

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF
Sona H. Hodaie for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in History presented on
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Abstract Approved:

Marisa Chappell, PhD

"If you are holding this letter" a historical fiction novella that educates readers about the historical significance of World War II: what it was like to be an American soldier fighting in Europe and how the war effected the personal lives those on the home front. Through first-person narration, this thesis exposes readers to the horrors of the reality of war and soldiers' miseries; the shifting gender norms in the United States; the passionate patriotism both at home and abroad; and the love between two seemingly insignificant young people as they navigate the tumultuous times of WWII through their devoted letters.

This thesis consists of fictional prayers and letters between an American soldier fighting the war abroad and his girlfriend living in Chicago, Illinois. The soldier, Thomas Hartley, is first stationed in France and later, Poland. His girlfriend, Donna Mayes, gains her first employment opportunity working in a war production factory. Through letters and prayers from Thomas and Donna, the devastation of WWII is apparent in the lives of both soldiers and civilians at home, but, as the story illustrates, the war also brought great joy and fulfillment in some cases.

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“If you are holding this letter,”

by

Sona H. Hodaie

A PROJECT

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Sona H. Hodaie, Author

This thesis is comprised of fictional letters and prayers between two fictional characters set during World War II. Because of the fictional character of this thesis, the details about U.S. troop movement, training, and battles should not be taken as factual historical events, but rather as an imagining of one soldier's experiences during events that did take place during the time and places in which he is set. I took license with describing the details of U.S. Army operations, such as the training camp, the ship ride across the Atlantic, the first battle experience in France, and aspects of the concentration camp in Poland. I also took license when describing details about factory work experiences in Chicago, Illinois during World War II. The stories about women's experiences working in factories and interacting with African Americans and male co-workers are drawn from historical sources about working conditions and experiences of women in the U.S. during that time. They are conceptualizations of what it would be like to be a woman entering a factory job for the first time during World War II U.S. home front culture and society. Additionally, the military conducted strict censorship with the letters that soldiers wrote and sent home. Soldiers were not to express emotions of fear or doubt. They also were not to disclose information about troop movements or plans. In this thesis, the letters sent home from war contain more expression of emotion than would have been allowed. I took license with these letters, allowing them to contain those emotions because they allow readers to have a better understanding of what it would have been like to live through World War II.

July 1, 1941

(Donna) Dear God,

This heat is dreadful. Every summer I ask my parents why they love Chicago so much. The city is our home, no doubt, our whole family's here, but the summer heat is just unbearable. I dab my face with my sleeves during church to keep from looking red in the cheeks, but I feel like a fool because my sweat comes right back. The tiny droplets slide down my widow's peak as quickly as I wipe them off. Sometimes I wish that I could bring a paper fan to church so I could concentrate better. I will admit, there have been moments when I wanted to use my Bible it's so hot. Instead, I tell myself that I am in God's house, and I must be reverent, so I do my best to pay attention. Don't ask me why, but occasionally I find that staring at the pulpit or Reverend Yellin's wrinkly hands is all I can do to keep from running down the aisle and jumping into the water fountain outside the church. I never got involved in any leadership positions at church (despite Mother's constant nagging), like being altar girl or Sunday school leader, so who's to

stop me from committing such an act of exasperation? Some people would be afraid of making such a scene, but I doubt anyone here would even remember my plain face by next Sunday. Instead, I continue to dab my face daintily with desperation, watching the second hand drag around and around.

Not Thomas, though. He sits with his family a few pews ahead of mine, and I can see the back of his head from where I sit. He is like a statue with his Bible in hand and back pressed perfectly into the bench seat. He keeps his composure like there's no heat, no hard wooden seat underneath him, no reason to move his head a stitch. He is the devoted son, the responsible, hard-working child that my mother never had the joy of having. Sometimes when we are together, driving in his car, watching a movie, or just sitting in church, I ask myself how I managed to have Tom in my life. All I know is, for a simple girl like myself, afraid to even voice my opinion among my family, Tom is my hero. He gives me courage to hold my head higher and makes me believe that I could actually be important.

(Donna) Dear God,

Whenever I have a free moment, there is always one place I want to be: the Hartly's house. I still remember the first time I came to that house over a year ago now. Barely a second after I rang the doorbell, Ruth, Tom's sister swung the door wide open with a grin and said, "You must be Donna." Taken aback, I adjusted my hat and managed to peep, "Yes, I'm Donna. Pleased to meet you."

"Well, come on in then!" She beamed at me.

I followed her into their modest living room. I remember watching her brown curls bounce joyfully around her long neck. Her dress was modest, but I could tell that she wasn't afraid to wear her skirt a little higher than our mothers would approve of. Even her gait had an air of confidence, and with each step her heels clicked against the wooden floor like an actress striding in to be received by an adoring crowd. She swung her arms just enough to accentuate her long curvy torso. I could imagine her wearing a glittering floor-length gown and shining her smile to thousands of fans. And among that

crowd of admiring fans, she might just spot my timid smile and blow me a kiss before stepping into her limousine.

Suddenly, she spun around and startled me from my daydream. “Thomas is upstairs. He should be down soon. Would you like anything to drink?”

After I politely declined, we sat across from each other in two armchairs, and she continued, “So tell me about yourself. What makes you tick, Donna?”

Not expecting such a direct question, I struggled to find something interesting to say. “I... uh... I really like to make dresses. And collect music boxes.” Right after saying that, I wanted to kick myself. Great job, Donna, way to make a good first impression. To my surprise, Ruth’s eyes seemed to catch fire, “Well I think that’s wonderful! People don’t make clothes like they used to. I would love to see your dresses.” Blinking back the shock, I smiled and said I’d love to show her sometime.

From that day onward, Ruth and I have been thick as thieves. She looks and acts quite differently than I do, but for some reason when the two of us are together, it practically takes a runaway train to separate us. Back in high school, Ruth’s teachers adored her. When she is home, her room is always spotlessly clean with a few disheveled pictures and jewelry falling from a drawer here and there. She always puts on her best appearances for people, and few have the privilege of seeing her with her walls down. We used to talk about all the things we would like to do after we graduated. Unlike myself, Ruth had big plans for her future. She didn’t want to be like her mother, always tidying up the house and cooking dinner for the family. She wanted to sing and be an actress, like Lauren Bacall. She wanted to wear beautiful gowns and be recognized for her contributions to the industry. I, on the other hand, wanted only to marry her brother, Thomas, and start a family with him. I wanted to be the perfect mother and wife.

Since I met Ruth, I felt a small twinge of something lacking in my life. Up until the day when she swung her front door open with her wide grin spreading across her face in greeting, I have felt something missing inside me. I still have the same goals: to settle down and raise a family of my own. I still graduated from high school and worked at the grocer’s down the street from my house. I still curled my hair and wore my nylons just so. I still felt the great surge of joy in my heart when I saw Thomas. But his sister changed something in me, something that has been longing to break free.

July 4, 1941

(Donna) Dear God,

It's hard to fully enjoy the Forth of July with a war on. Mother baked pie and invited our neighbors like normal. We watched a fireworks show in the park like normal. We even brought out father's favorite record by Al Jolson like normal. Despite the gaiety of the festivities, it seemed as if everyone had a deeper feeling of angst about the war ever present behind the whites of their smiles. After dinner, our family gathered around the radio to hear the news from the war in Europe. We listen to the radio every evening. It's our connection to the rest of the country and the world. The news told us that Winston Churchill continues to ask the United States for more aid for their fight against the Nazis. Father thinks that we're going to join the war very soon at this rate. Not everyone feels that way. Some people at church say that our country will not join the foreign quarrels. But Father feels otherwise. For the past few months, I have been walking around with dread in my heart. At first it was small, but the feeling is growing worse with each time that I listen to the news from the war. I have a plan for my life and how I want it to go. I want to marry Thomas and become Mrs. Hartley. I want to make a beautiful home for us and start a family. How can I hope to accomplish these things with a terrible war raging across the Atlantic? If Father is right and the U.S. does join the war, I know that Thomas would fight. He has a patriotic fire in his belly like lots of young men his age. He has already mentioned in passing what things would happen if the U.S. gets more involved. I banish the idea of Thomas leaving to fight; every time the thought flits into my head, I squeeze my eyes shut and avoid the subject entirely. However, there are nights when I cannot help but wonder how life would be if the U.S. did go to war and if Thomas was sent overseas to fight. Hot tears fill my eyes and spill down my cheeks in embarrassing amounts. I burrow my face into my pillow and try to remind myself to be strong. But how can I be expected to be so brave when all that I know could be turned upside down?

December 15, 1941

(Thomas) Dear God,

I can still see the look in Mother's eyes. Fear, grief, pain. I can still hear President Roosevelt's voice sounding through the radio that afternoon.

"I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese empire."

Roosevelt and other announcers continued to speak about war mobilization, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and other related topics. I couldn't make out a word of it. My mind wouldn't let me hear through the tumult of emotions crashing through my head like raging ocean waves. The one thing that filtered through my chaos was Mother's face. Her fine brown curls, entwined with silver streaks, tumbled down her back in disarray. Her eyes were almost completely blank, staring at mine. Her lips began to tremble, followed by her hands, which she struggled to keep on her lap, absently playing with a seam on her skirt. She opened her mouth to utter a few words to me, but slowly shut her lips and dropped her gaze. Droplets of tears began to quietly fall to her lap as she contemplated the gravity of what she just heard the President say.

The last time her country went to war, my mother lost her soul mate. From the moment she heard former President Wilson speaking of war, her life was forever changed. Through her grief, she worked every job she could find, raised her family to be upright, educated, children and instilled in me a deep sense of responsibility and honor. She knew without speaking a word that I was going. I had no choice. Not because of a draft, but because of Father.

(Thomas) Dear God,

Even though I was too young to remember, I can still hear Mother telling the story of the day Father left for war in Europe. May 15, 1917, my father left to fight and never came back. His life was taken by enemy fire one month before the war ended. Mother did

the best she could to keep our house and family afloat. I assumed the role of “father” not long after, and I’ve been taking care of my family ever since. It is my duty to fight this war and return victorious for my family, for Father.

