

Suggested reading to understand WWII

Use these suggestions as background to better understand the situation of young Americans during the period of World War II. These selections are chosen for how that generation saw the war. Many of these books were published during the war under conditions of censorship and before all facts were known. However, they do reveal how the situation was perceived at the time and reactions of the war's participants. Other readings were published after the war and give more context to the situations. More so than music or movies, these readings benefit from reflection and wider research and thus tend to be more historically accurate.

All Fronts:

- *See Here Private Hargrove*. Marion Hargrove. Ams PR, Inc, 1942. Comedy
 - An unlikely reporter is drafted, and his story tells of life in the Army as a cook at Ft Bragg, NC and his mishaps while serving in the early part of the war. Made into a movie in 1944.
- *Norma Kent of the WACS*. Roy Snell. Whitman Publishing Company, 1943. Adventure Fiction
 - This is a fictional adventure story for girls about a soldier in the Women's Army Corps.
- *Sally Scott of the WAVES*. Roy Snell. Whitman Publishing Company. 1943. Adventure Fiction
 - This is an adventure story for girls in the *Fighters for Freedom Series*, like the WACS story above. Tells of a sailor in the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service.
- *I Never Left Home*. Bob Hope. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944. Comedy
 - The famous comedian tells of his hilarious travels around the world entertaining troops.
- *Time-Life Series on World War II*. New York: Time-Life Books, 1978. History
 - This is a comprehensive history of the Second World by topic in 39 volumes. Packed with impressive photography that made Life magazine famous, the text is relatively brief and direct. Covers topics from "Prelude to War" to "The Aftermath: Asia" including: "The Home Front: USA," "Prisoners of War," "Liberation," "The Battle of the Bulge," and "Secret War."
- *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*. Herman Wouk. New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1971 and 1978. Novels, made into a TV miniseries in 1983.
 - The two volume saga of the Henry family centered on a US naval officer. Starts in Europe six months before the war and ends with Hiroshima. Written by one of America's best storytellers, it comes to grips with the global scale of the war and its grim realities.
- *The Good War*. Studs Terkel. New York: Random House, 1984. Oral history, Pulitzer Prize
 - Firsthand accounts of 121 people involved in World War II from the famous to the ordinary.
- *Daddy's Gone to War: The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children*. William Tuttle. Oxford University Press, 1995. History
 - This history explains the experiences of American children during World War II, examining the dislocation of families, and impact of comic books, radio programs, and other culture.
- *The Greatest Generation*. Tom Brokaw. Random House Inc., 1998. History
 - "In this superb book, Tom Brokaw goes out into America, to tell through the stories of individual men and women the story of a generation, America's citizen heroes and heroines who came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War and

went on to build modern America." [Google Books]

- *Don't You Know There is a War On?* Edward Steers Jr. Allentown, PA: Sign of the Ox, 2007.
 - A personal history of the home front in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania during World War II as seen by a young boy who tells of rationing, supporting the troops and war effort, school, bonds as well the impact of major events like Pearl Harbor, D-Day, and Japan's surrender.

