress. So that told David the kind of man his father really was.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

So when he died—Dave tells the story—Dave, perhaps you were right. Dave said, Dad, I learned it from you. So you—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—see, there's no rule of thumb here to be drawn.

00:53:23:00—00:54:25:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

I mean, no, we're trying to—

Studs Terkel:

But you have him tell that.

Interviewer #2:

We're trying to generalize, but, I mean, the point we're trying to make is that, that these guys did give something back to the country after the war.

Studs Terkel:

Well, [stutters] we're told these guys gave something back to the country after the war. I say they gave something to the country during the war. That's my point.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

It's not a question of their atoning for something. In my, in my, to my mind, they did not commit any sin. I think they were as patriotic as anybody. The idea of war itself was insane to them, as is to me today, and I hope to most of us. So, it's true, they were part, everything they did is part of a fabric, a pattern. Of course Dave would be in the civil rights battles, of course he'd be in anti-Vietnam war battles. As far as Rustin's concerned, the same thing could be applied to him, of course.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

It was part of a pattern, it wasn't a question of their atoning. Nothing to atone for.

00:54:26:00—00:55:06:00

Interviewer #1:

They were, they were such a small group, and they really, don't even, they're really a blip in the history of World War Two. And yet, do you, how do you see them historically, the fact that there were conscientious objectors in World War Two?

Studs Terkel:

Small in number, but they were like the biblical Gideon's army. [laughs] Gideon's army, you know. They were right. [laughs] They lost the battle, but they were right. And I hope they—if I can be ironic—I hope they win the war, this war. Hate to use that word. War itself is a crazy word, isn't it? War against poverty, war against drugs. It's a goofy word, isn't it?

00:55:07:00—00:55:26:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. War against war. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

Let's take a little break for a minute, I think?

Studs Terkel:

Let's see, what el-, what's a [stutters] we, we got some pretty good stuff there.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, I think we did.

Studs Terkel:

Yeah... but end, end with the poem, though.

Interviewer #2:

Oh, yeah, the poem.

Studs Terkel:

You gotta end with the poem.

Interviewer #1:

We've got a couple other questions I think we haven't gotten to...

[cut]

00:55:27:00—00:57:32:00

Interviewer #2:

Take your glasses off. Yeah.

Studs Terkel:

Betty Basye Hutchinson was a Miss something... Miss California or something, Miss, she was beautiful. And then she became a nurse. And she'd just be wonderful. But then, bit by bit, she saw the faces blown away, and the, the, they found themselves in Pasadena, I think, or Santa Barbara, at this hospital. And she remembered taking these guys for walks—the guy had no face—for walks. And the blue-haired dowager of the town says, must they be here? Must we look at that? The war, they thought, war heroes, instead they see this, Johnny got his gun, no face. And she remembered the bitterness that she felt. At first there was a glamorous aspect to it. And there was another woman who was a little girl, dated all the guys. She would—dated all the guys, and then didn't know who the guys were. Something happened to her, by the way, as far as her life with men is concerned, too. Just, the uniform was it. And then she learned later on, and said, I used to play with my Sonya Henie doll. I never played with dolls again. She says, something was, a loss of innocence, there was a loss of everything. In the case of Betty Basye Hutchinson, it was the re— feeling, you know, that of how glorious the war is, how rotten it really is, you know, deep, deep down, although she

admired and loved the guys, the wounded soldiers whom she tended. That's part of it, of course. So... and at the end, of course, there's a young girl, now an elderly mother, who was, young girl, from a private school to usher at the United Nations gathering in San Francisco. What hope there was! Now she's worth reading a sequence from. Perhaps you could do that toward the very end. I forget her name, Mrs. Harjan... right here.

Interviewer #1:

Is this where that, do you want—

[cut]

00:57:33:00—00:58:53:00

Studs Terkel:

You gettin' this?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

Studs Terkel:

That's, the—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Raise—

—there's little.

