Interview with Paul Fussell
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Interviewer: Rick Tejada-Flores and Judy Ehrlich

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Interview with Paul Fussell, conducted by Paradigm Productions ca. 1998 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—00:00:34:00

Paul Fussell:

—walking around. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

All right. OK, go ahead.

Paul Fussell:

Here we go.

Interviewer #2:

OK, start by introducing yourself.

Paul Fussell:

What, what?

Interviewer #2:

Start by introducing yourself.

Interviewer #1:

Introduce yourself.

Interviewer #2:

Start by introducing yourself.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah, yeah. My name is Paul Fussell, I am a retired professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, and, I live in Philadelphia, which is where we are filming this material.

00:00:35:00—00:03:33:00

Interviewer #2:

I think what we'd like you to start by talking about, just, your sense of—

[Crew member adjusts Paul Fussell's tie]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Keep going.

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead. [laughs]

Paul Fussell:

[laughs]

Camera Crew Member #1:

I'll be out of here in two seconds.

Interviewer #2:

Is that OK?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

Just, your sense of, the role of—

Paul Fussell:

Too much white, huh? Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

How other people who, either military people or people on the home front, what they thought about conscientious objectors during World War II?

Paul Fussell:

All right. What did people on the home front think about conscientious objectors? I don't know, because, during the war, I was not on the home front, but I suspect that they didn't even know about the concept. On the home front, people were conscious only of what they were made conscious of by the government, which is necessary and I don't object to it. But this whole spirit of liberal curiosity that animates learning was virtually unknown to most people. Nobody would've asked the question, "do we have objectors to this war that are not put in prison?" You know, it wouldn't have entered anybody's mind, because the, the flux of patriotic feeling was so powerful that questions like that never came up. As far as the Army goes, I never heard any curiosity on the subject, or any statement on the subject. The people who were despised when I was in the Army were Jews, niggers, and, Mexicans. And the, the talk in barracks was almost eighty percent [laughs] made up of scurrilous and false remarks and anecdotes about those three groups of people. Nobody ever talked about anything interesting, or intelligent—even among the officers. I mean, I served, a year, over a year, as an enlisted man, in the infantry, and it was an infantry barracks, and the conversation there was exactly the way it was, among the junior officers—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—that is, lieutenants and captains, with whom I spent the rest of the war. There was very little difference. They, they all came out of the same pool of sorta badly-educated high school kids who had grown up, and grown a little fat, and, decided they would join the National Guard or things like that. [laughs]

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

So it was remarkably non-ideological. I think I've made that point in some books of mine.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

Nobody was motivated by ideology, but rather by the motive to shine personally, and to get promoted in the military and make more money, or to, be able to gratify your relatives. I wanted to do well because I wanted my father and mother to be as proud as, proud of me as they had been when I was a kid—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—when I was a student. And I recently heard somebody at a conference saying that you'll never understand this war until you realize that all the men who fought it were kids. There were only kids. It was a rare man who was over thirty years old and almost all were around eighteen to twenty-two. When I was twenty years old I was leading troops. I was wounded when I was twenty years old—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

—and I was by no means extraordinary. We were all very, very young people.

00:03:34:00-00:05:15:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm. That, that's one of the things I think is interesting about this whole issue of conscientious objection in relation to—and it, it's as true for the military, participants, that they're at a very critical age in their lives when they have to face this question.

Paul Fussell:

Yes.

Interviewer #2:

And you, you're saying it's highly un-ideological, but were, are there elements of people having to deal with their conscience, think about what, at least think about what it is they're

getting into? Or is that just absent when you, people go into war?

Paul Fussell:

We, we—

Interviewer #1:

Do nineteen year-olds think about those things?

Paul Fussell:

—no, when, we sort of chose things like that, important things, not by deciding whether we would be COs or military. We chose to be in one branch of the service or another. Now some branches were openly cowardly, like the Coast Guard, for example, and some were openly suicidal, like the Marine Corps. So you could oscillate between those two. Actually, I joined the Army well before the war, broke out for Americans, as a way of avoiding the draft. And I joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps, which was a way of becoming, ultimately, an officer, but I assumed the war would last eighteen months and then close down, never thought I'd be in it. And, a lot of people ended up where they did in the military by devices like that, by hoping to escape, and then being entrapped by some [laughs] change in the law or something.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

Very little patriotism. What I wanted to do was be allowed to finish college, which I was allowed to do. And then I became an enlisted man, and was in it for about a year, while I was further trained, and then I became an officer, and the whole thing was just a series of accidents all along, 'cause you could hardly plan it.

00:05:16:00—00:06:55:00

Interviewer #1:

Could—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—could, Paul could we back up a little bit?

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

'Cause we were talking about what people knew, and what they thought about.

Paul Fussell:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

And, you weren't in the home front, but you were, you were aware of, of how the information was controlled.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

There, there's a popular conception now that the country was just naturally all moving in the same direction, but you implied that consensus may have been manufactured, and manipulated, and...

Paul Fussell:

Yeah, because nobody, it was assumed that because the Japanese had to be punished for starting the war with us, and the Germans as well, for joining the Japanese two days later in the declaration of war, it was assumed that the war simply had to be fought, because otherwise the United States would be run by the Germans and the Japanese, and that was the way I thought about it, and everybody I knew thought about it. The question never arose about what we should do, or what we should think about it. There was nothing to think about. The point was to kick ass on one side of the country, the Pacific—

Interviewer #2:

Mm.

Paul Fussell:

—[laughs] and the Atlantic on the other side, and keep doing that until we won the war. Then we could all go home and go back to college, graduate school, professions, and what we'd

been doing before.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

I never once heard an ideological statement by an American soldier or an American officer, except maybe the insane General Patton after the war, who would assemble the troops unwillingly and would harangue them about the evil of various liberal social movements that he'd heard of.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

But that was the only kind of ideological comment I ever heard that was separate from necessary propaganda, to, to beat the Germans and the Japanese.