“Those dirty Japs are gonna get it now,” Will said, pounding his fist into his palm. Will Pearce, my best friend, has the same fire in his belly that I do. His father didn’t die in vain in a war leaving his family to struggle; no, Will just has an iron will to make something of himself. His father works in a factory assembling various car parts. He never challenged Will to accomplish much of anything. Will has scuttled along the bottom of bare minimum in school and work, never trying too hard or caring much for anything. Throughout the years, our friendship has grown strong, and we do everything together, including now, going to war.

Lord, you sure work in mysterious ways. You helped me meet my dearest companion because of rats. On one of the first days of high school, Will and I sat by each other in the cafeteria and started talking about our pet rats. Not long after, we were coming over to each other’s houses everyday to play with our rats, shoot hoops, and cause trouble in our neighborhoods.

Like all good things, they end. Our dynamic began to change when I left for college. After graduation, I was on the fast track to a law degree at Wheaton College. I packed my belongings and left Will behind in our old neighborhood. He had a few odd jobs and finally found a steady one at the post office sorting mail and occasionally doing deliveries. Now when I come home for visits, he is still in the same place, same car, same clothes, same food from the same restaurants, same small-minded ideologies. When we see each other now, we talk about old times, old people we used to know. He doesn’t mention his current life, and I feel boastful if I talk about my pampered life at college. It’s getting harder and harder for us to relate.

“Those nasty Japs won’t even know what hit ‘em! They’ll learn their lesson from messin’ with America! The Nazis too!” His response echoed the resonating sentiments of many Americans, but the call for war is a bleak reality check for me. This is war. We’re finally in it. I’m going to fight.

“You got that right!” I say in an effort to keep both Will and my own spirits afloat. If I act like a wet blanket in this moment of patriotism and passion, Will’s morale would fall, I’m sure.

“We should go to the Army’s office tomorrow and enlist,” I say. Keep the ball rolling, no going back. Will turns his head to looks at me, slows his gait ever so slightly, and nods in agreement saying, “I’m right with ya.”

In that moment I realize, I gotta tell Donna about all this.

December 20, 1941

(Donna) Dear God,

How could you do this to me? You know how terrorized I’ve been all these months at the thought of Thomas leaving for war. How could you make my worst nightmare become a reality?

I avoided the thought of war from my mind for so long that when Thomas arrived at my house with a solemn look on his face, it took me a moment to figure out why. Without many words, we made our way to one of our favorite spots in town. He drove me to the edge of the City Park, and then we walked quietly to where there was a small creek and a large oak tree. We sat on a bench under the tree like so many times before. I began to play with his palm, drawing small swirls with my finger. He took a deep breath and said gravely, “You hear about the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii?”

“Yes,” I said slowly, not meeting his gaze, “it sounded horrible. And so out of the blue like that...”

“Yeah,” he managed to utter, barely audibly. He played with his shoestrings as he sat on the ground. I reached, took both his hands in mine, and looked him in the eye.

“Donna, I’m leaving to fight. Will and I enlisted at the Army office this morning. I will be leaving to train at a camp in New York called Pine Camp in about a month.”

At that moment, I lost it. I no longer had any control over my response, and I began to cry and sob, making a huge mess of myself. Tom immediately scooped me into his arms and held me like a baby. He tried to sooth my tears, saying the obvious comfort

lines, "It'll be okay, baby. I'll be back before you know it." I barely even heard him. One month? That's all the time we get until Tom goes off for who knows how long to fight half way across the world? I couldn't think or process anything. I hate war. I hate the greedy leaders, like Hitler who are taking my love away. My hair stuck to my cheeks from all the tears, and my hands were useless at trying to wipe them away.

After a while, I found my calm again. I drew whatever strength I could find within myself and tried to put on a more positive attitude for Tom. He is making a huge sacrifice, and he needs my love and support. Once I began to breathe normally, smile a little, and look him in the eyes again, he pulled something out from behind his back. He handed me a small box wrapped in cloth. I held it in my palm and slowly unwrapped its covering. As soon as I discovered what I was holding, I began to cry all over again.

"Your grandmother's old music box?" I asked quietly, not believing my eyes.

"It's for your collection," he said happily.

I gazed upon the little box; it was the most stunning one in my whole collection by far. With its little wooden feet and gold inlayed carvings of flowers and vines, it was beautiful. I held the tiny lever and began to wind it. The melody was perfect, "Greensleeves." It soothed my aching heart for a moment and I felt a small wave of peace enter my soul. I smiled broadly and choked him in a hug.

"Thank you," I murmured.

January 12, 1942

(Thomas) Dear God,

The waiting game is over, and I thank you for that. These past few weeks have been emotionally draining for myself and family. It's time to finally head off.

I went to Will's house earlier this evening. He is feeling the same way I am: anxious, fearful, and above all, ready. The one thing that Will has that I am lacking is confidence in the spirit of war. He talks of killing Japs and Nazis, showing them who's boss. I mirror his sentiments, but a piece of me is uneasy talking about killing like that. I

have never seen a dead person or witnessed anyone die. It sure doesn't seem like something to be taken lightly.

I had a moment in the hallway at home this morning. I saw the family photos hung along the wall. The one from Ruth's piano recital years ago, her beaming smile hasn't changed a bit. The one of my parents' wedding, the one from my high school graduation, the one of Dad in his Army uniform. That was one of the last photos ever taken of him. He is frozen in time as a soldier, staring boldly at the camera with a hint of his gentleness coming through his expression. Mother loves that picture of him because he was full of passion and purpose at that time. He left for foreign shores with confidence, and the war swallowed him forever. I looked again at the recent photo of myself and stopped for a while. I realized that this could be the last photo of me to be placed on the wall. There is a possibility I will not return home ever again. No more photos, no more life. I left the hallway with its memories frozen in time.

Tomorrow morning we will take a train to New York Pine Camp and begin training. We will find out more about training and our assignments after we arrive.

Lord, if I could ask for one thing, I ask that you comfort my family and Donna. It is for them that I leave tomorrow, and I want them to know that. I don't want them to be frightened or worried about me during this war. More than that, God, I pray I make them proud.

(Donna) Dear God,

Where did the time go? Thomas leaves on a train tomorrow morning for the Army, and I am sitting here in my room staring dumbstruck. Tomorrow, I will say goodbye to him, and it could be for the last time. The horrible war in Europe is sucking my life from me. It's taking the one thing I never wanted to lose: my love and my secure future. Fortunately, I still have Ruth. Her strength and positive attitude sure lift my spirits. I know that she is scared out of her mind for Tom, but she puts on a calm face for him. I am glad that she is coming to the train station tomorrow to say goodbye. She will keep my emotions from flying wayward out of my control. I have a feeling that these

next few months will be much improved because of Ruth's strong will to ensure that life goes on. She is already talking about what she wants to do to get involved with the war effort from home. I want to follow her lead and do my part in this war. The government will be asking for more and more soldiers to fight, and I know that I am not alone in my worry for our boys heading off. Soon thousands, maybe even millions, of fellow American women, will join Ruth and me in our struggle to get by without the men in our lives. Ruth says that us women will find our callings during this time of national action, patriotism, and confusion. Maybe I will find mine...

January 22, 1942

(Donna) Dear God,

The lump in my throat still hasn't gone away. The emptiness in my heart feels like a chasm.

This past week, I feel sadness follow me like an old dog, never leaving me alone for a moment. Even when my family and friends are spending happy moments together, a piece of me left on that train with him, and that missing piece makes it hard for me to lift my spirits. I'm spending a lot of time with Ruth. We don't talk about him though, because it brings my heartache on stronger.

I don't think I will ever forget that morning. The sun was just reaching its peak when we pulled up to the station. Tom and Will checked in and loaded their luggage onboard. We began to gather around them on the platform. The train exhaled a plume of smoke in preparation to leave. Our families gathered around them. Hugs, kisses, tears, forced smiles. When it came my turn to say goodbye, I felt a wave of peace sweep through me. We embraced, kissed, and shared a moment looking into each other's eyes. He smiled and gazed at me with his knowing eyes. I wrapped my arms around him, smelling his neck, feeling his clothes under my fingers. Time seemed to stand still for a moment, and I wished that it had. After what seemed like a split-second, we began to pull apart and he gathered his belongings. I wanted to reach out to him, pull him back, grab his hand and run. Instead, I stood up tall, managed to wear a calm expression, and

allowed my tears to pool and slide down my cheeks. In silence, everyone watched as he boarded the train. There were other families like ours standing on the platform. Women clutched kerchiefs, fathers stood stoic, and little siblings tugged their parents' pant legs in confusion. A few minutes passed, but it felt like an eternity. Finally, the train groaned, spouted a huge cloud of smoke, and its wheels began to turn. We watched the train pull away, and my family began to head back to the car. They left me, giving me a moment on the platform alone. I had no will in my body to move. The only thing moving were my tears slowly tracing paths down my cheeks and dropping off my chin.

Sometimes tears say all there is to say.

(Donna) Dear God,

Don't ask me how, but Ruth managed to convince me to join her when she went to the Red Cross recruitment office in downtown Chicago. We woke up early and took three different buses to get there. Ruth said that she had seen posters around town urging women to join the Red Cross and do their part in the war effort. She wants to become a nurse and be sent overseas to care for our soldiers, somewhere like London or Paris, she says.

"This is our chance, Donna. Our chance to get out, see the world, make a difference." She spoke with such conviction. She is far braver than I. I could never imagine being in the belly of war, seeing the mangled men and watching the sparks fade from their eyes. As the bus rolled down the busy Chicago streets, I watched out the window as people passed by. The war hadn't affected them yet or so it seemed to me. Maybe it has already claimed their loved ones like it is claiming mine. Maybe behind their stoic posture and expressions lies a seething pain and anxiety about the war. I'd like to think that's the case because that's sure how I feel.

"I don't know, Ruth. Are you sure you want to go through with this?" I hated the way I sounded. As soon as the words left my lips I felt a twinge of guilt and embarrassment seep into my heart. I grabbed her hand, and she looked at me with her calm, knowing smile. Patting my hand on top of hers, she confidently nodded her head.