Camera Crew Member #1:

—the book.

Studs Terkel:

Perhaps you can have a little kid's a'skipping rope—this is a few years ago, ten years ago, maybe—in a, in a ghetto, one of the housing projects. She's out in the yard skipping rope, at seven, eight, nine years old. And during, a little girl's—yeah, they're skipping rope to the tune of 'Miss Sally, Sally.' During the breathtaking, breath-, [reads] "During the breath-catching pause in this complex song game, the usual simple-minded question is asked by me. What do you want to be when you grow up? And the little girl says"—she's about eight—says, "I wanna see if, I wanna see if I'm gonna grow up first. I mean, I might not live to be grown up, 'cause I don't know when my time is up. I don't know when I'm gonna die, yet. I don't know

if I could die overnight from the bomb or something, so the day wasn't promised to me." The day wasn't promised to me. "I don't know what might happen. My life wasn't promised to me. And she and the other children begin to argue back and forth. They resume skipping rope, becomes a children's game, the reply to the last comment. It was, it wasn't. My life wasn't promised to me. And you go back and forth: it was, it wasn't, it was, it wasn't, it was, it wasn't." And that's how, where we are today.

00:58:54:00—00:59:15:00

Interviewer #1:

Hmm. Go ahead—

Interviewer #2:

And what does that mean? It's that the future is so...

Studs Terkel:

Even kids, eight, nine years old, aware of sudden, sudden mortality. Well, I may not live to be gr-, my life wasn't promised, a bomb, her phrase, a bomb may fall. That's it. Bye-bye, innocence.

00:59:16:00—01:00:24:00

Interviewer #2:

And it's really more prof—

Studs Terkel:

I'll say it again. Bye-bye, innocence.

Interviewer #2:

It's really more profound. They're not really talking about the bomb. They're talking about, someone might shoot them, or—

Studs Terkel:

Anything, of course.

Interviewer #2:

The—

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

Interviewer #2:

—the violence, violence pervades our—

Studs Terkel:

Let's talk about violence. And what is the ultimate of violence? Killing someone you don't even know, or worse than that, dropping a bomb upon people you don't even see, let alone know. The impersonality may be the worst of all. And that, when, it's horrible enough when young Paul, Lew Ayres, kills the young French soldier, stabs him in that foxhole. That's horrendous and loony. But to drop a bomb upon something you don't even know exists. It may exist, but you don't care if it does. You don't know if it's an it, or a he, or a she, know it's an animal, a vegetable, or a mineral. It doesn't matter, 'cause you're way, way up there. You're removed from it, too. That's the even, that's the ultimate horror. Thanks to technology, we experience the ultimate insensitivity, the ultimate savagery, which is war, now, twentieth, twenty-first century style.

01:00:25:00—01:03:05:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you know who Max Kampelman is? Max Kampelman?

Studs Terkel:

Yeah, I heard the name. Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

He was a, a, a, a negotiator—

Studs Terkel:

That's right.

Interviewer #1:

—during the Reagan—

Studs Terkel:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—years, and he used to be Washington Week in Review, he used to do that show. He was a World War Two conscientious objector—

Studs Terkel:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—who changed his belief system because of the dropping of the bomb, felt he could no longer be a pacifist, because he said—

Studs Terkel:

He could no longer be a pacifist because of the bomb?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, isn't that ironic?

Studs Terkel:

I don't, how, what, how can he explain that, how?

