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## When Books Went to War

Molly Gupstill Manning

# WHEN BOOKS WENT TO WAR

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*The Stories That Helped Us  
Win World War II*

Molly Guptill Manning

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*For my husband, Christopher Manning*

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## Introduction

“Were you ever so upset emotionally that you had to tell someone about it, to sit down and write it out?” a Marine asked in a letter to the author Betty Smith. “That is how I feel now,” he confided.

“You see I am . . . 20 year[s] old . . . but I feel twice that age. I went through hell in two years of combat overseas . . . I just wanted you to understand that despite my youth I have seen a little bit of suffering.”

At the time this Marine wrote his letter, malaria ravaged his body and he was hospitalized and confined to bed rest. Yet he credited the illness with saving his life. During his time in sickbay, he was given an Armed Services Edition of Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. “I have read it twice and am halfway through it again,” and “every time I read it, I feel more deeply than I did before,” he said.

“Ever since the first time I struggled through knee deep mud . . . carrying a stretcher from which my buddie’s life dripped away in precious blood and I was powerless to help him, I have felt hard and cynical against this world and have felt sure that I was no longer capable of loving anything or anybody,” he wrote. He went through the war with a “dead heart . . . and dulled mind,” believing he had lost the ability to feel.

It was only as he read *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* that something inside him began to stir. “I can’t explain the emotional reaction that took place, I only know that it happened and that

this heart of mine turned over and became alive again. A surge of confidence has swept through me and I feel that maybe a fellow has a fighting chance in this world after all. I'll never be able to explain to you the gratitude and love that fill my heart in appreciation of what your book means to me." It brought laughter and joy, and also tears. Although it "was unusual for a supposedly battle-hardened marine to do such an effeminate thing as weep over a piece of fiction, . . . I'm not ashamed," he said. His tears proved he was human.

"I don't think I would have been able to sleep this night," he wrote in closing, "unless I bared my heart to the person who caused it to live again."

The American forces serving in World War II were composed primarily of citizen soldiers — people who had no notion of going to war until Pearl Harbor was attacked. Many volunteered and others were drafted, and together these unprepared and unknowing souls faced a daunting combination of hurried training at bare-bones facilities, and days and weeks of transport, boredom, and fear. They experienced horrors and unimaginable scenes of violence and destruction for which no training could fully prepare them, and, for many, recuperation in hospitals spread around the world. They were constantly reminded of their proximity to death. As one soldier remarked, it was not uncommon to "have breakfast with a man and at supper time he has been buried."

The war took a tremendous physical and psychological toll on the men who fought it. The infantrymen plodded through endless mud, advanced as snipers fired at them, and slumbered in the comfort of rain-filled foxholes — sometimes to the lullaby of squealing mortars in the distance and buzzing insects swarming about them. They always seemed to be wet, dirty, muddy,

uncomfortable, and exhausted. They marched and fought through searing heat and bitter cold, faced disease — malaria, typhus, and infections of all kinds — and bore the brunt of the enemy's bullets and bombs. It is understandable why they referred to themselves as the "God-damned infantry."

The pilots and crews of the B-17 Flying Fortresses, B-24 Liberators, B-25 Mitchells, B-26 Marauders, and B-29 Superfortresses faced a different series of perils: flying a steady course as flak pierced holes in their planes, engaging in sudden aerial battles, and witnessing crew members suffer or die from injuries incurred midflight. Their limbs became painfully numb as they endured subzero temperatures during long journeys in unheated aircraft, and the relief they experienced upon safe return was often accompanied by the devastation of learning that others did not complete the trip back. Many planes crash-landed, ran out of fuel, or just plain crashed. The B-24s and B-26s did not earn the monikers Flying Coffin and Widow-Maker for nothing.

Those in the Navy had their own set of problems. The initial thrill of sailing the seas and seeing the world from a gleaming ship was chilled by the isolation of days and weeks spent outside the sight of land. "Loneliness" and "boredom" took on new meanings. Meanwhile, the constant threat of lurking submarines and the mere sight or muffled din of an approaching enemy plane rattled the nerves of even the bravest sailor. There was no disguising cruisers or destroyers on the open sea. When the "music" started, they were like ducks in a shooting gallery.