“I know it’s not going to be fun or easy. I might even regret this decision at first, but the one thing I know is that I want to do something. Something to help our boys fighting the enemy for us. I will treat each man as if he were Thomas because I know that someone out there cares about him as much as I do for Tom.”

I dropped my gaze and let her words settle in. I know she was right about it all. She was taking action while I tagged along and questioned her motivation, her principles.

“Donna, I’m not forcing you to join me, ya know? I know you’ll find your own path during this war. I think this crazy fighting might actually be a great thing for us all in the end. I’d like to believe that, anyway.”

Her optimism radiated like the sun’s rays, and soon my cold shuddering fear began to feel a little warmth and comfort. We rode the rest of the trip in silence mostly, awaiting the new adventure in store for Ruth.

(Thomas) Dear God,

Boy, this isn’t easy. It has only been five days at Pine Camp, and I’m already wondering what I got myself into. Every morning we wake up at four-thirty, clean up, shave, and then head outside for inspection. Our drill instructor, Sergeant Pike, is a big imposing man with a barrel chest and eyes like an eagle that pierce you with his scrutinizing gaze as he walks past.

One morning, I had the privilege of catching Sergeant Pike’s attention. As he clomped by the rows of men at attention, his eyes flicked my direction. He squared his posture, looked directly at me and said, “Did you shave this morning?” Without a moment of hesitation I replied, “Yes, Sir.” Standing next to me, Will didn’t move a muscle. With an unwavering stare, Pike said, “I see a patch on your skin. So I’m gonna ask you again, did you shave this morning, soldier?” “Yes, Sir,” I reply. My heart started pounding like crazy; it reminded me of the time Mother put her feather coat in the dryer with tennis balls to fluff it up, the thumping was incessant. Suddenly, Pike put his huge hand on my throat, practically lifting me off the ground, and said, “You got a patch here.” Removing his hand, he said methodically, “I’m gonna ask you one more time, did you

shave this morning?" I could sense Will was scared for me. Wanting to smooth the situation over, I replied, "No, Sir." Next thing I know, Will and I were both sent to the commanding officer's office. We walked in, razors in hand, and were ordered to shave our faces. We had no water, no lather, no mirror. We stood there scraping our faces for a half hour.

That morning taught me a little more about life in the Army. Sometimes we're expected to do the impossible; we're pushed to our limits and beyond. But all this makes you feel like you're something. You're a part of something bigger. I was humiliated, and yet, I was empowered. Will managed to forgive me too.

I think I will write Donna tomorrow. Mother too. I know they're probably worried and anxious to hear from me. Other men who have been at camp for a while have been writing home regularly. They say it's therapy for them and for their loved ones. I have to decide how much I want to tell them about life here. There's enough to write about, that's for sure.

All I know is, Will and I are ready to get into action. At night, I lay in my bed and think about everything in my life that has led up to this. I think about my family at home and especially, I think about Father. I will push myself, train hard, learn everything I need to learn, and never forget my mission to make him proud. Not only am I serving my country as a soldier, I'm fulfilling my father as his son.

March 10, 1942

(Thomas) Dear Donna,

I hope this letter finds you and my family well. This is my first chance to sit down with pen and paper since coming to Pine Camp. The first thing I thought of was you, Donna. Being at this training camp makes me miss you like crazy! We have to wake up early, be very clean, and do drills all day. The food isn't too great, but the cooks do their best. Nobody complains.

Everything feels so surreal here. It's almost possible to forget there's a war on with all the commotion at camp. But that is why we're all here busting ourselves, to become soldiers. Will and I are signed up for the infantry, so we'll be on one of the first

shipments overseas within a month or so. I think we'll be stationed somewhere in Northern France, that's all I know for now. Since the U.S. joined the war, we've been in debate with Great Britain about where and how to launch the attack against Germany in Europe, but I know our Army Chief, Marshall, is sending us to Northern France to bolster British forces stationed there.

Have I mentioned how much I miss you already?? This war better be over quick. I am one lonely soldier missing his sweetheart.

I will write again very soon.

Love,

Thomas

(Thomas) Dear God,

You never truly know what's coming until it comes, do you? Because of my time in law school and my high scores on my performance and intelligence tests, I have been selected for Officer Cadet School, which will take a much longer time to complete. At this rate, my Sergeant told me that it might not be until the end of 1943 that I am sent overseas to fight. To my relief, Will defied the odds and was also selected for officer training. He made the cut by his excellent scores on his performance tests. His intelligence tests were satisfactory, but it was his intense drive to be the best soldier he could be that propelled him to become noticed by our superiors. This is lucky, because our Sergeant who took special notice of Will told him that the Army just recently decided to allow soldiers into officer training based solely on their scores on these tests. If not for that, Will would have never made it.

I don't know how to react or how to feel about this unexpected change in plans for me in this war. I wanted to head overseas as soon as I could and start doing my part. Now Will and I are going to be sent to Officer Cadet School at Fort Benning, Georgia for eighteen months. From there will be sent to the Officer Cadet School in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey for a brief stay before being shipped off. By the time that Will and I complete everything required, we will be shipped to Great Britain in January 1944.

From what I've heard of officer training, it is rigorous and demanding on the men, but they turn into fine leaders for their companies. I pray that these next months go by quickly. I have a feeling that they will.

(Donna) Dear God,

I haven't touched Tom's music box since he gave it to me. It has sat on my dresser, left out from the rest of my music boxes that I keep on a shelf by my window. It has perched in that spot for almost two weeks. I've avoided it like I've avoided any thought of loneliness or despair over Tom leaving. And trust me, God, it has not been easy.

After meeting Ruth for lunch today, I've made a decision to help myself cope with the war. Ruth told me about her training with the Red Cross; she'll be a full-fledged nurse by the end of the year and possibly sent overseas to help directly in the war. When she told me that today, it finally sunk in that she is going to be gone as well. Ruth, my rock, my inspiration, will be leaving to fight this war like her brother. I sat in the cool metal chair chewing my turkey sandwich listening to her cheerfully jabber about the Red Cross and other news in her life. She seemed so calm, so sure of herself, and in that moment I realized that's what I need: something to be sure about, something to make me proud of myself and my accomplishments.

When I go to the grocery store, the movie theater, the public pool, or just walk down the sidewalk, I see the government reaching out to us, to women. The posters are relentless, but I must admit, they're growing on me. The pictures of women in uniforms working with tools, they look so sure of themselves. So patriotic. So strong. At first I walked past the posters in embarrassment, avoiding the gazes of the beautiful star-spangled dames. After a week or so, I began to peek their direction, entertaining the idea of being one of those ladies and then telling myself that would never happen. Next time I go past the posters by the grocery store, I will stop and look, really look and think about the possibility of becoming like one of the women on the posters, pulling back my curls, rolling up my sleeves, and being sure of myself for once.

As I sat on my bed tonight, I looked at the music box from Tom. I felt myself walk to it, pick it up, and begin to crank the little lever. I looked down at my hands carefully cradling the box, my bony fingers wrapped its tiny sides delicately. Looking at the details of my hand, the creases of my palm, the shadows along the bends in my fingers. For a moment, I could picture Tom's hand interlocked with mine; I almost felt his rough palms and radiating warmth seep into my chilled fingers. I let go of the lever and the song began to play. Slowly, quietly weaving through the subtle notes of the song, the music brought a rush of emotion through me. I felt an ache in my chest and my eyes began to burn, the familiar warning of impending tears. As the song spiraled into the chorus, I closed my eyes, tilted back my head and cradled the music box in both hands. I felt hot tears creep along my temples and become lost in my hair. I stood like that for a few moments, letting the song run its course until it reached its abrupt end. I could hear the next notes that should come but as the silence filled the room. I opened my eyes and turned my head back down to peer again at the box. Just like Tom and I, I thought. So beautiful and perfect and yet, cut short, halted by external forces out of anyone's control. But just like the box's music, our song is not over, it is asleep until the next time someone cranks the lever and conjures its melody back out.

It was then that I decided to be the composer, the musician, the maestro of this war. Although I feel overwhelmed by the enormity of this world conflict and how it has already ripped from my hands my passion, my drive, my lover, I will not allow it to rob me of my strength to push onward with my chin held high, nose to wind. I will not let this war be my breaking point, no, it is my chance to challenge myself and accomplish something worthwhile.

Thank you, God, for showing me the beauty of possibility and potential in this time of fear, strife, and suffering. I will not let you down.

May 2, 1942

(Donna) Dear Thomas,

I was so excited when I saw your letter in the mail, I just about screamed with happiness like a child! You have such a way of making me smile, even through a letter. I am glad to hear you are doing well.

I'm sure your mother or Ruth has written to you about Ruth's plans. I am so proud of her for joining the Red Cross. I know she'll make an excellent nurse. She hopes to be sent abroad to work in a field hospital. I admire her bravery to the upmost.

I am also discovering my own way to help with the war effort. I hope you are happy to hear that I have found a job working in the Buick factory. It is no longer for Buicks though. The factory is now producing aircrafts for the U.S. Army, and I am going to be right there makin' em! I have to take two city buses just to get there in the mornings, but I will make it work. My first day at the job is next Monday, and I can't wait! I feel this might be my chance to really do something meaningful.

I miss you so much already too, my love! I think about you more than I can find words to say. Please write again soon.

Love,

Donna

January 12, 1944

(Thomas) Dear God,

There she goes. Lady Liberty with her torch held high, piercing the sky. Our country's symbol of all it holds dear: freedom, honor, patriotism, fades from my view as the ship chugs to sea. Will and I took a moment along the ship's railing to breathe the crisp salty air and watch our country become a speck in the distance as we travel to war. After so many months of Officer Cadet School, we were both ready to be shipped into action. We're going to war to fight and defend our country; we're going to war. In that moment on the stern on the ship, Will and I shared the same sentiment without speaking a word. This is it; here we go. I felt better knowing that I had Will with me, his confident demeanor reassures my nerves. He looked out at the sea, the churning waves and mist, and smiled. He turned and took one last look at the U.S. before it was no longer visible. Unlike me, lost in reverie and contemplation of leaving home for war, Will turned on his

heels, slapped my back, and said nonchalantly, “Well, better get comfortable, I guess. We got a long way to go.” Brushing off his pant leg, he clipped away and found a seat inside. This trip will take longer than normal because we’re zigzagging our way across the Atlantic to avoid German U-Boats. A part of me is glad for a little extra time before reality hits.