00:06:56:00—00:07:29:00

Interviewer #1:

But, I mean, but was that necessary propaganda, to say, save gas because it'll kill a Jap? You know, that, they—

Paul Fussell:

Oh, yes. Absolutely. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

—they, the demonization...

Paul Fussell:

Yes, quite right. Well, that's necessary in any war. Quite right. We're now being told about Milosevic, you know, how he eats children for dinner, and so forth. Probably not true, but you can't do anything in a war without that kind of corruption. That's one of the worst things about war, is it ruins intellectual life, for a generation, I think, as I've argued in the, my book *Wartime*. OK, let's move on.

00:07:30:00—00:09:25:00

Interviewer #2:

Oh, I, actually—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah, go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

—if you could give us some examples of that. Just talk about some of the, you, the, the propaganda that was used during the war.

Paul Fussell:

Well, the, the, I can't think of anything specific, but it was all... I used to have, there's a, a picture that I mentioned in my book *Wartime*, it was the, the front cover of *Collier's Magazine*, about four days after Pearl Harbor. It shows a Japanese general, who is depicted as a vicious hawk on wings, and he's flying over the United States, getting ready to attack, and ruin all of our lives. That sort of thing is very common. And, nobody was ever called Japanese. They were Japs, and they still are. My friend, Eugene Sledge, the Marine who wrote the wonderful book called *With the Old Breed*—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—still refers to the Japanese as Japs, with great contempt.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

I have to be careful when I'm with Germans whom I like, that I don't let the word Krauts slip out, because we never used the word German. They were always Krauts.

Interviewer #2:

Mm.

Paul Fussell:

Any Krauts around here? Oh, I saw one or two hiding in that place yesterday [laughs], and so on.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

And the, everybody, everybody shared those words and that attitude. I mean, nobody ever brought up the question of COs. I assume that they, there were some, but, because, we had a civilized country, and there was a certain amount of coercion, but there were always, loopholes in the coercion somewhere, and I knew there must be a CO, loophole. I never would've taken it, because I didn't feel that strongly about it. And besides, if I had taken it, it would have revealed an embarrassing contradiction in my attitudes, because I had joined the Army well before I was drafted. And if I'd already committed myself, and I couldn't, renege—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—once that had happened.

00:09:26:00—00:10:29:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm. Do you feel, I, I, I, you, paint this picture of a war that's not ideological. Yet there are 13,000,000 people who participate in the war in way or the other.

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

How do you get millions of people to participate in something as ghastly as—

Paul Fussell:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

—a world war?

Paul Fussell:

You attack them. You bomb them at Pearl Harbor and kill 2,000 sailors in five minutes.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

Or you, build concentration camps all over Europe. The extermination camps in Poland weren't yet known about, but the news about the concentration camps was almost as bad, and that excites people, pretty fast. The, the fact that the Germans declared war on the United States is sometimes forgotten. But when that happens, you have to defend yourself.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

Otherwise, when, they're gonna come marching up Broad Street in Philadelphia—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—and kill the intellectuals—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—which is what they delight to do—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—both the Japanese and Germans. So it's easy enough to, to find a motivation that was serious but was not ideological.

00:10:30:00—00:13:28:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

But at the same time, you know, there's this process, now, now, looking back fifty years after the war, there's, there's a, a very heavy patina of romanticism of all experience—

Paul Fussell:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

—and it was all about liberty and democracy and idealism and the four freedoms. And—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—does, is that after the fact, or was some of that there?

Paul Fussell:

There's a little of that there, yeah, but not among the troops. The troops knew better. The troops—

Interviewer #2:

Could you, could you, like—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah. Yeah, OK.

Interviewer #2:

—refer to Rick's question?

Paul Fussell:

The question is sometimes brought up about the amount of genuine intellectual and ideological, content in the American mind as we defended the United States. That's what we were doing. There was very little of it. It wasn't necessary. Most people hate thinking, as you know. It's an awful exercise for them to, to put them through, and if they can be given an idea which is satisfactory they will embrace it for their own purposes, and that's what all the wartime propaganda did, and it did it very satisfactorily. I, I must have commanded, in, in all the time I was in the Army, about 500 soldiers. Not a one ever came up to complain about the issues that the war was about, or to ask about it, and—I found one kid who, in the winter of 1944—we were expecting the Germans to attack, we were on a, a snow-covered hill, in little holes. And he came to me—he was a replacement, I had not seen him before. He said, I've decided I'm not going to fire my rifle. He wanted to be a, you know, an ex post facto CO. And I said, well, why are you telling me that? I don't care whether you fire it or not. [laughs] And that sorta took the wind out of his sails, 'cause he thought I'd make a big demonstration. That's the only time I found anybody who even objected to, to doing what he was supposed to be doing in the Army. And what my people were supposed to be doing was pretty, was tough. I mean, they were supposed to kill people, most of them boys about their age, just wearing gray uniforms, and not as well-shaved, maybe. But, they were asked to do some very tough work—

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible]

Paul Fussell:

—which demanded total commitment on their part. And, even in that setup none of them ever suggested that they shouldn't be doing this, or that there was something immoral about this, or that, they'd like to reconsider their decision [laughs] to be there, and so forth. So it was very much a uniform intellectual, if you can call it that—a uniform intellectual attitude towards the war and what had to be done. We all hated it, I never met anybody who liked it. We all wanted to get home as fast as possible. But at the same time, we knew the only way to get home was to destroy the German army, because they were preventing us from exercising our will.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

And that's how the war kept itself going.