The days were grinding, the stress was suffocating, and the dreams of making it home were often fleeting. Any distraction from the horrors of war was cherished. The men treasured mementos of home. Letters from loved ones were rare prizes. Card games, puzzles, music, and the occasional sports game helped

pass the hours waiting for action or sleep to come. Yet mail could be frustratingly irregular — sometimes taking as long as four or five months to arrive — and games and the energy to play them could not always be mustered after a long day of training or fighting. To keep morale from sinking, there needed to be readily available entertainment to provide some relief from war.

The story of the Armed Services Editions — portable, accessible, and pervasive paperbacks like the edition of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* that so moved a young Marine to write Betty Smith — is a remarkable one. They were everywhere: servicemen read them while waiting in line for chow or a haircut, when pinned down in a foxhole, and when stuck on a plane for a milk run. They were so ubiquitous, one sailor remarked that a man was “out of uniform if one isn’t sticking out [of] the hip pocket!” They were the most dependable distraction available on all fronts. Whenever a soldier needed an escape, the antidote to anxiety, relief from boredom, a bit of laughter, inspiration, or hope, he cracked open a book and drank in the words that would transport him elsewhere. Every soldier and sailor abided by a strict policy of swapping and exchanging books, no matter how worn. The print could be smudged, the pages ripped or falling out, and still a book would continue to make the rounds. As one sailor said, “To heave one in the garbage can is tantamount to striking your grandmother.”

They weren’t just for entertainment and diversion. Books also served as the premier weapon in fighting Adolf Hitler’s “war of ideas.” Nazi Germany sought control over people’s beliefs, not just their bodies and territory. From the 1933 state-sanctioned book burnings in Germany to the purging of libraries across Europe as nations were conquered by the Nazis, “un-German” reading material was threatened with extinction. The scale of destruction was impressive. By V-E Day, it is esti-

mated that Germany had destroyed over 100 million books in Europe.

And yet the story of the Armed Services Editions is largely untold. It was an astonishing effort. The government supplied more than 120 million free books to ensure that America’s fighting men were equipped with spirit and resolve to carry them through their battles.

With books in their pockets, American GIs stormed the beaches of Normandy, trekked to the Rhine, and liberated Europe; they hopped from one deadly Pacific island to the next, from the shores of Australia to the backyard of Japan. Some read to remember the home they had left behind, others to forget the hell that surrounded them. Books uplifted their weary souls and energized their minds. As the letter to Betty Smith reveals, books had the power to soothe an aching heart, renew hope for the future, and provide a respite when there was no other escape. For many of America’s servicemen, books were their most important equipment.

After the war, the accessibility of mass-market paperbacks — together with the GI Bill — helped build a new literate middle class, spreading reading to a wide and democratic public. The wartime book programs had made *The Great Gatsby* into a classic, engaged dozens of authors in pen pal relationships with thousands of soldiers, and touched the minds and hearts of millions of men and women.

This is the story of pens that were as mighty as swords.

## A Phoenix Will Rise

What is to give light must endure burning.

— VIKTOR E. FRANKL

**E**VEN THE MISTY drizzle that blanketed Berlin did not dampen the merriment surrounding the grand parade held on May 10, 1933. Thousands of students, proudly wearing their university colors, walked through the foggy streets by glittering torchlight as they made their way toward the Bebelplatz, the main plaza between the Friedrich Wilhelm University and the Opera House. Forty thousand spectators gathered in the plaza to behold the spectacle that was about to unfold; another forty thousand assembled along the parade route. In the center of the Bebelplatz, a massive pyre of crossed logs, twelve feet long and five feet high, awaited. As the first revelers arrived, they threw their torches onto this peculiar structure. Blue flames shot skyward. It was a breathtaking sight. Soon the skeleton of logs erupted into a glowing mass of fire.

Meanwhile, a procession of automobiles snaked along the periphery of the Bebelplatz. Some of the students formed an orderly line between the cars and the crackling flames. The crowd

watched as one student reached into the first vehicle, taking a book from a pile stacked inside. The book was then passed down the line, from one hand to the next, until it reached the student standing closest to the fire, who hurled it into the flames. The crowd burst into applause. In this manner, one book after another quickly made its way to the blaze. Some students grabbed armfuls of them, pacing between the automobiles and the inferno, fueling the fire each time they passed.