Something that bothers me about the Army is the racial segregation, the separation of Black and White soldiers in everything we do. On board our ship, Blacks have their own quarters and Whites have theirs. The two groups do not associate with each other. Even at Pine Camp, we had separate mess halls, separate training programs, separate everything. When we arrive in Wales, our first stop along the way to France, the Black and White soldiers will be assigned to different towns.

The separation of Blacks and Whites has been a normal phenomenon in my life. Growing up, I saw segregation in almost every facet of public life. But this is different. This is the U.S. Army in a time of world war. This is not the time for separation, alienation, and inequality. This time is about camaraderie, nationalism, wholeness. Our enemy is across this ocean, not across the cabin of this ship. It pains me to witness the discrimination wreaking onboard while we travel to far away shores on a mission to eliminate an enemy accused of similar racism.

(Donna) Dear God,

I have never had such a day. I woke up at 5 A.M., rode two buses and arrived at the old Buick factory just outside downtown Chicago by 7:30 A.M. The line of workers outside the factory was the largest line I had ever laid eyes on. It looked like the Fair had just come to town with all the people bunched up waiting. One thing I noticed right off the bat, the women, or lack of women, more like. Out of the hundreds of people packed to enter the factory, I looked at the line and picked out a few women scattered amongst the sea of men. I found a spot in line, clutched my jacket and lunch bag under my arm, and braced myself for whatever this day would bring.

“You in line for a job at the factory, Miss?” An angelic voice sounded from my right, and I whipped around to find another girl about my age waiting behind me.

“Yes, I am. What a line though!” I said, trying to sound like I knew what was going on and what was happening next.

“This your first day too?” She asked. I was glad for the conversation. “Yes it is.”

“Mine too,” she said. Her auburn hair was tightly curled and tucked smartly behind her hat. Her features were slight and her clothes were plain. I liked her.

“I’m Donna Mayes,” I offer, holding out my hand for a shake. “Susan Odell,” she replied, shaking my hand and smiling warmly. I spotted a ring on her finger, and I couldn’t resist.

“Who’s the lucky guy?” I ask making a small gesture toward her wedding ring. Immediately her hand went to the ring and touched it softly. “James,” she said warmly, smiling at the thought of him. “The only reason I’m even here at this job is because he’s getting ready to leave for the war.” In that second, I felt a connection between us. I had heard of other girls from my former high school class and church getting married before their sweethearts left for war. “War Brides.” Their families and friends all warn them against doing it, but they get hitched anyway. It’s something about war that creates jitters amongst young lovers, and no one can change their minds. If you ask me, I say go for it.

We continued talking for the better part of a half hour until the massive queue began to shift forward. The line moved steadily toward its mouth at the entrance to the factory. As Susan and I neared the front of the line, men sitting nearby began hollering and whistling at us. Susan and I became bashful. I felt my cheeks burn that familiar feeling of self-consciousness. I hate that feeling. I ducked my head and kept walking forward. Eventually we made it inside, met the manager for the floor we were to be on, and commenced training. The Buick plant had gotten a government contract to build airplane engines for the B-24 Liberator bomber. The men who work at the plant started leaving for war, so workers were needed badly. That’s where we, the women, came in.

I have never flown in an airplane, but now I’m helping to build them. My job is on an assembly line, “the jigs.” Another worker welds the plane parts and then I rivet the parts of the plane together. Susan and I are working on the fuselages of the planes. I like that job because I know that’s where our boys will be sitting when they’re flying. I like

riveting because it's like gluing the plane together, making sure it's ready for whatever comes its way. The rivet is a metal bolt with a head at one end. My job is to drive it into place with a rivet gun using pre-drilled holes already in the plane. Then another worker, or buckler, uses a metal bucking bar to bend the other end of the rivet into a second head that secured the plane parts together. For now, I will be riveting and Susan will be bucking.

It is a powerful feeling knowing that the steel that I will be working on might be the only barrier between one of our soldiers and the enemy fire. These seemingly insignificant metal pins that I will insert into the plane may be holding together the only thing keeping that man from death. And that man inside the plane would be someone's husband, brother, or son. It puts a whole new perspective and gravity to my work, I'd say.

January 20, 1944

(Thomas) Dear Donna,

Our ship has made it to Wales, and we are stationed in a small port town for a week or so. Soon we will board a troops train and travel to Brighton on the coast of England. Then we will be shipped across the Channel to France. Everything seems to be happening so fast now, and yet, time is no longer as it used to be for me. Some days start and end before I have a chance to sit down and think, and others stretch on into eternity, the sun never seeming to leave its position above. The one thing that remains constant is my longing for you, Donna. I miss you so dearly. When I come home, promise me that we'll never be apart like this again. Once I get my arms around you, honey, I'm never letting go. Be warned.

One thing that's interesting is the way the Welsh people react to us. At first the townspeople were very positive and welcoming. After a week, they are still pleasant to us, but they look at us oddly when they see how the Black and White soldiers are segregated from each other. In Wales, there is no such separation of people by race, and I think they think poorly of the U.S. Army for conducting its troops in this manner. Back at home, the separation is always there so we don't stop to think about it. Sometimes you

don't notice what's in front of your face until you've seen what it's like without it. Shouldn't we all be on the same team here?

Anyway, our letters can only disclose certain information about our whereabouts and movements. I will write again soon.

I love you always,

Thomas

February 2 1944

(Donna) Dear Thomas,

Say hello to the new Donna. My job at the old Buick factory has been going stupendously. I love waking up in the mornings (quite early) and having a role, a purpose for my day. It helps me cope with you being gone and Ruth joining the Red Cross. Even Mama feels like she's helping with the war effort just by getting me out of bed and on my way to work! She tells me, "Don't ever think about quitting, Donna!" I've met a handful of other women working there, and we're starting to really hit it off. My role at the factory is to rivet the plane parts together, which I know sounds rather boring (I must admit, there are times I wish I could be home reading my books or making more dresses), but it fills a vacancy that I never knew existed in my life. The paychecks are a very lovely perk too! I bought some slacks for the first time, and man, they're comfortable! I am dog tired by the end of the day, but I'm also proud and happy at what I am accomplishing. I am telling my friends at church about it, and they might look for war jobs too. Us women are stepping up and working for our country, and it feels so great! If it weren't for you and Ruth in my life, I may have never stumbled upon this opportunity, and for that I will be ever thankful.

I have been waiting diligently to hear word from you. My heart leaps every time I see the mail piled on the kitchen counter, and I dig through it like a crazy person searching for your handwriting on an envelope. Maybe tomorrow will be my lucky day.

Love Always,

Donna

February 3, 1944

(Donna) Dear Thomas,

I know I wrote to you yesterday, but I figure you'd appreciate more correspondence once the mail finally makes it to wherever you are. I still wait for one of your letters to come in the mail. I know there's one coming closer to me with each passing day!

I had a great dinner at a new friend's house. Her name is Helen, and she works at the factory with me. The dinner was tasty, but above all that, the conversation was delicious! Helen, a few other gals, and I began to talk about work. Helen and her sister told us the best ways to keep the drills sharp in the factory and how to tell when a detonator needs to be re-inspected. I couldn't believe my ears for a moment. In any other circumstance, one would expect ladies like us to be conversing over local gossip or new recipes. Not anymore. Some of them have been married for a while, but now they have real jobs outside their houses for the first time in their lives. They've realized that they are capable of doing so much more than just cooking meals and doing laundry! This is my realization too, Thomas. And I'm starting to feel a little better about all this war business.

I don't know if Ruth has been writing you letters, but I'm sure she is. I haven't seen her as often as I used to because we're both getting involved with the war effort, but I see her at church every Sunday, and she looks very well.

Thomas, I miss you so dearly. Sometimes when I smell the familiar sweet smell of Mother's peach pie, the one that you always loved, I fight back tears because it brings back such vivid thoughts of you. Other times when I'm walking I pretend you are there behind me. I imagine your arms wrapping around my waist and squeezing me tight! What I wouldn't give to feel that right now...

Love Forever and Always,

Donna

(Donna) Dear God,

Thou shalt not kill. As I sat in church today, I flipped open my Bible and found myself in Exodus, the Ten Commandments. Everyone knows them. I remember my teacher telling us kids in Sunday school that we must know all ten. Thou shalt not kill. That was the easiest one to remember. I consider myself a devout woman of God; I know the Ten Commandments at least. But what I don't understand is how all these millions of Americans are getting along knowing our boys are out there doing just that: killing. I don't understand how chaplains can call themselves men of God and then turn around and prepare our boys to go into battle. The Bible clearly says it—don't kill. It doesn't have in parentheses, "Except in times of war." When a man kills another person, we all feel it's justified to punish him as a murderer. But when a soldier kills man after man after man and returns home, we pin a medal on him. The more people he kills, the more medals we pin on him.

I wished I could say something. If I was free from all inhibitions, I would have bolted from my chair and pointed my finger right at the verse: Thou shalt not kill! I would have slammed my hymnal down and marched right out of that room full of "God-fearing" hypocrites. I would have left the congregation muttering and whispering about me. And I would have never returned. But as we all know, I'm not brave. I'm mousey little Donna who never speaks out and questions why this is so.

(Thomas) Dear God,

I cannot imagine a longer or more grueling experience that could take place in one day, twenty-four hours. Never before had I witnessed such chaos, agony, terror, confusion, or excitement all at once. If I live to be an old wrinkly man, I never want to go through something like that again.

And that was only my first day.

It started out fine. Our company was traveling through the French countryside. That sure is beautiful land. Before this opportunity to travel, I had silly ideas about

France. When I thought of France, I thought of poodles, French maids, fashion models, and overall frivolous lifestyles. However, as our company passed through, we saw solemn hard-working peasants plowing fields with horses, little churches and houses.