European Theater

- *Brave Men*. Ernie Pyle. Henry Holt, 1944. Journalism.
 - Ernie Pyle was the war's most popular correspondent, and these are some of his newspaper columns reporting on the common soldier back to the home front.
- *Up Front*. Bill Mauldin, Henry Holt, 1945. Humor
 - Bill Maudlin was an Army sergeant and cartoonist for the Army *Stars and Stripes* newspaper. His work was very popular with front line troops, and won him a Pulitzer Prize.
- *Crusade in Europe*. Dwight Eisenhower. New York: Doubleday, 1948. History, made into a TV series in 1949.
 - This is the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe's memoir of leading the Allied armies into North Africa, Italy, Normandy, and the eventual capitulation of Germany.
- *Band of Brothers*. Stephen Ambrose. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. History, made into a TV miniseries in 2001.
 - History of an airborne rifle company from rigorous selection and training through battles in Normandy, Holland, Bastogne, and occupation duty in Germany. Based on journals, letters, and interviews. Dick Winters, the company commander lived in Central Pennsylvania.
- *A Bridge Too Far*. Cornelius Ryan. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974. History, made into a movie in 1977.
 - The classic account of Operation MARKET-GARDEN, the failed Allied airborne attempt to cross the Rhine River in Holland in 1944. This well-written book presents the operational view as well as the personal heroics and leadership for both sides.
- *The Damned Engineers*. Janice Holt Giles. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1970. History
 - The fascinating account of the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion's role in blunting the German drive during the Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944. This is an excellent depiction of applied initiative and courage at the small unit level.
- *Company Commander*. Charles MacDonald. Washington: Infantry Journal, 1990. History
 - An autobiography of a young rifle company commander, fresh from the States, who leads Normandy veterans through the Battle of the Bulge and the invasion of Germany. This is an absorbing story about the development of leadership in combat.
- *Catch 22*. Joseph Heller. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961. Novel
 - Heller portrays the irony of war and the frustrations of military bureaucracy as he describes the anti-heroics of members of the World War II Army Air Forces. The title earned a place in the dictionary and our vocabulary for a no-win situation due to illogical rules.
- *Citizen Soldiers: The US Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of*

Germany. Stephen Ambrose. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. History

- A history that melds personal combat experiences of US troops with contextual material to help readers understand the big picture of the war. An excellent account of what the war felt like for infantrymen in the European theater.

Pacific Theater

- *Wake Island Command*. W. Scott Cunningham. New York: Little, Brown, 1961.
 - The commander of Wake Island tells how his garrison held out for two weeks against the Japanese in 1941. Balance this account against the Marine commander, James Devereaux, memoir of 1947, the *Story of Wake Island*. Both became POWs after what was called the Pacific "Alamo."
- *They Were Expendable*. William White. New York: Harcourt, 1942. History, made into a movie in 1945.
 - The story of Motor Torpedo Squadron 3, which fought against the Japanese invasion of the Philippines after the Pearl Harbor attack. White fought as a skipper in dangerous attacks in which his squadron was decimated defending Bataan and Corregidor.
- *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*. Ted Lawson. New York: Random books, 1943. History, made into a movie in 1944.
 - A secret raid in 1942 is lead by Lt Col Jimmy Doolittle and a brave band of B-25 airmen who take off from aircraft carriers to bomb Tokyo in America's first retaliation for the Pearl Harbor attack. After a successful attack, Lawton crashes and must evade capture in China.
- *God is My Co-Pilot*. Robert Scott. New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1943. History, made into a movie in 1945.
 - A commander in the US Army Air Force's American Volunteer Group gives his perspective of flying fighter aircraft against the Japanese from the China-Burma-India Theater as part of the famous Flying Tigers supporting Nationalist Chinese forces.
- *Guadalcanal Diary*. Richard Tregaskis. New York: Random House, 1943. History, made into a movie in 1943. Won a Pulitzer Prize.
 - Written by a war correspondent who survived the battle, this tells of the long, bloody battle by the Marines that marked the successful land-air-sea battle against the Japanese which turned the tide of the war for the Americans. Stated in a matter-of-fact and unadorned style.
- *The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors*. James Hornfischer. New York: Bantam, 2004. History
 - The incredible story of the men who fought in the Battle of Samar in October 1944, a sea fight against a much-larger Japanese force, as part of the larger Battle of Leyte Gulf. Filled with detail based on the author's extensive interviews and eyewitness accounts.
- *Typhoon of Steel*. James and William Belote. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. History
 - This examination of the battle for Okinawa details the campaign from the U.S. Army, Marine, and Navy perspective. It is a very readable history of one of the fiercest battles of the Pacific war
- *Goodbye, Darkness*. William Manchester. New York: Little, Brown, 1980. Memoir
 - In this powerful memoir, Manchester gives his firsthand account as a Marine in the Pacific during World War II--what it looked like, sounded like, smelled like, and, most of all, what it felt like--by visiting the battlefields on which he fought.

Compiled in 2010 for the Silver Spring Veterans Memorial, PA. Updated 2013. Comments to bouchatc@hotmail.com