The initial destruction was interrupted only briefly, so that one of the student organizers could deliver a speech about the purpose for the gathering. To ensure the purity of German literature, he said, it was necessary to burn all “un-German” books and documents that threatened the national movement of Nazi unity. This included all works by Jewish authors, for “the Jew, who is powerful in intellect, but weak in blood . . . remains without understanding in the presence of German thought, fails to dignify it and, therefore, is bound to injure the German spirit.” The extermination of these offensive volumes would make the nation stronger by ridding it of ideas antagonistic to Germany’s progress. When the book burning resumed, another student announced the names of authors whose books were being destroyed, and explained why their ideas were harmful to Germany. Sigmund Freud was denounced for falsifying German history and degrading its great figures. Emil Ludwig was criticized for his “literary rascality and high treason against Germany.” Erich Maria Remarque was condemned for denigrating the German language and the nation’s ideals. Author after author was named. Book after book was burned, and the crowd cheered as if they were watching a sporting event. And so it continued for hours into the night.

Although it had been rumored that the book burning was solely orchestrated by an overzealous student organization,

it became clear that it was done with the blessing of the Nazi Party when Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, the “Minister of Public Enlightenment,” arrived to make a speech. Goebbels oversaw the Reich Chamber of Culture, which regulated Germany’s literature, press, radio, theater, music, art, and film. He used his influence to mold German society to suit Hitler’s ideology. Goebbels was wary of politically progressive authors who championed such causes as pacifism, socialism, reform, and sexual freedom. Books that so much as hinted at such themes were condemned to the flames.

When Goebbels ascended the swastika-draped rostrum, he declared that “Jewish intellectualism is dead” and that “national socialism has hewn the way.” Gesturing toward the scene before him, he continued:

The German folk soul can again express itself. These flames do not only illuminate the final end of the old era, they also light up the new. Never before have the young men had so good a right to clean up the debris of the past. If the old men do not understand what is going on, let them grasp that we young . . . men have gone and done it.

The old goes up in flames, the new shall be fashioned from the flame of our hearts.

After Goebbels’s speech, the song “The Nation to Arms” punctuated the night air and the students again took to throwing books into the mountain of fire.

To ensure that Berlin’s book burning would have a wide audience, it was broadcast live over the radio and filmed. Movie theaters across Germany soon showed footage of Berlin’s bonfire with commentary explaining that harmful books eroded German values and must be destroyed. As this message spread,

ninety-three additional book burnings were held, each attracting a large audience and intense media coverage. The students of Kiel University assembled two thousand examples of literature considered harmful to the German spirit, built a giant bonfire, and invited the public to watch as they burned the offensive books. In Munich, students led a picturesque torchlight parade before collecting one hundred massive volumes from the university library to be publicly burned. At another event in Munich, five thousand schoolchildren gathered to burn Marxist literature, and were urged that "as you watch the fire burn these un-German books, let it also burn into your hearts love of the Fatherland." In Breslau, five thousand pounds of heretical works were destroyed in a single day.

As book burnings spread across Germany, the Nazis also targeted any individuals who harbored anti-Nazi sympathies. Those suspected of entertaining views harmful to Germany were subjected to house searches; if anything objectionable was found, the offenders were punished. Some were never seen again. Quiet hysteria spread; many people preemptively destroyed documents and books that might be problematic. According to one report, when a local woman was given a tip that she should make sure her home was "really clean," she "immediately burned [her] books and papers and the next day endured a search." Nazis published lists of books fit for burning; among the authors named were Karl Marx, Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Heinrich Mann, Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, and Arthur Schnitzler.

Helen Keller wrote an impassioned letter to the student body of Germany, expressing her shock and disbelief that the birthplace of the printing press had become a crematory for this invention's posterity. "History has taught you nothing, if you think you can kill ideas," she scolded. "Tyrants have tried to

do that often before, and the ideas have risen up in their might and destroyed them." "You can burn my books and the books of the best minds in Europe, but the ideas in them have seeped through a million channels and will continue to quicken other minds," she said.