00:13:29:00—00:14:54:00

Interviewer #2:

Could you talk about—

Interviewer #1:

Uh—

Interviewer #2:

I just want to see, but you talk about a positive, that the Allies had a, it was negative thing we were doing. We were stopping something, whereas the Axis—

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

—was doing something positive, that they were—

Paul Fussell:

That, no, that's interesting. Am I reporting that there was only a negative emotion, that this was stopping the Germans? No. That, that is what I'm saying, there was no positive emotion, like, let us bring the four freedoms to benighted Europe. Never. People would have laughed if you'd brought up such an idea, because they knew better. They knew that we weren't doing the, we were imposing military discipline upon all the civilians we encountered. We had to. Otherwise they would've blown us up from the rear.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

And we were bringing anything but freedom to people. You know, I'm amazed that the soldiers in Vietnam didn't just die laughing all the time, because the, the announced point of the thing, to bring freedom to these poor people who were menaced by communism, was so far from what was going on. We were shooting them—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—when they didn't do what we liked, or when couldn't identify their, their purposes.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

Freedom was the last thing in our minds, and, they never got any.

00:14:55:00—00:16:20:00

Interviewer #1:

Paul?

Paul Fussell:

Yeah?

Interviewer #1:

When you talk about the unity of purpose in World War II—are we OK on tape? Yeah, so, yeah?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Can you raise the level returning to me?

Interviewer #1:

Talk about it a little bit in terms of what it meant to you as a person, because—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Other way.

Interviewer #1:

—the rules are changed in war. They're not normal rules. You are—

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—told to do things you would never do, you wouldn't think, and, and that you wouldn't think were right to do—

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—in normal life but all of a sudden your values have to shift, and you have to confront the fact that you will take someone's life, and, and talk about that personal—

Paul Fussell:

Well, what, what we're talking about is, military training, the function of which is to remove the old person and put it aside, and embrace the new one. The Marine Corps is probably the best at this, because it has much more strenuous training, even today, than the Army ever had. But the Army did its best, so the, the trick was to train everybody so that he obeys instantly, never thinks about the cause of anything, and learns to move really fast all the time, without pausing to consider. I wrote once, fairly recently, that the, I'd like to see the, the three-word motto of West Point improved a bit. It's now, "Duty, honor, country," and I'd like to add the word, celerity, which is pretentious for, speed. Move fast and you may survive. Don't stay in one place too long. And so, celerity. Very important, we, we were all trained in that as soldiers. OK.

00:16:20:00—00:17:24:00

Interviewer #1:

But, but what I was getting at is, is what you talk about in your, in your book and your writing, about the fact that, that you have to do things where you have to become essentially desensitized—

Paul Fussell:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—in order to do those things, you, you—

Paul Fussell:

Exactly.

Interviewer #1:

—can't feel like a normal human being, and react, or—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—express concern, or those emotions about—

Paul Fussell:

Right, yeah. Well, soldiers are not normal human beings, and I wish people would remember this when they, when they, they see a four-star general briefing us about the day's events in Serbia. They're not normal human beings, that's why they're doing that sort of thing. That's why they're, that's why they enlisted in and have survived in a, an institution like the Army, where independent thought is absolutely forbidden. You have to do what other people do, and that was the main reason I hated it so much. It had no room for individual, individuality, and not to mention eccentricity, and, to stay in it is to lose your humanity, even if you're not killing somebody at their orders.

00:17:25:00—00:18:39:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm. I think that's a lot of the story that we want to tell—

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

—is that the, in a lot of ways, the conscientious objectors, what they really typified, what, what, is the, the lesson they teach us, is about independent thinking in a time when everyone

is pretty lock-step going in one direction—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—they are very conspicuous nonconformists—

Paul Fussell:

[laughs] Very—

Interviewer #2:

—to this—

Paul Fussell:

—very true.

Interviewer #2:

—yeah. So I, I just wondered if you might comment on where, what happened to nonconformists in a world that was on—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—in World War II.

Paul Fussell:

The question is, what happens to conformists in a world where coercion, presides, like the military? What happens is that all the bright people learn the art of silence—you say nothing. You learn the art of hypocrisy—that is, laughing at cruel and stupid jokes, pretending to be an ordinary, nice guy, going along with the gang, 'cause if you don't, you're not gonna be fired from the Army, but you might get transferred to a tougher unit, which everybody fears, where, suddenly have to fight the war in the midst of strangers, which would be very difficult, indeed, because they, those people haven't been trained to look after you and you to look after them in the way that makes fighting possible.

00:18:40:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah, just—

Interviewer #1:

But, let's go to the specific example you talk about in *Doing Battle*, where you've heard about, about the incident that you, refer to as the turkey shoot—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—which, which sorta represents the ultimate dehumanization.

Paul Fussell:

Absolutely.

Interviewer #1:

Talk about that and what it represents.

Paul Fussell:

Well, this was something I didn't see myself, but I heard enough about it to persuade me that it was genuine. I was in the hospital, recovering from wounds at that moment. And when I came back, they said, you should have been here for this turkey shoot, you missed a really good time. And I said, what are you talking about? They said, well, we, we, we came upon a group of about ten to twenty Krauts in a former bomb crater, and they wanted to surrender, and we didn't let them, we killed them all, this, systematically; and they cried and they screamed and they tried to climb out, and we wouldn't let them; we killed them, and it was really a great show; I'm sorry you missed that, it was quite wonderful to take part in that. They didn't put it quite that [laughs] ironic way, but close to it. And, there were a few other similar institutes, incidents, not as bad as that one, that I'd, I witnessed, but you, you have to expect that sort of thing when you, when you give firearms to boys and accustom them to the whole ideology of killing in order to survive, you must expect that they will not draw the line necessarily in a humane way, that they will simply keep it up... one thing I'm fascinated by is

the, the rescue, during the Cold War, of the American military from, obloquy, the sort of disdain that it had suffered between the wars. You'd think that when the war was over the military would resume its standard bad reputation of a, a group of ill-educated drunkards and fools, you know, and prize-fighters and so forth. But no, it's continued, and it's continued to this day, so you get phenomena like General Powell, you know, who is an admirable man; but the fact that he's wearing a uniform, fifty years ago, or thirty years ago, would've been, the ruin of him, if he'd done that after the war. Eisenhower get elected president only by wearing a suit. Nobody would have elected him if he had, had stuck to a uniform. Everybody was thoroughly sick of the war by that time. But the, the Cold War, thank God, some would say, was waiting there to be employed as a, a device of military rationalization. So now, being a general, that is, the, the leader of a number of mass murderers, is, is honorable as being the CEO of a company that makes mattresses or something. There's nothing awful about it all. People have forgotten, they've been brainwashed entirely about militarism, because the Cold War required that that take place.