Interviewer #1:

His explanation is that it was, there was no longer any opportunity for person to person, you couldn't be in the foxhole anymore with the person you'd killed, so how can you talk about—

Studs Terkel:

Well, he's out of his fucking mind.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Studs Terkel:

I mean, what does he, I don't care if he's Max Kampelman or not, [whistle] you know? What the hell is he talking about? That's even worse! [whistle] It's my whist-, see, my whistle's here, I got so excited, that, what, my, even my, my hearing aid got excited. How could, how could he even say that? That's even worse! No, it's not person to person. This is worse than

person to person. Doesn't he see that? My God. Think about it. Way up there, flying the wild blue yonder, and you're dropping it, bam! Where? Oh, thousands, thousands, thousands of feet below, you don't see anybody. Man, woman, child, animal, vegetable, mineral. Nothing. So therefore you're not—well, how'd you do? We did great, we dropped twenty-five bombs today. How many children did you kill today? And how many what? How do I know what, what they looked like, you know. Might have been cows, might have been horses, might have been rabbits, I don't know. Who knows, so? Yeah, well, I did my, I did my mission. And what happens with this guy? And you read about Paul Tibbets, is it? The, the pilot of, Little Boy, no, the first one. Boxcar was the second. Oh, Enola Gay, named after his mother. No conscience. I remember one, one guy, of course, and the navigator of the second one, that bombed Nagasaki, navigator of it. A farmer in Indiana. He says, I don't think about it. Well, and he said, I try not to think about it. He added, I try, not to think about it. That's it. So you know, he is, so there's some semblance of hope there, slender though that reed may be, to which we cling. Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

What is—

Studs Terkel:

That's about the ticket, I think.

01:03:06:00—01:03:51:00

Interviewer #2:

But, you know—

Studs Terkel:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—part of, part of what that dropping the bomb means is that if you're removed from it, you don't have to feel the pain so—

Studs Terkel:

That's—

Interviewer #2:

—it's easier, so—

Studs Terkel:

—if you're removed—

Interviewer #2:

—so—

Studs Terkel:

—from it—

Interviewer #2:

—so—

Studs Terkel:

—it's impersonal.

Interviewer #2:

—so—

Studs Terkel:

What—

—but that's, the, the mission now is to change, to automate war, as you said—

Studs Terkel:

What?

Interviewer #2:

—and once war is automatic—

Studs Terkel:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—then how do you oppose it? You know, because people aren't sensitive to it anymore. How do you develop that sensitivity?

Studs Terkel:

Well, all the more, all the more reason to oppose it, 'cause now we become robotic. As it is, you know, more and more technology is taking over, for better or for worse. Let's not talk about the computer to me. I don't want to talk about that if I could, 'cause I, to me, hardware, see, I'm, I, I'm an old neanderthal. Hardware to me is hammer, nails, pots, pans—

[cut]

[end of tape]

01:03:52:00—01:08:44:00

Interviewer #1:

Run down your rap on hardware and software again [laughs].

Studs Terkel:

Oh, sure, I'll do it.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, that was [laughs].

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead.

Studs Terkel:

Because the war and more is, war is high— high-tech—more and more technology involved—because it is, that's all the more reason to avoid, because it makes us less and less human. The guy who stabs the other guy feels horror, or as the boy does, or whatever it is, he feels, c— horror, or, a crazy kind of perverse exhilaration, I'm alive, he's not. A human feeling, whereas when you're way, way up there, you're with a high technology plane, and you drop, you see nothing, then you become more 'n more of the robot. As we come to more and more high-tech, take the computer for example. I'm gonna sound like an old neanderthal now, and probably am one, like a Luddite. Remember, Lud was the farmer in the eighteenth century, led the farm, against the machinery putting them out of work, and he wanted to destroy the machines. I'm not a Luddite, but I understand Lud and Luddites. The computer, for example, see. There's a language, a new language, which I don't understand. Hardware, to me, is a, pots, pans, hammer, nails. Software are pillowcases, bedspreads, and Turkish towels. In the old days, they called up a guy, say, Charlie Andrews, I'm calling Charlie Andrews, an old friend of mine, on the phone. And a human voice answers, answer, person is