Others joined Keller in censuring the youth of Germany. Nobel Prize winner Sinclair Lewis denounced the book burnings, stating the works being destroyed were some of the "noblest books produced by Germany in the last twenty years." He added that the authors whose writings were thrown into the flames "should feel nothing save satisfaction at receiving this unintentional tribute from an organized mob." In London, H. G. Wells gave a defiant speech on intolerance, echoing some of the same sentiments as Keller. Book burnings "had never yet destroyed a book," Wells said, as "books once printed have a vitality exceeding any human being, and they go on speaking as though nothing had happened." "It seems to me," he went on, "that what is happening in Germany is a clumsy lout's revolution against thought, sanity and books." Although he admitted that he did not feel safe in England, and believed that authors could one day be lynched or sent to concentration camps because of the perceived danger their books presented, he found comfort in a single idea. "In the long run," he said, "books will win, and the louts will be brought to heel, and sane judgment will settle with all the braying and bawling heroics of these insurgents." In the meantime, Wells protested Germany's actions by providing a refuge for endangered titles. With the cooperation of other authors, Wells established the Library of Burned Books, which opened in Paris in the spring of 1934. The library housed copies of all books banned or burned by the Nazis, and held in safekeeping writings and books donated by German refugees and anyone who felt their books might be at risk.

American editorialists also voiced their disapproval. It seemed incongruous that universities, which had long been a chief glory of Germany, had become one of her shames, one newspaper said. The *New York Times* dubbed Germany's actions a "literary holocaust," commenting that "such an exhibition of the new national spirit, silly and shameful as it seems, bespeaks a mass-movement plainly touched with insanity." *Time* magazine referred to the incident as a "bibliocaust" and reported the ghastly details, including how a band played Chopin's "Funeral March" as books were cast into a bonfire in the Romerberg, Frankfurt's medieval marketplace. Many Americans gathered in public protests — eighty thousand in New York, fifty thousand in Chicago, and twenty thousand in Philadelphia.

How could Germany, an educated nation renowned for its philosophers and thinkers, tolerate the purging of its libraries and the destruction of its books? These acts were not isolated events, but rather one piece of a carefully orchestrated plan devised by Adolf Hitler to manipulate German culture in accordance with his policies and dogmas. Once he gained power, Hitler passed laws to ensure obedience to the new order he was establishing. For example, in 1935 *Mein Kampf* became state-sanctioned reading; a copy was gifted to every couple who married, and it was used as a textbook in every German school.

The führer's involvement in transforming Germany's cultural institutions to bolster his policies extended far beyond books. Hitler worked to create the impression that only pure-blooded Germans had made culturally and artistically significant contributions worthy of display in museums. He founded a new holiday, the Day of German Art. As the presider over the day's festivities, he selected which artworks would be exhibited, and awarded top honors to pieces he deemed ideologically ap-

propriate. Thereafter, he dictated where each work would be displayed within galleries, and set the value of each creation. The pieces that reinforced his vision of Germany were displayed prominently, and their price tags were correspondingly high. Museums were similarly "purified" by Hitler and Goebbels, as they forbade the display of pieces created by Jews or others considered to be inferior to full-blooded Germans. By exhibiting only those works that would herald the accomplishments of the Aryan race, Hitler aimed to give the impression that only they were capable of bringing glory to Germany.

Education was reorganized to reflect Hitler's ideology. On the same day as the Berlin book burning, Dr. Wilhelm Frick, Germany's minister of the interior, lectured German school administrators on changes to the educational system. He mandated that students be instructed on "everything concerning the fatherland and German history — with special emphasis on the last twenty years" and on "race science, heredity and genealogy." As to the latter, Frick explained that schools must "consistently emphasize that the infiltration of the German people with alien blood, especially Jewish and Negro, must be absolutely prevented," and that lessons on "race biology must also bring out mental and spiritual differences between the different races and must bring home to pupils the dangers of race deterioration." Under Frick's guidelines, children were instructed that pure-blooded Germans were a superior race. Concomitantly, Jewish and left-leaning lecturers were dismissed from their employment; at some schools, vacancies ran as high as 33 percent.

Hitler also exploited radio and film to disperse his ideas to even the remotest places. Radio broadcasting was considered an efficient means of publicizing, and ensuring obedience to, the führer's dictates. Goebbels endeavored to make inexpensive radios available to the masses so that families across Ger-

many could listen to Hitler's messages. German movie studios were pressured to produce entertaining films containing propaganda, and Hitler and Goebbels personally worked with producers to see that their vision for Germany was adequately reflected on the big screen. Goebbels wielded enormous power; he approved scripts, prevented "un-German" films from being made, and determined whether completed films were worthy of being shown. When the public criticized the dull, propaganda-laden films offered in German cinemas, Goebbels blamed movie critics for planting such ideas in their reviews. In 1936, film criticism was outlawed.