00:21:33:00—00:21:36:00

Interviewer #1:

And, an Army which—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Let's change this...

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, let's stop—

[cut]

[switch tape]

00:21:36:00—00:23:39:00

Paul Fussell:

—both, writers about war and soldiers who fought in the war—

Interviewer #2:

It's, it seems like it makes—

Paul Fussell:

—that everybody gets rid of his reservoir—

Interviewer #2:

I'm sorry—

Paul Fussell:

—gradually.

Interviewer #2:

—are we rolling?

Interviewer #1:

Go ahead. Yeah, yes. [overlapping with Interviewer #2]

Interviewer #2:

Oh, go ahead.

Paul Fussell:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

Start at—

Paul Fussell:

Are we rolling?

Interviewer #2:

Yes. [overlapping with Interviewer #1]

Interviewer #1:

Yes, yeah.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

Paul Fussell:

OK. I want to talk about something I mentioned in my book *Wartime*, about what I called the reservoir of courage—that everybody enters war with his or her courage full up to the brim, and every time you have to, expend a little of it, your quantity goes down a little bit. It's like using up gasoline in a tank, and it is never refilled. There's no way to refill it, because everything you see is even more disheartening and frightening. So, everybody has a breaking point. And I think 200 days in combat was found, in the second war, to be the breaking point for most people. You could sense it coming, and then, at that point, that was the worst moment, because at that point you realized that if I go on this way without doing something different from what I'm doing, I'm gonna break down in front of everybody, and this will involve tears. And as one of my favorite writers, Robert Graves, puts it, tears, dirtied trousers, and the whole rest of the bag; and humiliation and disgrace, and perhaps even prison. And so everybody knew this was true, and thank God the war ended before most of us had had to be on the line that long. But I was on the line for about three quarters of that time, and my stability began to shake by that time. I began to get very nervous in dangerous spots, whereas before I hadn't even noticed, or it was kind of fun—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

I thought it was kind of sporting, you know—I got away with it again, the German sniper didn't see me that time, and that sort of thing. But after a while that's impossible. So it does break you down ultimately, and there's no escape from it.

00:23:40:00—00:24:26:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm. It—go ahead.

Interviewer #1:

I want to get back to, you know, when you were talking about the turkey shoot and you described it, you said, you said, well, maybe they didn't say it that ironically, but that sort of reminded me of, of, of your very perceptive comment that the title for Studs's book, the great word, war, *The Good War*, is actually a very ironic—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—comment, because of the, the strange construction of that phrase.

Paul Fussell:

Quite right. It's just printed in the title page of that book, and on the spine, as well, in quotation marks, which wouldn't be there unless they were quotation marks saying, in effect, "Can you believe this, dear reader? Pay attention to this phrase." But, too often today the phrase is just printed without the quotes, and everybody thinks that it was a good war.

00:24:27:00—00:25:02:00

Interviewer #2:

If—

Interviewer #1:

But—

Interviewer #2:

—you go in a little bit more about that. When you think of the phrase, the good war, how does that strike you now, fifty years later?

Interviewer #1:

I mean, was it a pretty good war, or an acceptable war, or—

Paul Fussell:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

—a necessary war?

Paul Fussell:

It was, necessary is the, yeah, necessary is the only word that I would, apply. Good, never, because no war is a good war. It was a necessary war, an inescapable war, especially since we didn't start it. I mean, the Japanese started it by bombing Pearl Harbor and the Germans started it by declaring war. But it was necessary that we defend ourselves from those people.

And so, necessary war I would insist upon.

00:25:03:00—00:25:59:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you think it was inevitable? I know America really didn't rush to enter the war.

Paul Fussell:

It was not inevitable. No, no. If Roosevelt, probably, had not annoyed both the Germans and the Japanese by doing various devious and clever devices to help them defend themselves—I mean, to help the Allies defend themselves, especially Britain, Japan never would've attacked us and the Germans wouldn't have joined in. We could have sat here through the whole war doing nothing, but if that had happened, Britain today would be a German colony. It would've been a German colony, and every Jew would've been beaten up, and killed, shipped to Auschwitz and such places—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—and, the results would have been utterly intolerable. And so to that degree, it was, it was the right war to fight, even though we didn't start it.

00:26:00:00—00:26:42:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

Go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

Oh, I was thinking about the, if you could describe—

Interviewer #1:

Oh, we were gonna do Lew Ayres, we didn't do Lew.

Interviewer #2:

Oh, yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Of course.

Interviewer #2:

Lew Ayres.

Interviewer #1:

Talk about how the soldiers felt about Lew.

Interviewer #2:

What the soldiers felt about Lew Ayres.

Paul Fussell:

About who?

Interviewer #2:

Lew Ayres. [overlapping with Interviewer #1]

Interviewer #1:

Lew Ayres.

Paul Fussell:

Oh. The soldiers admired Lew Ayres, actually, because he was the most publicized CO in the country. We didn't know about, well, Robert Lowell hadn't performed yet, he was, he wasn't even on the scene; and we, he, he was the one conspicuous CO, because he was a film star.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

And, the, they, the, troops that I dealt with, thought he was terrific. They sort, they envied him, they wished they'd thought of it. [laughs]

00:26:43:00—00:28:29:00

Interviewer #2:

They did? OK, so there was some consciousness of conscientious objection—

Paul Fussell:

Oh yeah—

—because of him, probably...