Not long after our train was rolling through the quaint countryside, the mood quickly changed. There was rubble all over the ground. You could hear gunfire in the distance. We were within a few miles of the frontline. We got off the train and piled into trucks, headed straight for the fighting. Everyone in the truck became serious and the elation of the French countryside was completely extinguished. As the trucks barreled through the last few miles, the sound of large shells exploding became apparent and the piles of rubble grew larger along the road. Finally, we were off the trucks and moving on foot.

Before this day, I had seen a few planes dropping bombs on the other side, seen patrols coming and going with prisoners. It was still fun and dramatic, nothing too serious. When the truck stopped and I jumped off, I looked at Will, and we both understood. We were going in. We knew we were going to be under direct fire. Some of our division was going to be killed.

We were relieving a division that had been there, the Eighth division. We were being sent to cut off a German pocket and secure the front. At that point, we were moving forward, drawing closer with each step. It was still exciting; no one had been killed yet. We could hear mortars blasting. I kept seeing shadowy figures slinking around in the bushes, but I couldn't be sure what they were. My memories from training at Pine Camp came rushing back to me, but nothing could have prepared me for what came next.

One distinct memory I have from those few moments before we entered the front was our uniforms. They were still clean and crisp. Like our uniforms, we were young inexperienced kids who had never seen the face of battle. In contrast, the veteran troops that we relieved looked exasperated. They had beards, filthy uniforms, and most of all, the looks in their eyes told it all. They had been through a lot. Some of the men wore an expression on their faces—You're gonna find out now. I could see a mixture of relief, pity, contempt, and fear all wrapped up in their faces. I didn't know what to make of them; I had too much to do at that moment to worry about it.

As we moved forward, we saw our first dead Germans. Their bodies laid strewn on the ground in grotesque postures and piles. I had never seen a dead body before except once in a funeral home. I was disturbed by the way their faces seemed frozen and their eyes blank. Everything was there in their eyes, their faces, except the spark. And that made all the difference. The obvious conclusion to be made from these bodies: if Germans were dead, the Americans were getting killed farther up the line. We came to an American artillery emplacement. Surrounded by incessant firing, we took respite there. It was reassuring to see how much artillery we had. But then I remembered all the dead Germans lying outside and my moment of relief was quickly forgotten. Night was falling, so we stayed at the emplacement until the morning. The only thing I wanted that night was to sleep, and the one thing I desired so desperately was the one thing that evaded me for hours. I had plenty of other unwanted experiences to take its place. The night was miserably cold and damp. The other men around me were looking weary. They all smoked cigarettes. I had tried a few, and was starting to get the hang of them. I wondered what Donna, Ruth, or Mother would think of me smoking cigarettes. I am not proud of it, but I am also not ashamed. In war, you do what you have to do to survive, and part of surviving is ensuring at least some peace of mind. Cigarettes gave that to the men, and to myself somewhat. That night, I was cold, scared, and sick to my stomach; a cigarette sounded just right.

What felt like three minutes later, the sun began to dawn, and we had to move. Through my grogginess, I saw some ambulances and army surgeons prepping their equipment. Here we were, fully healthy men. It was a sobering sight. Not how I wanted to start the day. Our platoon of about thirty men was to take a small town along the German line. I was the bazooka man, and I quivered as I slung it over my shoulder. We were soon marching through a forest; the little town was within sight, maybe a few hundred yards away. It was a surreal moment, divorced from any reality I had ever known. We stopped at the edge of the forest and saw sheep grazing in some fields in front of us. Soon there was heavy gunfire: machine guns, rifles, and mortar shells began to bombard the grass ahead of us. I could see actual mortar shells, German 88s, landing on the ground and leaving ominous craters where they left their destruction. They hadn't hit anything substantial yet, and I began to feel like this wasn't so bad. That lasted about

three seconds. The sheep started to get hit, bleeding out in the fields. Seeing the animals being shot down and left to die made it all come home for me. Soon that would be us out there, and people would be lying dead like the sheep. It was like a curtain was lifted in front of my eyes. As I crouched in the brush, I glanced at Will, still so grateful to have him there. He put his large hand on my shoulder and blinked laboriously, lowering his head in a slow-motion nod. I patted his hand and understood completely.

Our sergeant gave the order to move forward, and we began to charge from beneath the foliage toward the town. The German fire worsened. Our men started getting hit and going down. I could hear their screams as I kept running. My heart hammered in my chest, and I could feel my pulse beating through my veins. I kept moving. No stopping. I found a safer patch on the field, and with the help of another man, began firing in the direction of the German position. I seemed to actually be making a little difference with my bazooka on the German forces. Our platoon kept pushing forward, and eventually, forced the Germans to retreat. We took the town with little trouble.

Our sergeant ordered us to pick up our dead because “we don’t leave our dead to the enemy.” Lacking the proper medical supplies, some men and I improvised stretchers using our field jackets. I took off my jacket and turned the arms inside out. We put rifles through the arms and used them as handles for our make-shift stretchers. We picked up a man, I couldn’t remember his name, but he was barely older than I was, probably in his late twenties. Half of his head had been blown off, and his brains were coming out onto my hands and uniform. I couldn’t look down or think too much about what I was doing. Here I am, yesterday, never seen a dead body to today, carrying one with my jacket while getting the gray squishy brain matted with hair seeping between my fingers in the process. After a few hours of clean up and searching the town, night began to fall. It was now our mission to return to our battalion in the morning. We stayed the night in abandoned homes and apartments. Some of the living spaces had been bombed and every room had a wall gone and was open to the outside. We made ourselves comfortable in the homes and helped ourselves to any food or drinks we could find inside. We ransacked the abandoned homes without guilt.

That night as I tried to find sleep in a cot inside one of the abandoned homes, I kept seeing the dead men. Their faces, their limp arms, their dirty boots dangling. I

especially couldn't shake the image of the Germans we had killed. After taking the town, we passed the Germans who died defending it. I looked at a few individual Germans and each took on his own personality. I could see their faces from beneath their helmets. No longer were they abstract enemy figures, targets for our guns. Their faces were not so brutish under their helmets like the newsreels depicted them in America. They were exactly our age. Once the helmet was off, we were looking at men like us.

In that twenty-four hour period, I had experienced more war, death, and fear to last a lifetime it felt. My heart was heavy from everything it was processing from the day. I tried to make sense of it all, tried to rationalize the killing and destruction I had witnessed. I understood that we were fighting for our country against an evil enemy. I got that idea. But what I saw that day—our men being blown apart mid-step, the German boys heaped up dead, the soldier's remains spilling over my hands—had planted a seed in my mind. I began to feel that nothing, no cause, could be worthy of so much blood to be spilt. Not just American blood, but the carnage on both sides of the war seemed like a waste to me. So much potential, courage, strength, love, shot from the ground like a target duck at a shooting range. I guess I realized how powerful man has become, ending life so quickly and easily with the pull of a trigger. The idea of killing became divorced from the consequences of death. I shot my bazooka valiantly at the enemy only to find that they were boys just like me on the other side.

April 25, 1944

(Thomas) Dear Donna,

I have received your latest letters, and boy, they sure lifted my spirits! When I sit down to read them I let the rest of the noise, commotion, and confusion of our Army camp fade to the background of my mind and I focus on you. I imagine your voice speaking as I read each word. I study the curves of your handwriting and picture your hand moving along the page. I let myself retreat to a bubble of love filled with thoughts of you. I am so blessed to have you, Donna, I realize that so much more now. Please never stop writing me until I set foot back in America, back to you.

Last week, my platoon had its first experience at the front of battle, and it went well. We took a town and then moved forward and took another. I cannot disclose our position to you, but I can tell you that we're still in France.

I have only been on the ground in France for a short while, and I have already seen so much, Donna. To put it all down on paper would be an improbability. From the brief time I've been here, I am beginning to feel a deep sadness and desperation from all that I've seen. In an effort to relieve you from the burden of hearing this and to save paper, I will suffice it to say that this war has nothing good to offer the world or me. I hope it reaches its end very soon for everyone's sake.

I will try to write again very soon. Give my love to my family. I miss you crazier and crazier each day.

Thomas

(Donna) Dear God,

Your people have baffled me yet again. How, in this time of international upheaval and national mobilization, do we manage to divide ourselves so distinctly? One would think that this war would bring unity among Americans, but from what I have seen and heard at the factory, this is not the case at all.

Among the growing number of white women coming to work at the factory, a sense of racism is steadily seeping into the workplace. I started noticing it almost immediately once I started working there regularly. The white women would talk amongst themselves about how they don't want to work with any colored women. Some of the white women went to the management and told them how, if colored women did become employed there, separate bathroom facilities must be provided for them. The management wanted to please these ladies, but they also couldn't afford to have more bathrooms put in during that time. Things seemed to smooth over for a few weeks; no Negro women came looking for jobs.

I read in the newspaper that thousands of Negro people, men, women, and families, are migrating north from farms and rural employment to cities like Boston and

Chicago. Less than a week later, I spotted two Negro ladies looking for a job in the factory. I was taking my lunch break and happened to stroll past the employment office downstairs. There they were sitting politely in their plain dresses, hands gloved and folded daintily. Behind their plain and pleasant demeanors, I could tell that they had worked hard in their lives. Their eyes were lined with a look of strain, probably caused from years of toil and manual labor. I bet they'd be great employees here, I thought to myself.

Apparently I wasn't the only one to notice their presence. After returning from my lunch break, I heard a few white women talking about the two colored girls signing up for jobs. The ladies began to complain about how colored people smell and how they carry venereal diseases. This derisive conversation meandered toward the topic of separate bathrooms to prevent the spread of such diseases, and at that moment, I felt a twinge of pain in my conscience. I wanted to speak up and tell those women that this war requires us to join together, to work together, and support each other. How can we expect to rally together under one flag if we can't even use the same bathrooms as each other on the job?

My heart went out to the two Negro ladies because I know how difficult it has been trying to assimilate myself as a woman into this industry dominated by unwelcoming men. They don't want or like working with women, and they especially won't like working with Negro women. They play practical jokes on us women and holler and whistle in our direction. Just when I thought us women had it bad, I observed how the white men look upon the few Negro men working here. Their faces either completely ignore the gaze of each other or they reveal disgust and disrespect. Their racist attitudes are openly revealed on a daily basis.