By 1938, the Nazis had banned eighteen categories of books, 4,175 titles, and the complete works of 565 authors, many of whom were Jewish. Yet some Jewish authors remained on bookshelves, to the utter frustration of the Nazis. German newspapers published furious missives censuring institutions that allowed the continued influence of Jewish writers. German librarians were forced to carefully comb through their collections and ensure that every book inimical to Hitler's policies was eliminated.

In that year, Nazi policies moved from books to people. On October 18, 1938, Hitler deported over twelve thousand Polish Jews from Germany. Yet only four thousand were allowed to enter Poland, leaving thousands stranded on the German-Polish border. When Herschel Grynszpan, a young Jew living in France, learned that his family was among those languishing on the border without food or shelter, he stormed into the German embassy in Paris and, in a fit of rage, fatally shot German diplomat Ernst vom Rath on November 7, 1938.

The incident spawned an anti-Semitic wave of terrorism across Germany. By November 9, news of the assassination had spread, and violent anti-Jewish demonstrations erupted in Ber-

lin. Squads of young men roamed the city, breaking store windows with metal batons and weapons. Shops were emptied, merchandise was thrown into the streets, and looters descended like vultures. The *New York Times* reported that gangs of young Germans, who appeared to be officials or members of the Nazi Party, vandalized Jewish-owned businesses as onlookers joked and laughed. By the following day at least ninety-one Jews had been killed. Almost all Jewish businesses in Berlin were gutted. Eleven synagogues were burned, countless temple books and Torah scrolls were destroyed, and thousands of Jews were imprisoned, sent to concentration camps, or driven to suicide. November 9, 1938, became known as the Night of the Broken Glass — Kristallnacht.

As the foreign press demanded answers and details, Goebbels stepped forward to set the record straight. The *New York Times* reported that he "openly sanctioned the wave of terrorism, destruction and incendiarism that swept over Germany," and even promised that "there would be further anti-Jewish laws for a comprehensive solution of the Jewish problem in a manner that will equalize the status of the Jews in Germany in conformity with popular anti-Semitic sentiment." "The reaction of the German people to the cowardly murder in Paris" signified "the nation follow[ing] its healthy instincts," Goebbels said. He confessed that he sympathized with the rioters and vowed to silence all foreign criticism by threatening that Germany's Jews would pay the price for any lies and exaggerations published overseas. As for the victims of the attacks, Goebbels said: "If I were a Jew . . . I would remain silent. There is only one thing the Jew can do — shut up and say nothing further about Germany."

Kristallnacht provoked little outrage within Germany. Hitler's policies beginning in the late 1920s had paved the way for acquiescence of such blatant persecution. After years of deval-

uing Jewish contributions to German society and culture, the Nazis had created a climate where violence against Jews was generally condoned.

Some Americans, however, found Germany's barefaced anti-Semitism shocking. Newspapers were flooded by letters voicing concern and incredulity. For example, from Saint Paul, Minnesota, a man wrote: "The extent and severity of this outbreak of terrorism [are] unbelievable," and the "assassination of a minor official cannot justify wholesale retaliation in this manner. Retaliation against a whole people for the crime of an overwrought youth is a throwback to barbarity." A San Franciscan wrote a letter to that city's *Chronicle*, marveling that "one madman could infect a whole nation of intelligent, sensible, essentially kindly people with his own fanatic madness." In Boston, a writer to the *Herald Tribune* remarked that "the noblest feature of modern civilization, respect for human life, has been abandoned for the time being in Germany." This Bostonian noted that while the "internal affairs of Germany are her own business . . . there are some practices which are so revolting to mankind, such a setback for civilization, such a debasement of the human spirit that absence anywhere of protest against them is almost equivalent to approval of them."

Germany declared war on Poland on September 1, 1939. Britain and France were compelled by treaty to declare war against Germany. Yet as the German military pushed into Poland, France and Britain were invaded initially not by tanks and bombs, but by words. Hitler's psychological warfare paved the way for a quick succession of German victories.