Paul Fussell:

—but it was located only on him and his person. Nobody knew how many there were, what they, what kind of work they were doing, and so on. The medics that I dealt with may originally have been a kind of CO that volunteered for that work, and were never thought of as combat soldiers. I don't know. The medic that I speak so highly of in my, in my memoir—John the medic, as we called him, a Mexican-American from Southern California—was actually a profoundly religious person, and I suspect that originally he indicated that he, wanted to do something involving religious or social work, or something, social improvement work in the Army, and they said, would you like to train as a medic?

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

And he, apparently said, yes, and so he was with the fighting troops all the time. As I said at the end, he was shot in the leg, and never even mentioned it. An extraordinary man.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

And, very religious. He would lead us in prayer from time to time, utterly un-asked. I mean, he was quite a, an extraordinary character, and I've lost touch with him entirely. I suspect he may not be alive still, but I don't know. But he was virtually a CO; he acted like it. He never carried arms; he never, shot at anybody; he didn't mind our doing so, that was our job, but he knew his was not. His was to run around with these two big, canvas sacks of bandages and morphine and so on, and get very close to us, and to do, do the work he was supposed to do. But he may have begun as a CO, that's what I'm getting at.

Interviewer #2:

Hmm.

Paul Fussell:

But he never told me that, or I never found it out. [laughs]

00:28:29:00—00:28:53:00

Interviewer #2:

Huh. Interesting.

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

And so it's very likely he could have had that classification, and you wouldn't know that, or would—

Paul Fussell:

I wouldn't know that at all, no. And they, the men I was leading had my attitude towards him. They thought he was superb. And the question of whether he was a CO, or whether he started that way, never came up. It's just that John is the medic, he was trained by the Medical Corps, issued to do this act of first aid, and that was sufficient explanation.

00:28:54:00—00:29:09:00

Interviewer #2:

Huh. That's interesting to think, that you, as his commanding officer—

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

—which you were, correct?

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

That you wouldn't have even, that they would have said, this guy is a CO.

Paul Fussell:

It wasn't necessary.

Interviewer #2:

It wasn't necessary?

Paul Fussell:

No.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Paul Fussell:

They said, he's a medic.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Paul Fussell:

'Cause a lot of medics were not—

Interviewer #2:

Right.

Paul Fussell:

—COs—

Interviewer #1:

True.

Paul Fussell:

—they were just trained by the Medical Corps.

00:29:09:00

Interviewer #2:

Sure. Can you, we, we, I had asked you earlier about that, what I thought was a quote, but turns out not to be, but maybe you had said to me in our conversation before, about the attitudes, the general, the attitudes of soldiers versus other, mothers, of soldiers and World War I veterans towards the conscientious objectors. If you could talk about that, about the—

Paul Fussell:

I'm not certain I remember that.

Interviewer #2:

I, but I, I, maybe not—oh, I thought you said you did remember that from conversation. Would you say, is that accurate, though, do you think? That there may have been a more hostile attitude toward COs among other people than among soldiers, or—

Paul Fussell:

There, there may have been, yeah, but I was never aware of it, because when this was going on I never met any civilians—

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—let alone the sort of civilians who would, take that attitude.

Interviewer #2:

OK. That's, that's a fair—

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

—appraisal.

00:29:53:00—00:32:53:00

Interviewer #1:

I'm, I'm really, interested in trying to get you to explain the, the, the mass amnesia that affects American society, that, that, you know, that, it's obvious once the war is over that people want to close the door, it's a horrendous, traumatic experience, you don't want to think about it.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

But why do you not want to learn the lessons of it? Why, you know, did, did America learn anything from that horrendous experience?

Paul Fussell:

I suppose they did. They learned that the atom bomb—

Interviewer #1:

Give, give me a, give me a whole sentence.

Paul Fussell:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

Hmm.

Paul Fussell:

What did America learn from that whole experience of the war? The question assumes that Americans are in the business of learning things, which, as a long-time university professor, I'd be very skeptical of. You have to teach them things, and they barely learn them then. They learn nothing on their own, I would say, because learning is hard work, and people don't willingly do hard work unless they're under a boss or unless you can show that it's a rapid way to advancement of some kind. I've forgotten what the question is... [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

The question is what, the—

Interviewer #2:

[inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

—if—

Paul Fussell:

[laughs] You cut that out.

Interviewer #1:

—unwillingness to learn any, real lessons from World War II, except that war is wonderful, and we won, you know.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah, I just can't—

Interviewer #1:

What's—

Paul Fussell:

—answer that, I don't know enough people of that kind.

Interviewer #1:

Well, let, let me put it this way. You're—

Paul Fussell:

The, the question never came up with me and my kind because we were in graduate school, or we were beginning to be university professors, or we were concerned with our own stuff. We weren't concerned about the nature of the United States, or the political situation, or the United States' moral situation. We had won the war by dropping the atom bomb on a bunch of civilians, and that was too bad, but it ended the war, so we were ambiguous about that, most of us. We were ambiguous about the bombing of Dresden in the same way. There was a good thing, because it helped the Russians come forward another fifty miles or something. And we knew it was bad. But we had always known that aerial bombing was a bad thing, that

it could not distinguish between friend and enemy. We've had additional evidence of that in Kosovo, but no reason to bring that up now. But it's a standard—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—American business, or trick, almost, to assume that by invoking technology you can somehow escape the facts of life. One fact of life is that war is not mathematical, it is not predictable, it is an immense theatre of error all the time, and it destroys nothing so fast as fixed principles of anything, and that planning always goes wrong, as I try to argue in my memoir called *Doing Battle*. You cannot plan anything in a business when the object is so irrational—that is, is to kill somebody and keep him from killing you. Now planning clearly doesn't belong in that atmosphere, and therefore you have to do something else, that is, act, without much consideration of what you're doing. Act in a way you've been taught to act. Now, does that answer it?