For some reason, I expected this war to bring Americans together, like a huge team, working toward the same cause. But my naïve perspective was quickly forgotten once I saw how the white men and women treated their Negro coworkers. I'd like to think that I'd be brave enough to stand up for what I believe is right and defy these racist attitudes by showing decency to my Negro co-workers.

(Thomas) Dear God,

It's time to move out again. The men in my platoon have grown very close to each other. We've trained together, fought together, and died together. As we keep marching and fighting patches of German forces together, a strong sense of kinship is growing between us. Never before would I have the chance to meet such a variety of people in one time. In our platoon, we have a street-smart city boy from Boston, a few farmers, a southerner, a high school history teacher, and a handful of college students. After our time in this war, I couldn't imagine a better bunch of boys to fight it with. When we storm German encampments or fight off enemy fire from our bunkers, we don't do it for patriotism. The reason isn't bravery or bloodlust, it's that sense of not wanting to fail your buddies. And that motivation has driven us through a string of successful missions.

I struggle finding the right words to write in my letters home. I feel I can't express the true reality of my experiences here in fear of bringing them more worry. It pains me to paint my deeply shell-shocking time here as a comfortable jaunt through France. The more I bend the truth in my letters, the more I feel the urge to lie to myself too. I want to tell myself that I'll be coming home soon, that Will and I will return triumphant, but I know that possibility is not the most probable. I try to keep my mind from thoughts of death, but in this place it is a very bleak reality.

After our platoon took a different town along our push through France, we surveyed the town and its occupants. As cold weather is soon approaching, the townspeople are beginning to struggle to find food that hasn't been damaged by the war. I saw a man running his horse up and down the street to get its circulation up. He was going to kill it with a knife to feed his family and neighbors. After I managed to comprehend the situation, I offered the man my pistol to use instead. The sight of that man preparing to kill his horse out of such desperation made me realize how war affects people. I had seen soldiers shot from the ground in a split-second. I had seen medics and nurses run from patient to patient in the medical tents in their rush to help all the wounded. But this was the first time I had internalized the war killing those completely uninvolved, the French families, animals, and homes.

It was also in that moment that I realized how much the Americans don't understand war. They don't know what war truly is like. They see pictures in newspapers and newsreels at the theaters. But there is one feature of war that they have never experienced—the smell. When we go through a village, we get hit with these horrible smells. Like a wall, the stench slams you, and even the toughest soldiers cover their mouths with whatever they can find. We look around to find bloated bodies reeking. They are no longer humans to my eye; they have decomposed beyond much human recognition. All the bodies, the Germans, the French, the cows, the horses, they all smell the same putrid smell. It's not discriminating; they all smell the same. Maybe, if Americans had known even this much of war, they'd be more concerned about peace.

(Thomas) Dear God,

I was there with him when he died. His name was Kevin Short. He was from Chicago like me, about my age, bright guy. I was there with him in his last moment. Our platoon was taking a hill fortified by German bunkers. It was a risky operation, and we knew it. Less than five minutes into the upward thrust, it began to rain 88s. We were being pounded by so many bullets and shells, the ground looked like it was dancing from all the rubble being displaced. Kevin and I were running upward together and split in different directions. Less than a minute later, I hear him calling for help. I whipped my head in his direction to see him lying in the patchy grass, his limbs splayed in an unnatural disarray. I bolted to him and found him mortally wounded with a blow to his chest. In that moment I knew I was all that he had.

“Well, you got a miracle wound, Short! Now you're gonna be going home to your wife.” I tried to sound convincing, like I believed what I was saying.

The enemy fire continued to rain down the hill. I saw other men going down and heard their cries for the medic ringing through the din. I looked down and Kevin was looking right back at me. There was something in his eyes, like he was trying to tell me something. I had no hope of hearing his whispered voice above all the shooting. I lowered my head toward his and cradled his head in my lap. There was no use in calling

for the medic because he was needed in other places, and Kevin didn't have much time left. I could hear his labored breaths become shorter, quicker, quieter. His eye flickered shut, his arm fell limp, and his breathing came to a stop. I sat with him a moment, made sure to take his dog tags for our C.O., and let myself sink into the stillness for a brief time. That could have been me. I could have gone Kevin's direction and been shot just like he did.

Thirty seconds later I was back on my feet and moving forward. I couldn't afford to stay in one spot on that hill peppered with incessant mortar shells. More and more men started to get hit. Our numbers were waning. Our C.O. received orders to halt the mission until more support could reach us. One of the officers who was on the hill ran into a patch of the German defenses that was equipped with white phosphorous. He witnessed two of his men burn before his eyes. He came stumbling down the hill sobbing. He ran into another man's arms saying over and over, "No more killing, no more killing, no more killing."

In war, the balance between life and death is so fine. I try to find a reason, a rationale for all this killing and destruction. I try to take everything that I've seen, heard, and experienced thus far and contextualize it. Fit it in a neat box so all these horrific memories can be put in and be made sense of. Then I could go out and shoot my rifle at the Germans knowing that this whole war is for a just cause, a very thought-out and purposeful reason. Somehow I don't think anybody could see and experience everything I have so far and come up with a neat little justification for it all. This thoughtless slaughter is beyond the realm of our humanity to comprehend.

(Donna) Dear God,

Whatever I was missing in my life, in myself as a person, whatever that was, I found it. I am filled with a new sense of purpose and confidence that I have never felt before. If I could freeze this feeling and keep it locked up in a safe place forever, I would!

It all started with a bad thunderstorm. The sky was gray and heavy from the afternoon onward. A couple co-workers and I were taking our lunch breaks outside and you could feel the impending storm churning in the distance. The air was thick and ripe for it. An hour or two later, about a dozen women and I were inspecting bomb detonators in a smaller more cramped work area. It began to rain and we could see the slates of water slide down the windows. Soon there was thunder rumbling through the sky followed by mighty cracks of lightening. Before long, I could tell we were sitting right in the eye of the storm. We kept working methodically. Suddenly all the lights went out, and in the commotion a box of detonators was dropped and spilled all over the ground.

“Don’t MOVE, ANYBODY!” A woman yelled out. She screamed it so loudly and in such a panic, her voice cracked. I could hear the terror in her voice.

“A box of detonators spilled, they’re all over the ground!” A few women shrieked and others began to grab for anything to hold onto. The room was completely black save for a little light peeking through the dusty window. I could sense the panic rising among the women. A bead of sweat meandered its way down my temple. My palms were clammy and my knees began to wobble from freight. I knew someone would come to check on us at some point, but if one of us even so much as nudged one of the thumb-sized detonators the wrong way, we would all be blown to pieces.

“Ev-Ev-Everyone down on their hands and knees. Slowly!” I heard myself speak calmly and confidently. I could hear the women’s breathing, heavy and frightened. I carefully dropped my hands to the ground and began to feel around for a place to put my knees. I could hear the others do the same.

“Okay, that’s good. Now let’s all calmly make our way to the door. Take your time. I’m sure someone will come check on us soon.” I was even beginning to reassure myself. I began shuffling toward the exit, and I could hear the other women following suit. One lady began to cry softly. Another woman accidentally placed her hand on mine for a second and I could feel how her hand was trembling. Sweat continued to cumulate on my brow, but I was too scared to lift my hand to wipe it. The thunder and lightening continued as terrifying as ever. During the split-second flashes of lightening I could make out the other women, their backs curved and heads lowered slowly crawling toward the door. Eventually a woman made it to the door, and she reached for the knob and slowly

pushed the door open. Light shed through the room from the windows in the hallways outside. I felt the collective group of women breathe a huge sigh of relief. We then looked down at our hands and swiftly crawled to safety.

Our boss came soon after to make sure everything was okay. The women were standing around, a few still trying to calm their nerves. After we explained what happened, our boss approached me, shook my hand, and heartily thanked me for saving the day. The women seconded that notion. I felt like a million bucks. I respectfully downplayed my role in the crisis while inside I felt like fireworks were going off. We were sent home early so the factory could be checked for any damages from the outage. I rode home on the bus with a silly grin on my face. I held my purse and crossed my ankles and just beamed from ear to ear.

After ruminating on everything that happened, I took a moment to be quiet with my thoughts. I felt a surge of warmth in my chest, a sort of fullness and light like I had a weight lifted from my chest that I never knew was there before. I asserted myself today. I took a stand and trusted my instincts. I thought on my feet and it all came out all right. Golly, I wish I had learned how to be confident twenty years ago! I am so tickled with myself. I cannot wait to wake up tomorrow and return to work.

May 15, 1944

(Donna) Dear Thomas,

I have changed dear, and in the most wonderful way! I love being a workingwoman. You are no longer with a girl that's interested solely in a home—I shall definitely have to work all my life. I get such satisfaction out of working; I cannot imagine being a well-rounded individual without it in my life.

Thomas, I think about you all the time. You are never far from my mind. I am starting to see you, like a crazy person wishing for something that isn't there. I see you in the chair, in the shadows of the rooms. Everywhere I go you are always with me in the back of my mind. I wish I could receive a letter from you every morning when I wake up.

More than that, I wish I could hear your voice, feel your touch, smell your hair. I wish I could talk to you in person and laugh at your funny jokes. You always make me laugh.

Oh Thomas, tell me this war is going to be over! Tell me you're coming home! I don't know how much more I can take of this waiting.

Job or no job, my satisfaction and contentment can only last so long without you. I am a workingwoman, but I need my sweetheart by my side!

Love always,

Donna

June 2, 1944

(Thomas) Dear Donna,

I have received your letters, and I am so proud of you for finding happiness and purpose at your job. All the work you women are doing for our country is keeping our military armed and strong. We owe you all a very big thank you.

My platoon is being sent to Poland to fortify a division that is coming under harsh German pressure. It is important for us to make progress in the East because Germany is pushing that direction quickly now. I can't tell you too much through these letters because the Army is trying to keep our operations quiet. We're going on a freight train headed out next week.