France and Britain each knew they would be attacked after Poland, but France was more vulnerable, with its long land border with Germany. Hitler prepared for battle by infiltrating

France's airwaves. Germany hired native-French broadcasters to lure unsuspecting listeners to tune in to amusing radio shows and popular music. Many listeners were oblivious to the propaganda that was subtly included. These radio commentators expressed worry over the German army's dominance and military strength, and predicted that France could not withstand an attack. The doubt Hitler's radio programs planted in French minds quickly spread. Edmond Taylor, a correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* who lived in France during this period, witnessed Hitler's intricately choreographed propaganda campaign and how it crumpled France's resolve. Describing it as a "strategy of terror," Taylor reported that Germany spent enormous amounts on propaganda and even bribed French newspapers to publish stories that confirmed the rumors of Germany's superiority. According to Taylor, Germany's war of ideas planted a sense of dread "in the soul of France that spread like a monstrous cancer, devouring all other emotional faculties [with] an irrational fear [that was] . . . uncontrollable." So weakened was the confidence of the French that something as innocuous as a test of France's air-raid-siren system generated ripples of panic; the mere innuendo of invasion somehow reinforced the idea that France would undoubtedly be defeated. Although the French government made a late attempt at launching an ideological counteroffensive by publicizing the need to defend freedom, it was as effective as telling citizens to protect themselves from a hurricane by opening an umbrella. When the invasion finally did come, France capitulated in six weeks. By similarly destroying the resolve of his enemies before invading them, Hitler defeated Poland, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg in addition to France, all in under a year. Over 230 million Europeans, once free, fell under Nazi rule.

As France succumbed to its fate and surrendered to Ger-

many, Hitler prepared to send a powerful message to the world, showing how seriously he took his role in avenging Germany's military humiliation in World War I. France's defeat was an opportunity to display the might of the German army and intimidate other nations that would be invaded in the future.

On June 17, 1940, Hitler met with what remained of the French government to sign a formal armistice. Employing every dramatic device to mark the event, Hitler insisted on re-creating the scene of Germany's defeat in World War I, aboard Marshal Ferdinand Foch's private railway car in France's forest of Compiègne. The rail carriage had long been stored in a French museum; on Hitler's orders it was moved to the exact location where it had stood on November 9, 1918. Clearly, it was France's turn to be humiliated. The führer personally delivered the terms of capitulation to the French officials. After the armistice was signed, Hitler decreed that Foch's railway car and a monument dedicated to France's World War I triumph be transferred to Berlin, where they would be displayed in a museum to mark Germany's victory over its longtime enemy across the Rhine.

Once a nation fell to Germany, great care was taken to re-fashion that country's concepts of culture, history, literature, art, media, and entertainment in an effort to solidify and reinforce Hitler's power. Often, the first cultural pillar to be toppled was the library. Hitler created the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) to confiscate desirable books and other artifacts in occupied territories. They were intended for a Nazi university to be built after the war. Undesirable books, by contrast, were destroyed. In Eastern Europe, the ERR burned a staggering 375 archives, 402 museums, 531 institutes, and 957 libraries. It is estimated that the Nazis destroyed half of all books in Czechoslovakia and Poland, and fifty-five million tomes in Russia. Libraries in occupied nations that remained open were re-

organized to serve the Nazi agenda. Poland's libraries were re-structured along National Socialist lines through a process of Germanizing records, supplementing collections with Nazi-approved literature, and removing all undesirable materials. After Holland was defeated, recent German books were displayed in order to impress the public with German achievements. When France fell, one of Germany's first actions was to issue the "Liste Bernhard," which identified 140 forbidden books. In September 1940, a more comprehensive list was published, naming nearly 1,400 titles. Many libraries in Paris were simply closed. H. G. Wells's Library of Burned Books, ironically, was carefully preserved by the Nazi occupiers. According to Dr. Alfred Kantorowicz, the library's general secretary, the Germans kept it "under lock and key," and although it was "practically impossible for foreigners to use the books," Germans consulted them for reference. Hitler's attention to libraries became so well known that, throughout Western Europe, librarians and curators took preemptive measures, moving their most valuable holdings to caves and castles, hoping to hide and preserve treasured collections.

As American newspapers reported Hitler's cultural attacks, the war began to be defined as having two fronts or dimensions. One journalist explained: "There are two series of conflicts going on at the same time: the vertical conflicts in which nations fight one another, and the horizontal conflicts which are ideological, political, social and economic." Other descriptions referred to the war as involving physical and mental components, and as being fought on the battlefield and in the library. Regardless of the terms used, a unanimous understanding emerged that the war was not waged on battlefields alone: the ideas a nation espoused were also under attack. Hitler sought to destroy not only armies, but also democracy and free thought. This new brand of combat was pegged "total war."