00:32:53:00—00:34:00:00

Interviewer #2:

Well, but it, it does, but not on a personal level, in terms of, I mean, we're talking to you because you're a very thoughtful, articulate person, so, so forget about what everyone else learned from the war. What did you learn from the war?

Paul Fussell:

I learned roughly about the things I've written my books about, ever since, about just what I've said, about the, the impossibility of being rational on the front line, or the difficulty of being infantrymen, which everyone has sort of forgotten, because it's all so nasty; or the ease with which simple decisions, that seemed to be almost guaranteed to work right, work wrong, almost inevitably. I have a, a lot that, in what I've written, about the way night operations always failed in the unit I was in.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

Everybody knew this, but we couldn't break ourselves of trying them again, you know. Every time we tried it, loss of life occurred, sometimes civilians were killed, but we didn't know what else to do, and so we did that. And I suspect many people, found themselves in the same situation.

00:34:01:00—00:35:43:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. What were your feelings on the day of Pearl Harbor? Do you remember that day?

Paul Fussell:

Yes, I do. I was in college. I was a, sophomore, I think, in college in California. I was, horrified, of course, especially when I found out what the casualties were. And to this day, on the little shelf over here [he points], I keep a tiny model of the USS Arizona, that little gray ship there. And I was, extremely angry. All of us were angry. And if I had been more athletic, I probably would've rushed down and joined the Marine Corps instantly, but I was not, and I had already committed to the Enlisted Reserve Corps of the Army. And I was a little frightened, 'cause I thought, "Good God, this war is actually gonna take place, this war we've been talking about and horsing around with the idea of for so many years. It's going to occur, and I'm gonna be in it, because I signed up in the infantry, and I'm gonna be an infantry platoon leader, but I hope the war doesn't last that long." And that's how I consoled myself, made it possible to go on with my academic work, and partying, and acting like a college student.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

But, I, I was very shaken. We, we all were. We, we'd would stay up all night long talking about the issues—never ideological issues, always military issues. What does it mean that they have now beaten the troops on Wake Island? How long can Bataan last without the Japanese taking it? And so forth. That was our conversation, but we were obsessed with the war, as we should've been, you know. It was the most awful thing that had ever happened to the United States, and we were aware of that. Yeah, did you have something more? Excuse me.

00:35:43:00

Interviewer #1:

[overlapping with Interviewer #2] Well, it, it, but, but—

Interviewer #2:

I just don't think ever said the words, Pearl Harbor, in that whole statement, I wonder if—

Interviewer #1:

That's it—well, but—

Interviewer #2:

—you could begin that and just say, the day of Pearl Harbor, I—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah, yeah. When we found out about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, which I didn't know about until about noon on that day—I was driving back from Pasadena, where I'd been seeing my parents, to Claremont, California—so forty-five miles, or so—where my college was, looking forward to a nice week, beginning on Monday, in, in my accustomed way, you know, cutting classes, and having beer at night, and so on. When all of a sudden—I didn't have a radio in this, car. I don't know how I heard about it. I didn't hear about it until I got there, and people said, "What do you think about it?" And I said, "About what?" They said, "About the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor near, in Hawaii." And I said, "Good God, have they done that?" And so, and then, then I was in on the whole thing. But at first I was quite safeguarded by innocence. My father never allowed us to have auto radios. He thought they were frivolous and unnecessary. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

[laughs]

Paul Fussell:

And he was probably right, too. [laughs] But not, not everybody had a radio in his or her car.

00:36:51:00—00:38:08:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

Well, well, you know, hindsight is always twenty-twenty, you know, and that, and we've talked to some people who, I guess, felt they were astute political observers, who said, well, we don't understand why anyone was surprised at Pearl Harbor; maybe where or when, but

not that something like that would happen. Was it a shock or not? Or was it—

Paul Fussell:

Oh, an absolute shock, yeah. And I hadn't yet grown up enough, and had enough experience of Americans in official positions, to realize that the whole thing was occasioned by American stupidity. I hadn't learned to be a satirist yet, you know, I was still naive and sweet, and pleasant, and I never wondered, what was the cause of this? Don't we have any spies in Japan? It's the same thing at the moment in, in, Serbia. Always hitting the wrong target. Why is that? I think it's because we have never taught the Slavic languages in the Ivy League, where people go into the Foreign Service or into the CIA and so on. Nobody there speaks the language, and they don't, they haven't been able to fit in, and wear local costumes, and act like local people, which spies have to do. I think it's largely an intelligence failure, caused by [laughs] a language failure. But I would think that, wouldn't I, because I'm a language person.

00:38:09:00—00:39:03:00

Interviewer #2:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Well, language is very important. It's—

Interviewer #2:

But I, I would think, are you—

Interviewer #1:

—it's the code.

Interviewer #2:

—are you not surprised by our hitting the Chinese embassy?

Paul Fussell:

Not at all. Oh, no, I expect things like that. Quite right. I think we've done very well to limit it as far as we have, 'cause I know the kind of people who are doing the planning.

Interviewer #1:

It's, yeah.

Paul Fussell:

I know who they are, and I meet them sometimes in Washington, and I meet them sometimes at West Point, and at Annapolis. They are just ordinary guys doing well. They like beer, they like girls, they're not at all intellectual, not at all skeptical. Nobody's trained them to ask the hard questions all the time—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—you know. And unless you do that, you're not gonna make it as an intellect, and they haven't done that. In other words, now here I'll give a little ad, they have not had a liberal education, they've had a technical education. And the essence of a liberal education is to believe nothing until you've found it out for yourself.