I am excited to get out of France. It is hard work moving through the German forces here. I don't know if Poland would have been my first choice though. The Germans had no mercy on Poland. In France and other western European countries, the Germans left most civilians alive and took few prisoners. In the East, it was a much different story. In Poland, Hitler has no desire to leave survivors. Also, I've heard that the winter there is brutal. I haven't felt my toes from frostbite for weeks now, and this is supposed to be mild compared to where we're headed.

I miss you more each day. I never knew my heart could sustain such pain and loneliness. I constantly think of the day when I can come back home and see you. I replay how we will reunite over and over in my head. I imagine us running to each other and

wrapping each other in a hug so warm and loving, we never let go. It is thoughts like this that keep me strong, that give me hope.

I love you and always will.

Thomas

August 4, 1944

(Donna) Dear God,

What's happening with Thomas? Why haven't I heard from him? It has been weeks longer than his normal letter-sending schedule. I have been so filled with worry over him and what might have happened. Around the neighborhood I have seen a growing number of houses with gold stars hanging in their windows signifying a soldier who had perished. With each passing day, the dread inside me deepens at the thought of Thomas' house soon donning one of those stars. God, if there is any news to be heard of Thomas, let it come swiftly, whatever it is.

I received other news from my job today. My manager did not talk to me personally, but he did tell other women. During a lunch break, a few ladies and I were sharing a table and it didn't take long for one of them to mention the latest news. I cannot say whether I was surprised or not. In retrospect, it makes sense that us women are being used to fuel war production, but I never stopped to ask myself what will happen once the fighting is over. What happens when our country doesn't need any more bombs or airplanes? I found out the answer today. As soon as Hitler gives in and our boys come home, it's quitting day for us. There will be no job vacancy once the war is over. We will have served our purpose, and I fear I will have lost mine. Even though I have only been working for a short time, less than a year, I cannot imagine being content to stay home for the rest of my life. I feel betrayed by my own country for opening my eyes to the beauty of work, purpose, and productivity only to have it ripped away once my services are no longer needed.

(Thomas) Dear God,

Poland is a mess. The German Blitzkrieg ripped through this country and left it to burn in misery. We connected with the division we are to join. They looked wearier than any group of men I have seen. Their eyes had seen more than I could imagine, and it showed in their faces like an ominous warning for what is to come.

Yesterday, I witnessed something I don't think will ever leave my mind for as long as I live. We came to a town called Gross-Rosen in Lower Silesia, Poland. As we marched through the small town, we smelled a horrible stench coming from the outskirts of town. We went to investigate the smell, following our noses into a nightmare. There was a German concentration camp situated just outside of town. The Germans abandoned the camp before we had a chance to get them. The smell became identifiable very quickly: death and decay. As we neared the camp, it became obvious something very serious was afoot. It was the quietness. The air was still and not a sound moved through the expanse of space. A few men and I began to wander inside the iron gates. The image I was about to witness is one I could have never prepared for. Less than a few steps into the camp, we came across stacks and piles of dead people along the walls. They were stacked like cordwood in neat rows. The interchangeability of the bodies was what blew me away. I tried to imagine what had happened to these people. How long had they been in here? Their bodies were unbelievably gaunt like they hadn't eaten in weeks. Their faces had the look of pure horror. The smell was so overwhelming, I almost wretched. As soon as we had made it inside, our company commander charged in and ordered us to get out immediately. He said diseases were running rampant in this camp, and we could catch typhoid. We ran outside, but I could not shake what I had seen from my head. I tried to put on a natural face for the rest of the men in our company, but my heart was forever scarred. Our commander went back in for a moment and took a few pictures of the carnage. Will was beside himself with passionate anger. He was fuming frustration and confusion at the whole scene. He was mumbling about the terrible things he would have done if the Germans had still been there. This experience fed his fire to kill any and all Germans we come across. I don't blame him; how could humans do such things to each other? Surely those people do not deserve to live after what they've done.

My reaction to the concentration camp is not one of anger, but one of deep sadness not just for the victims but for all of us. The Germans, the French, the Japanese, the Americans. What have we gotten ourselves into? This war is creating such pain, suffering, and death on all sides. There is something in some men that seeks power and the rest of us follow blindly for the sake of home and nation. There are few dissenters, too few. I have come to believe that there is no cause great enough to justify all this destruction of life. If there is another war, there will no winner. It is madness, and it is consuming me.

August 28, 1944

(Thomas) Dear Donna,

I apologize for the long delay in my letters. It seems I have been at a loss for words for the past few weeks. Our division has been moving quickly through Poland, and it has been a whirlwind of battles followed by days of nothing but traveling. The winter is everything I was dreading and more. I never could have imagined such a cold! It seems the winter has seeped into my heart, Donna, because I often cannot lift my spirits to do much of anything except eat, walk, and sleep. I feel myself going through the motions I know so well in this Army. I joined the Army expecting excitement, danger, and purpose. I have come to find misery, confusion, and deep sadness.

We have a big battle coming upon us within a few days. I guess I finally found the will to write because I am scared of this one. It is going to be one of largest offensive battles I've been in. Will and I have received our orders, and now we're waiting with the rest of our division for the time to move out. For now, my mind is constantly filled with thoughts of you and of home. I try to think of what you might be doing, maybe sleeping, going to work, or talking with Ruth. I do whatever I can to escape the reality of war around me.

I apologize for my candid and honest writing, but I thought you would want to know the truth of my situation over here. Will has managed to stay strong and keep his spirits alive with thoughts of hatred toward the enemy and love for home. I don't know

how, but I know he will be coming home as a hero. He's got what it takes, and I think he's going to make it out alive.

As for me, I am doing what I can to cope with everything I've seen and experienced here. This war struck a cord in me that I never could have foreseen. It has taken more from me than I had available to give.

I miss you more than words could say. My entire being aches to see you, feel you, and be close to you. I cannot say whether this war will be over soon or not. All I know for sure is that I want to come home and I loathe this wretched war with every piece of my being.

With Never Ending Love,

Thomas

(Donna) Dear God,

The price of war is grave sacrifice. On both sides of the fight, on all fronts of the battle, home and abroad, sacrifice is unavoidable. War takes and takes without remorse. Its greedy tongue swallows life, light, and love. I thought I had done my part, had given enough, had worked my share. I thought this war had taken from me everything it could have. I was dreadfully wrong.

Today is Sunday, my day off. Ruth's as well. The day was unfolding like any other until the door rang at an unusual hour. I opened it to find Ruth. Instantly, I detected an air of defeat in her body language. One hand clutched the doorframe while the other hung loosely at her side clutching a single sheet of paper. Her dress was disheveled and she didn't even bother to wear a jacket. Her hair was still in its nighttime bun and she had a hint of smeared mascara under her eyes, probably remnants of last night's dancing at the USO. Before I dared to say something, her trembling lips parted and she lifted her eyes toward mine for the first time. I had never seen Ruth look so scared and weak. My heart sank, and I already felt a lump growing in my throat. After a moment, she managed to say, "Donna, it's Thomas."

Inside, my world began swirling, and I could barely hold myself upright. I immediately let her in, and we sat on the couch. She grasped both my hands in hers and silent tears welled in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. “Thomas is dead, Donna. He was killed in action in Poland two weeks ago.” At that moment, I stood up and looked around the room. Breathing short quick breaths and feeling my whole body begin to sweat, I took in the room. Everything was still in its normal place. Then why did everything feel so incredibly wrong? I let my knees relax, and I collapsed to the couch in a sobbing mess. Ruth handed me the telegram and I read its contents in a blurry haze, barely distinguishing the words and letters until I saw the one: “KILLED.” Thomas has been killed. I let out a guttural scream that came from a deep primal part of me that I no longer had control over. I tilted back my head, clenched my fists, and screamed the only thing I could think, “No.” The sobs took over and my scream petered out into a raspy whisper. Ruth wrapped her arms around me and time no longer existed. Mother’s favorite clock ticked the seconds and minutes away with its methodical beat, leaving me in a world of pain separated from any chronological reality. The rest of the morning passed without my notice or care. Thank goodness, I let my parents go to church by themselves this morning, because they would have thought the house was burning down, or something unimaginably worse...

(Donna) Dear God,

The rest of that day passed with me talking to family, to Thomas’ family, crying, and sharing confusion. I was not there though. My body was a hollow shell, and my mind had receded to a distant realm of disbelief, shock, and searing pain. I held the music box he had given me. I could still remember his eager and pleased expression when he handed it to me. Now, I hold the box in my hands and feel nothing but numbness. I carry the music box in my purse, never letting it stray far from my side. I haven’t had the strength or courage to crank the lever and listen to its tune. Music has a way of piercing the soul, and I don’t think my heart could bear such agony. A part of me wants to remove the lever so the song can never be heard again.

That night I distinctly remember. Ruth and I snuck away from our families and stood on the back porch of her house. The air was cold, but neither she nor I seemed to notice. She reached into her coat pocket and revealed an envelope with my name scrawled across the front in Thomas' polished handwriting. In the twilight, I could tell that Ruth was beginning to cry, and I saw her breaths shorten as their mist swirled in the fading light and chilling cold. As she handed me the letter, she spoke quietly, "He wrote it before he left and told me to give it to you if he were to die." I reached for the envelope with shaky hands and held it for a moment in the receding porch light. "Thank you, Ruth," I said earnestly and gave her a hug. As anxious as I was to read its contents, I decided to bring the letter home first. Ruth understood, and we said our goodnights, promising to meet again in the morning. My parents and I returned home in relative silence, and I headed straight for my room. Unable to hold back my anticipation, I carefully broke the envelope's seal and unfolded its double-sheeted contents.

January 29, 1941

Dear Donna,

If you are holding this letter in your hands, I will never hold your hands again. This thought alone is too dreadful to imagine, and yet it is a possibility that we both must face. I wish more than anything to return home to you, but this is war, and our individual outcomes are uncertain at best. I am about to join a movement, a mass mobilization that is responding to a call for help. We all have become parts of a greater whole as a nation and as an alliance against the enemy. Our fates are and always have been in the hands of God, and I find peace knowing that He holds both of our futures securely. Whether or not our lives continue to intertwine or if my departure for war is our final goodbye, you have imparted your wisdom on me. Whether or not you know this Donna, your shy demeanor and questioning intuition have instilled in me a fresher perspective on this life, and I intend to experience it through a new lens of inquisition and respect for dissenting views. I plan to examine myself more deeply and how I fit in to this world. If I never see you again, my love, know that I was forever changed by you.