not in, and I call again. Human voice says, Charlie's not in; could you leave a message? I, sure, tell him Studs called. OK. Now I says, Charlie Andrews in? And a mechanical voice says, if you want so-and-so, push one; you want this, push two; you want that push three. By the time you get to six, I don't who the hell it was I called or why I called to begin with. And, so this is part of it. I remember being at the Atlanta Airport, which is a modern airport, and it's good, but you get off at the gate—it's high technology. And you got the trains, you go into trains to take you to the concourse of your ultimate destination, and you get on this train, and it's smooth. Everybody's standing, there is silence, except for one thing. There's a voice up above. It once was a human voice, it was a male voice. But no longer, it's the voice of a robot. A human as a robot. And the voice says, in a mechanical cadence, concourse one, Fort Worth, Dallas, Houston; concourse two—as a machine does—Chicago, Springfield, Peoria, says, well, the train's about to take off, so, when a young couple rush in last minute, part the pneumatic doors, as you do when you go in an elevator, you wanna make the elevator, you go, they part, without losing a beat, that voice up above said, because of late entry we're delayed thirty seconds. Everybody's looking at that couple, with—

Interviewer #2:

[laughs]

Studs Terkel:

—fury, you know, like, and the couple look like. It may have been a honeymoon couple.

Interviewer #2:

[laughs]

Studs Terkel:

They're at the foot of Calvary at that moment. Well, I happen to have had a couple of martinis to steel myself for occasions of this nature, and so I call out, in the manner of a train-caller, George Orwell, your time has come and gone. Now, people laugh when I say this to an audience, but not on that train. So now they look at me, and I joined the young couple at the foot of Calvary. And they, and they, what's gonna happen to us. Then I see a baby. There's a baby on the lap, a few seats, and it was, she was, the woman was speaking Spanish to her friend, so it's a, it's a Latino baby, you know. The baby's about seventeen months old, little baby. So I say to the baby—and I hold my hand like that, because my breath is a 100-proof, you know—

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Studs Terkel:

—so I, I say to the baby, sir, or madam, what is your opinion of the human species? And she, what, what a baby does, the baby looks and the baby giggles. I said, thank god, a human voice. So there is hope. But in this technological age, I look for the human voice—and, I suppose, the heart, the heart that isn't there in the wars. God help us to be, I don't know. More and more mechanical, more and more impersonal. It's the impersonality that's the obscenity. That's the crowning obscenity, the impersonality. Our patriots are better than their scuds. In fact, George Will said that once, in one of his, our, whatever the mach— our things were called during the Gulf War, our s—

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

Studs Terkel:

—our something were better than their things, and our machines are better than their machines. Nothing to do with us as humans, you see.

01:08:45:00—01:11:50:00

Interviewer #1:

Let me ask you something about radio. How much are we, I just remembered another interview we did, with Norman Corwin, and we talked to him about radio, and I, and you—

Studs Terkel:

Oh, you got Corwin on the show?—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, Corwin's—

Studs Terkel:

Interviewer #2:

Yes.

Studs Terkel:

Oh great, he'll be great.

Interviewer #1:

Yes, and, and I was thinking about how important radio was as a medium that united people

during World War Two, and being the first war where there was electronic medium, or, you know, I, national broadcasts. How did that help bring the home front together?

Studs Terkel:

Radio is far more... [pause] radio has far more involvement to the listener than TV does to the viewer. The word couch potato was never used in radio days, because during, you listened. There was a voice, whether it be horrendous ones, such as Walter Winchell—that fraud, you know—or whether it was the voice of William Shirer, or, or Ed Murrow. You see, it's a voice you were hearing. We're not talking about the war itself, the nature, we're talk-, the voice said something urgent, the voice did news. And you listened. On TV you watch, and after a while you become zombie-esque, zombie-ized, you watch. See, that's where Marshall McLuhan was wrong. Marshall McLuhan was brilliant. He spoke of radio as, TV as the cool medium, that's the phrase he used. Cool medium. Haskell did a movie about the Chicago... police riots in the, '68. He called it, he took off on Ha— on McLuhan, 'cause he called it “Medium Cool.” Cool medium means—this is derived from jazz. Cool jazz and hot jazz. Cool jazz is cerebral jazz, to which you listen to; hot jazz was Armstrong and mainstream, and dancing to it, you see. But cool jazz is the cerebral. The implication is you're more involved, said McLuhan, with TV now than radio. He's dead wrong, it's the opposite. See, you are fed stuff, you see it as well as hear it, so your own imagination is not piqued as radio does. The, for example, Dylan Thomas, “Under Milk Wood,” the play, you hear it on the radio, or a phonograph re— I call it phonograph record, again, it tips things. It tips my age and the time I, which I believe. So you hear it, you envision, it's about a Welsh village from morning to night. You envision that Welsh village, you envision that blind Captain Cat. He's your Captain Cat. You envision that beautiful Polly Garter, it's your, now, I saw it on TV, and I saw it onstage, I saw it in New— and by the way, it's very good. A very good cast. The Captain Cat was wonderful. But he wasn't my Captain Cat, that village wasn't my village, that Polly Garter wasn't my Polly Garter. So you see, radio is the cool medium, and TV the hot medium. And it's the cool medium that attracts you cerebrally, that challenge you cerebrally more than the hot one does. Radio by far more effective, I think, as far as intellect is concerned, whenever it is, than, than TV.

01:11:51:00—01:12:46:00

Interviewer #1:

And how did it influence people during World War Two, particularly?

Studs Terkel:

Well, TV was still new in World, in World War Two, you know, TV came after World War Two. Like, I was, my program in Chicago—well, there were three of 'em, this is Chicago. We were pioneers in 1950. Dave Garroway, show “Garroway at Large,” he became the first host of the morning show—

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—very, his was the very first face ever seen on daytime television, of “Today Show.” And the genius of our group, Bert Chilstrom, [unintelligible] and we had a show called “Stud's Place.” Well, that was new, that was 1950, '49, '50. But during, during World War Two, radio! In England, my God, a lot, Murrow in London, you know, at Portland Place. I was at that place where they did it, the radio where the features were. Oh, it was powerful and astonishing. Now there was the involvement, in hearing those voices, and then you imagine, too.

01:12:47:00—01:13:18:00

Interviewer #1:

Took you there. How—

Interviewer #2:

But also, wasn't—

Interviewer #1:

—about Corwin, Norman Corwin—

Interviewer #2:

—but the other thing about radio was, was that radio was connecting the world in a different way than it had been connected before.

Studs Terkel:

That's right. It did.

Interviewer #2:

You, you could never hear anyone before.

Studs Terkel:

No, you, that, did. By the way, in favor of TV, TV during the civil rights movement was good. People saw dogs, for the first time, chasing African-American—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—people, and they saw, they saw Sheriff Jim Clark, they saw Bull Connors, and the clubs. That was good, see, then, for the first time we saw—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

—something.

01:13:19:00—01:13:38:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. And is there equ-, an equivalent in World War Two with radio? Did people for the first time think they were in it together because they were—

Studs Terkel:

Well, I think so. But the whole, well, the whole war itself had that feeling of being together, far more than any adventure be— before or since, certainly since, my God. Yeah.

01:13:39:00—01:15:31:00

Interviewer #1:

And, and well, well thinking, thinking about Norman Corwin and the, do you remember hearing “On a Note of Triumph” when it was broadcast?

Studs Terkel:

I'll never forget hearing “A Note of Triumph” on that day... what was the day?

Interviewer #2:

It was V.E. day—

Studs Terkel:

It was V-, V-, V.E. day.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Studs Terkel:

What was the day, now? It, was it May...? V.E. Day—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, May seventeenth, is it? Is it—what's—

Interviewer #2:

I don't remember.