00:39:03:00—00:41:09:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm, mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

Interesting. The, why, I think we talked about the beginning of the war. The end of the war, I love the quote you gave from, Eisenhower's, mistress, the, about—

Interviewer #1:

What is the—

Interviewer #2:

—the, how—

Paul Fussell:

Oh, yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—there was, no one laughed, that no, the, the whole feelings at the end of, at, at V.E. day.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

What were your feelings when the war ended?

Paul Fussell:

Profound relief.

Interviewer #2:

Could you say—

Paul Fussell:

I was in the hospital—

Interviewer #1:

Wait, start out by saying, when the war ended, so...

Paul Fussell:

All right. When the war ended, my situation was very complicated, because I was joyous, but not really because the war had ended. I was joyous because I had been wounded, and I knew I couldn't be wounded again, because the war was gonna quit. And I was not particularly happy that we'd won, because I knew by that time at what cost we had won—not just in, in the young men that served with me, but in the Germans, as well. The German army was largely, peopled by people who weren't more than twenty-five years old. We'd just spread them across the country, so I had blown them up, ruined them in every possible way with what is unforgivable, contempt. And without a thought for their parents, or their friends, and so on; what they're gonna make of this, this, disruption in their expectations. Well, I was immensely happy, and therefore I was deeply annoyed when I couldn't get out of the Army right away. I thought I'd be home in two weeks, 'cause the war was over, no reason to keep me in the Army. And I would've paid, I had some money. I would've paid for my own passage home, you know—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—but the ships were entirely full of soldiers being demobilized. And so I had to stay in the Army, as you know from my, memoir, something like almost two years after the war was over, doing absolutely ridiculous work, which helped to sort of feed my, just, [laughs] disdain, not just for the Army, but for large corporate institutions that don't work very well, but just go on automatically. OK.

00:41:10:00

Interviewer #1:

The, the other issue, relating to the end of the war, we talked to Max Kampleman, who was Reagan's Chief Arms Control negotiator—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—who was a pacifist and a CO—

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—and he said that the moment he stopped becoming a pacifist was when the bomb was dropped at Hiroshima, because that proved to him that pacifism could never convince anyone. It was, it was a moral turning point for many people. What did the bomb represent to you?

Paul Fussell:

[pause] Achievement.

Interviewer #1:

K, again, I need a—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah. Well, when the, when the, when the war ended, as I talked about at the, a, a while ago,

when the war ended, I was talking about when the war in Europe—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Paul Fussell:

—ended, which is the one that I paid attention to. When the atom bomb was dropped, I was on my way, in a big, camp in France, I was, on my way with my division to be sent to the Philippines to be trained in the invasion of the islands of Japan, which, for the infantry, would've been a disaster, as well as for the Japanese. So I greeted the news about the atom bomb with a fairly complicated group of emotions, but the major one was relief and happiness. I was sorry for the damage it had caused, but when I thought about it more, I would say cruel things like, well, they asked for it; they started the war, and we ended it, and that's the way it is; I hope they learned something from it; and so on. One thing I find very touching is the reading I've done in immediate post-war Japan, where instead of reviling their conquerors and brutalizers, they were friendly with them.

Interviewer #2:

Hmm.

Paul Fussell:

These people were [laughs, and begins to cry], they were Shintoists, they weren't Christians—

Interviewer #2:

Hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—they weren't used to forgiving, they weren't—

[loud crash as something falls over]

[production discussion]

Interviewer #2:

Oh, I thought that thing—

Paul Fussell:

Oh, Jesus. [laughs] OK.

Interviewer #2:

—was moving.

Camera Crew Member #2:

It moves.

Paul Fussell:

That—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, I heard.

Paul Fussell:

OK, fix it.

Interviewer #2:

I'm sorry.

[cut]

00:43:09:00—00:44:08:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, I, I guess my last question about the bomb in Hiroshima was, do you see it as a real moral turning point in the world, in terms of—

Paul Fussell:

No.

Interviewer #1:

—how people, or—

Paul Fussell:

No, no.

Interviewer #1:

—or was it just the natural...

Paul Fussell:

It was a natural intensification of what we'd been doing all the time. The real, the real turning point was when everybody, all the, warring countries, decided that the aerial bombing of civilians was OK—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—and this was nothing but a, a technological magnification of that. That's where the moral question entered, when you decide to kill people who are not in uniform, who are not trained as military people, then you're in a different world, and it's a world where you think, you know, that Germany and the Soviet Union located themselves naturally, but for us to be there was something quite new. But again, I would say necessary. It was the only way to win the war. That's the awful thing about wars, the only way to win them is to imitate your enemies, and that leads to all kinds of horrors.

[siren]

00:44:09:00—00:44:55:00

Interviewer #2:

[stammers] I have a, you say—I'm not sure in which book, but you talk—and something like this in both books—that the, the, the activity of war is something that's more lied about than anything else.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

Do you think if people told the truth about war, you would end, we would end up with a lot more conscientious objectors, or a lot more Marine recruits?

Paul Fussell:

It's hard to know. We might end up with a larger Marine Corps.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

It's, I don't know how many people were really secret sadists. Probably a vast number. Who are satisfied now by things like automobile races—there'll be one tomorrow which I will watch, by the way, [laughs] the Indy 500; or who are, you know, excited by airplane crashes and so forth. So it's hard to know.

[siren]

Paul Fussell:

But it would certainly be interesting to find out what would happen in that case.

00:44:56:00—00:45:05:00

Interviewer #1:

I think I'm about done.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, I think we've—

Interviewer #1:

Unless you have any—

Interviewer #2:

—gotten every—

Interviewer #1:

—unless you have—

Camera Crew Member #2:

That question—

Interviewer #1:

—anything to say—

Camera Crew Member #2:

—wasn't the full thing—

Interviewer #1:

—that you think is—

Interviewer #2:

It's all right, it's all right.

Interviewer #1:

—well, let's stop for a second.