Although Americans took solace in their physical distance from Germany's army, it soon became apparent that Hitler's ideas had long reach. Just as it invaded France with radio broadcasts before sending in its military, Germany relied on the radio to engage American minds long before there was any suggestion of American involvement in the war. Radio sets of the 1930s and 1940s typically included shortwave bands for international listening. For eighteen hours each day, Germany (with Japan's help) broadcast programs that would reach North America; the war of ideas against the United States had begun. If America could be weakened as efficiently as France, Germany would be able to trounce the nation with very little struggle.

In order to make its propaganda more palatable to Americans, German officials searched for American expatriates to hire as announcers, as their accents would conceal their loyalties. In exchange for such benefits as ration coupons, which were only distributed to German citizens, and protection in an increasingly volatile Germany, several Americans joined Reichsradio. Iowa-born Frederick William Kaltenbach and Illinois-born Edward Leo Delaney were among the first American radio hosts. Later, Reichsradio would turn to the infamous Mildred Gillars, better known as Axis Sally, to deliver some of its greatest propaganda punches.

The campaign had little effect, however. The American media readily exposed Germany's radio shows for what they were. The *New York Times* reported that Germany's broadcasts were smartly arranged, copying the format of typical American radio shows: they read the news, played music, and presented skits. Yet while domestic radio stations included sales pitches for soap and breakfast cereal, the *Times* warned that Germany was out to sell a point of view.

Beyond calling out the propaganda campaign, some Ameri-

cans discussed counterattacking. France's quick defeat demonstrated how effective Germany's radio campaign could be. One of the loudest voices to address this issue belonged to the American Library Association (ALA). Librarians felt duty-bound to try to stop Hitler from succeeding in his war of ideas against the United States. They had no intention of purging their shelves or watching their books burn, and they were not going to wait until war was declared to take action. As an ALA publication observed in January 1941, Hitler's aim was "the destruction of ideas . . . even in those countries not engaged in military combat."

Throughout late 1940 and early 1941, librarians debated how to protect American minds against Germany's amorphous attacks on ideas. The "bibliocaust" in Europe had struck a nerve. America's librarians concluded that the best weapon and armor was the book itself. By encouraging Americans to read, Germany's radio propaganda would be diluted and its book burnings would stand in marked contrast. As Hitler attempted to strengthen fascism by destroying the written word, librarians would urge Americans to read more. In the words of one librarian: if Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was capable of "stir[ring] millions to fight for intolerance and oppression and hate, cannot other books be found to stir other millions to fight against them?"

When Goebbels spoke in Berlin on the night of May 10, 1933, he declared that from the ashes of the burned books smoldering before him there would "arise victoriously the phoenix of a new spirit." As he uttered these words, Goebbels envisioned German nationalism, fascism, and Nazism emanating from the books' remains.

Within ten years of Goebbels's speech, from the embers arose a renewed dedication to democracy and freedom. From the remains of those tomes blackened and licked by flames arose

a spirit dedicated to spreading ideas, including those contained in the books that had been destroyed. Soon, thanks to America's librarians, towering piles of books would rise in libraries, department stores, schools, and movie theaters — not for burning, but for donation to American servicemen. Rival publishing companies would come together, pooling their resources and expertise to print tens of millions of books for American servicemen on all subject matters and professing all manner of viewpoints. From the ashes, books would arise and flourish.

TWO

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## \$85 Worth of Clothes, but No Pajamas

In all phases of administration, training, and operation make every effort to keep your men informed. Nothing irritates American soldiers so much as to be left in the dark regarding the reason for things.

— ARMY BASIC FIELD MANUAL

AS WAR SPREAD across Europe in 1939 and 1940, most Americans opposed getting involved. In June 1940, the recently invented Gallup poll revealed that only 7 percent of Americans were in favor of an immediate declaration of war against Germany. Yet many understood that America might not have a choice. That same month, the *New York Times*, along with several other major newspapers, endorsed the unpopular position that the United States needed to immediately adopt a national system of compulsory military training. The *Times* explained:

The most powerful mechanized army that the world has ever seen is now striking at Paris. We must consider realistically the consequences of that army's victory. If we are not to be caught without warning, we must face in all frankness the worst that can possi-