Studs Terkel:

It was V.E. day. I'll never, we were at dinner, my wife and I, at the home of a guy, there were three couples seated there. I remember, there was a psychia— I remember there were two other couples, and it was seven o'clock, Chicago time. It was eight o'clock, New York time. "On a Note of Triumph," and I knew of it. Oh God, we—I knew some people in it, you know. Bert Ives, Pete Seeger was in it, and, and several actors I knew were in it. And I said to them, listen, she's just about, we'd just about had, served drinks, just about to have the, the hors d'oeuvres before that, you know, the appetizer. And I sai— co— could we hear it, CBS? She turned it on, and guess what? No foo— forgot the food. And we were just listening to it, and we ate, but dinner was cold, really, an hour later. It was an hour, hour and a half, I forget which it was. "On a Note of Triumph," and at the end was the prayer, read by Martin Gable, the actor Martin Gable. But that was an incredible program, see. Corwin's words sang, and that was the, the end of Hitler, wasn't it? That was a great program, you see. Nothing quite like that ever, was there? There was no writer in radio ever like Norman Corwin, or for that matter, today, on a, on an electronic medium. And so that was a, I must admit, that was a high moment. I remember that very well. What was the, what was, it was the V.J. day.

Interviewer #1:

No, it was V.E.

Interviewer #2:

V.E., it was V.E.

Interviewer #1:

You're right, V.E. day.

Studs Terkel:

I mean V.E. day.

01:15:32:00—01:15:55:00

Interviewer #1:

It was V.E. day, and you mentioned in a, yeah, he's an incredible man. You know—

Studs Terkel:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—he just won, he's still working at—

Studs Terkel:

He's eighty-nine.

Interviewer #1:

Ninety.

Studs Terkel:

Is he ninety? Now—

Interviewer #1:

His father—

Studs Terkel:

—his brother, you know, his father'll be 110.

Interviewer #1:

Yes.

Studs Terkel:

Well, you know what he says in the book, in “Coming of Age”—

Interviewer #2:

Hmm.

Interviewer #1:

Oh, that's right, [unintelligible]

Studs Terkel:

—you know, he say, “Coming,” you know what he says in the book—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Studs Terkel:

—I says, how do you want to die? What do you? I'd like to die at the age of 110 in the duel, fighting over a woman.

Interviewer #2:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

01:15:56:00—01:17:27:00

Interviewer #2:

So, so, Studs, it's, it's time, it's the time of the interview where we ask you for final thoughts. I mean, what perplexes me is, these were things that happened fifty years ago. A generation forgot 'em, now a generation is discovering them, but maybe in a different way. How do you want, how do you want people to remember that time? What do you think is important?

Studs Terkel:

To remember the time of World War Two?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, what do you, what do you want the new generation to know about that?

Studs Terkel:

To remember that was a war that was inevitable. Had to be. The nature of fascism itself, and Hitler, and whatever it was around and about it. To remember that, at perhaps the last time anything could possibly've justified "The Good War," but still with quotations around it. Anything that follows I say goes in the category of looney-tune-ism, of obscenity, I should say, 'cause we don't know now, it's no longer a question of being looney. It's a question now of being, profaning the idea of life itself, and being close to what I call obscenity. To me, obsceni—anything, any, that degrades the human species in any way—when I say obscenity, I don't mean anything involving sex. Far beyond that. Anything that degrades human possibilities and the human spirit is obscene. And war—remember that—war is obscene. It's a—

01:17:28:00—01:17:53:00

Interviewer #1:

Was that war obscene?

Studs Terkel:

Huh?

Interviewer #1:

Was that war obscene?

Studs Terkel:

No, I'm saying that was inevitable. That had to be. But even that war made savages of those fighting on the quote-unquote, good side. That's the point.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Studs Terkel:

I think we got it, eh?

Interviewer #1:

I think—

Interviewer #2:

We got it.

Studs Terkel:

You can use a bit of it here and there.

Interviewer #1:

Oh yeah, that was lovely.

Interviewer #2:

Now let's all sit still because we need to—

[cut]

[end of interview]

01:17:53:00