[cut]

00:45:05:00—00:45:33:00

Paul Fussell:

—listener and—

Interviewer #1:

—and, I'm sorry, yeah.

Paul Fussell:

—observer of this, that I don't know what I'm talking about.

Interviewer #2:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Oh, no.

Paul Fussell:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

But wait, we were asking you to talk about— [overlapping with Interviewer #2]

Interviewer #1:

They know better than that.

Interviewer #2:

—the things you do talk about.

Interviewer #3:

You're an expert, then. [laughs]

Interviewer #2:

You're an expert, then. [laughs]

Paul Fussell:

I never met a CO in the Army. I never met one [stammers], so identified afterwards when I was a graduate student at Harvard, when all the men there were veterans of, one kind or another. And we all knew everybody else's military identity, and I'm sure there were some COs there, but they never sort of indicated it.

00:45:33:00—00:46:33:00

Interviewer #1:

But that was a way of identifying yourself after the war, as, what did you do—

Paul Fussell:

Oh—

Interviewer #1:

—in the war?

Paul Fussell:

—absolutely. Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

So talk, talk about that a little bit—

Paul Fussell:

And various degrees of, of contempt attached to—

Interviewer #1:

Start—

Paul Fussell:

—people.

Interviewer #1:

—start over again with that.

Paul Fussell:

Well, I hate—because I've been in a dangerous situation myself, and been almost killed many times and just barely escaped death in the last one, I was extremely angry, quite irrationally angry at people who'd never been in danger, and especially people who, had discovered, sort of upper middle class routes of escape from danger, like being admiral's aides, for example, where you wear a, had a uniform, but what you do really is become the admiral's social secretary and send out the [laughs] invitations to cocktail parties, and greet people hypocritically, "How nice to see you again," that kind of thing. And that used to really boil me while I was at Harvard after the war. But except for that, we all, treated other with great understanding, I think.

00:46:34:00—00:47:53:00

Interviewer #2:

Would you put conscientious objectors who took a principle position against war participation in the same category as the people you just spoke about?

Paul Fussell:

They'd be higher. They'd be higher, [laughs] 'cause hypocrisy was not one of their, businesses. They were, they were free, at least, of that crime. Yeah. Oh, I'd put them much higher, yeah. And indeed, for courage, they're, they were, braver than many of the people I knew in the Army, who, in the infantry, the fighting forces. They were braver because they had solicited public social contempt by that decision, and no soldier had ever done that, just

the opposite. And they could have avoided it so easily by opting for something which was apparently military, but was totally safe and noncombative, and they declined to do that. The, the troops I was with also, they never said that they thought that noble behavior, but when I, sort of indicated, talking to them, that I thought it was, they never objected, they agreed, that it was harder to be a CO than to be, not quite a rifleman, but let's say, a mortar man, who's about 200 yards behind the line dropping his shells into the tube, you know? That it took a great deal of courage, we all knew that, and that's one reason that we never, sank to disparaging them.

00:47:54:00—00:48:52:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm. You've mentioned before that, the actually small number of people who participated in the war who were, in real danger.

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

How would you do, what, can you quantify that a little bit for us?

Paul Fussell:

I can't, because I don't, sort of do things that way.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

But I would say, if it's more than ten percent, I'd be astonished.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

And that includes the Air Force. Everybody forgets that the, the people that bombed Europe had 55,000 casualties, the same number—dead—the same number as after the Vietnam, as in the Vietnam War, and that took a vast amount of courage. At least in the infantry you can run away if you choose to, but in a bomber you have to sit there and take it. So we had great

respect for those people. But I think bomber command, British and the, Army Air Force—which is what it, Air Corps, which is what it was called then—constituted a very, very tiny segment of their respective armies—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—no more than ten percent.

00:48:53:00

Interviewer #2:

This question is more just intellectual—

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

—curiosity on my part.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

You described the, you talked in the, in, in, _Doing Battle_, you said that war was less a struggle between good and evil than worldwide disaster implicating everyone, everyone—I'm sorry, I can't read my writing—scarcely distinguishing it, within the, from the general—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—shambles and ruin.

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

You called that, a prime illustration of modernism.

Paul Fussell:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

How did you equate that horror with modernism? What, what made you—

Paul Fussell:

It, I thought I explained it, in the, in the—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Paul Fussell:

—passage. Because nobody cared. Nobody cares. There's a general contempt for human beings, which you see also in the fact that we've all failed to pay any attention to auto accidents, one of the great scourges, health scourges in the, in the United States. Everybody assumes nothing can be done about it, so we do nothing about it, and so forth. Well, that's very modern, to assume that human beings are replaceable, and, and, since there's no God anymore, you don't, you, damaging any laws of his.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

So why not, just kill freely, as we do in, in,, Serbia. The point there is less, we're sorry, yes, but we're not sorry for the people we killed, we're sorry we made a mistake—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

—which, suggests that we're not [laughs] the people we thought we were, we're not as good at technology, as we have told ourselves. We make terrible mistakes. But, that's what the apologies mean.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Fussell:

I think that one where you, you, hit the Chinese Embassy is the, the best, the funniest [laughs], the most appallingly melodramatic and comic outrage. Couldn't be better.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm. It was my favorite of a long time, when I thought—

Paul Fussell:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

—and it did, it was more an embarrassment than it—

Interviewer #1:

Judy?

Interviewer #2:

—was that we were sorry we killed—

Interviewer #1:

I, I think we're done—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—if we could just—

Interviewer #1:

—sit still—

Paul Fussell:

Profound embarrassment.

Interviewer #1:

—for a minute, we need to, we need to—

Camera Crew Member #2:

We'd like room tone here—

Paul Fussell:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #2:

—everyone be quiet, room tone—

[production discussion]

Interviewer #2:

Paul Fussell:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, OK.

Interviewer #1:

And then I need some stills.

[cut]

[end interview]

00:50:47:00