Remember that you have Ruth, your family, and friends. They are never far away, and they will take good care of you. Remember that I always love you and am alive in your spirit forever. You carry my fire now, Donna, and I could not imagine a more perfect person to entrust myself to than you.

With Never Ending Love,

Thomas

Annotated Bibliography

Contextual Historical Background

Foner, Eric. *Give Me Liberty! An American History Vol. 2*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

p. 814 This section broadly explains home front mobilization, including the Office of War Information's rhetoric, the continued emphasis on capitalism and free enterprise, and the rise of labor, especially for women. Foner describes how women's labor was framed as temporary, always just until the men returned. He analyzes wartime advertisements that were targeted toward women and discusses how these advertisements mention victory and sacrifice but never the topics of rights, independence, or self-determination for women.

Hapke, Laura. *Women of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s*. Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 1995.

This book provides contextual historical information on the attitudes surrounding women's work during the years before the scope of my thesis (World War II). It describes how women faced hostility from society when taking jobs during the Depression because it was commonly believed that women would only be stealing jobs from qualified men during the time of high unemployment rates. This article also discusses women's work and the obstacles facing women during WWI and the 1920s.

O'Neill, William. *A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

This book provides historical information on the political history of the home front, including laws passed that affected women's labor. This book also contains detailed information on wartime rationing, an issue that affected women's lives in significant ways during the war. This book includes many analyses of public opinion polls conducted during the war on issues about foreign policy and internal affairs. O'Neill argues that before Pearl Harbor, because of Americans' distance from the war in Europe, they developed a false sense of security and did not want to become involved in "distasteful foreign quarrels."

Terkel, Studs. *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II*. New York: The New Press, 1997.

This book contains a wealth of valuable oral histories from all angles of WWII, including a section devoted to documenting the experiences on the home front and especially the voices of women during that time. These oral histories are important because they reveal the daily lives of women on the home front from dating, working, rationing, living with family, and dealing with the loss of loved ones abroad. Most of the oral histories from

women on the home front are positive in tone. The oral histories almost all start with descriptions of how the women were mostly unaware of the war before it became an unavoidable reality at home—loved ones left to fight, rationing kicked in, and there were many jobs that needed to be done to keep the country operational. Many women spoke of the freedom they felt by earning their own money, and these voices helped me create Donna's positive experience with work. Other women voiced how sick and tired they were of the bloodshed and how their resentment for the war worsened as the years went by. This resentment is where I found inspiration for Donna's internal turmoil over "Thou shalt not kill," and the hypocrisy of Christian men going to war.

The War. Directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. Washington, DC: Public Broadcasting Service, 2007. Accessed via www.Netflix.com, March 25, 2013.

Women and Working

Yellin, Emily. *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*. New York: Free Press, 2004.

I used this book for its documentation of the lives of women on the home front. The book explains how women became involved with the war effort by joining the Red Cross, the United Service Organization, and the Office of Civilian Defense. In the narrative, I used the information on the "Red Cross girls" when writing about Ruth's volunteering with the Red Cross. The book also has an in depth description of women's labor during the time, and what the work environment was like for women in war jobs. I used this information when describing Donna's time at work, being bullied by men, finding out that her job was temporary, and witnessing the racial discrimination.

Colman, Penny. *Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Home Front in World War II*. New York: Crown Books, 1998.

This is a middle school level history book about Rosie the Riveter and her historical context. The book discusses FDR's Fair Employment Practices Commission and its successes and failures. This book is useful for describing race relations and how African American women faced a double bind, or double discrimination at the workplace because of their intersection of race and sex. It also has useful information about women's daily lives on the home front, told through vignettes. The best part about this book is the large amount of photos of 1940s women, almost one per page for all 103 pages.

Oppenheimer, Valerie Kincade. "Demographic Influence on Female Employment and the Status of Women." *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 78: 1973.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2776613>.

This article provides contextual information on working women beginning in the early 1900s. It discusses the demographics of women who commonly found jobs in the early and mid 1900s, how they were treated at work, and which types of jobs they normally worked. The article also explains how women's work grew and evolved in accordance with increased industrialization in the U.S.

Waite, Linda J. "Working Wives: 1940-1960." *American Sociological Review* Vol. 41, 1976. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2094373>.

This article describes women's work in the time period following WWII. According to the article, female employment rose significantly following WWII. This surprised me because I thought that during the 1950s women mostly returned to their traditional home-laborer statuses.

"Women Want To 'Get it Over!'" Radio Corporation of America. New Jersey: 1944. <http://www.archives.gov/southeast/education/resources-by-state/wwii-women.html>.

This leaflet from 1944 is interesting because it lists a set of recommendations for employers looking to hire women. The list includes bulleted items such as, "Limit her hours to 8 hours per day, offer rest periods from monotonous jobs, avoid horseplay or 'kidding' because she may resent it, and finally, appoint a woman counselor to represent the thoughts and wants of your female employees." The leaflet has various pictures of women using fine tuned machines with captions that read, "Women are Careful, Teachable, Patient, and Cooperative." This helps me get an idea of positive work environments some women experienced.

"Training Women for War Production." Narrated by Eleanor Roosevelt. U.S. National Youth Administration, 1945. <http://www.youtube.com>. Accessed April 20, 2012.

This video shows scenes of women working with heavy machinery, like welding tools on airplane assembly lines. Eleanor Roosevelt urges young women to take an active role in the war effort and take on war jobs, like hospital work, large-scale food preparation, radio operations, and more. This exemplifies the efforts made by the U.S. government, specifically, the War Labor Board, to recruit women for war jobs.

African Americans at Work

Boris, Eileen. "You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing with Your Wife: Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II." *American Quarterly* Vol. 50 (1998). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30041600>.

I am interested in the ways in which U.S. women faced gendered discrimination when seeking and working in war jobs. African American men and women also faced severe racial discrimination in almost every aspect of their jobs. However, white women did not identify with the struggling African Americans. Instead, most white women

avoided and complained about having mixed-race work environments, and some even walked out on their jobs in response to the interracial work places. This article contains quotations from African American men and women describing the harsh attitudes they encountered at their jobs. This article references a book, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*.

Womanhood

Delano, Page Dougherty. "Making Up for War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture." *Feminist Studies* Vol. 26 (2000). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178592>.

This article describes the culture surrounding women's application of make-up during WWII. Some make-up wearing women were associated with sex or prostitution, for others, it was a sign of female agency and sexual power. For women who regarded make-up as a symbol of their strength and womanhood, this quotation exemplifies their sentiments, "Beauty is her badge of courage." The article analyzes how make-up wearing women were portrayed in war posters. Interestingly, the War Production Board went so far as to ensure that make-up never appeared on the list of materials rationed during the war.

Mower, Jennifer M. "Pretty and Patriotic: Women's Consumption of Apparel During World War II." PhD diss., Oregon State University, 2011.

This PhD dissertation by a former OSU student discusses the federal regulations limiting the consumption and development of women's fashion during WWII and how women reacted to and were influenced by these regulations. The author provides background information on the War Production Board and its enforcement of rationing in the U.S. The author interviewed thirty women who were young during the war and asked them about their experiences with fashion and clothes during that time. I used the broad background information about the federal government in WWII, how it tried to supply the war, and how these efforts affected women's lives in more ways than merely clothing.

STG.Brown.edu. "What Did You Do in the War, Grandma? An Oral History of Rhode Island Women during World War II." Accessed March 28, 2013.

http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/

This website is a good source of interviews of women on the home front during WWII conducted by high school students in Rhode Island. The women interviewed share about almost every aspect of home front life, from gaining jobs, missing loved ones, home keeping, and American attitudes about the war throughout the time period.

Winchell, Meghan K. *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses during World War II*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

An important aspect of young women's lives during this time was going to the USO, United Services Organization, and spending time with soldiers. This book discusses how

volunteering at the USO helped women feel like they were making a positive difference in the war effort. The USO is not a major theme of my home front narrative, but I am interested to learn more about how participating in the USO impacted women on the home front.

Mobilization/Motivation

Gernes, Arthur C. "Speech from the War Manpower Commission." Boston. July 31, 1944.

This speech highlights the importance of rationing and war production among the American people. The main issue of the speech is the lack of manpower in various New England cities, like Boston. One motivational quotation of this speech is, "Do we at home wish to reduce our prospects of victory? If not, then let us grapple with this menace of absenteeism or desertions from war jobs until it has completely disappeared from the entire industrial scene. And we can do it." I use this rhetoric in my thesis and show how the labor posters inspired Donna to work.

"War Manpower Job Flier Promoting Women to Register for War Jobs." United States Employment Services. Mobile, Alabama: 1942.
<http://www.archives.gov/southeast/education/resources-by-state/wwii-women.html>.

The first lines of this leaflet are enough to make an impression. In large block font, it reads, "If Hitler came to Mobile—Every woman would defend her home with a gun, a knife, or her bare fingers." The leaflet goes on to implore Mobile women to take war jobs. It gives examples of women doing manual jobs, like operating drill presses and assembling engines. The leaflet calls for 6 million additional women to take war jobs now, concluding with, "Help bring them back alive!"

War Correspondence

"Home Front and War Front in World War II: The Correspondence of Jill Oppenheim de Grazia and Alfred de Grazia (1942-1945)," edited by Ami Hueber de Grazia, Metron Publications, Princeton, NJ. (CD-Rom documents compiled into a PDF)

This collection of letters between husband and wife are numerous, about sixty total. Jill and Alfred's letters are beautiful in their handwriting, honesty, and candidness. Alfred tells Jill about his opportunity to tour Paris. In every letter he tells her about how much he misses her. It seems like most of what gave the letters their value was not the content about daily happenings and routines, but the affirmation and acknowledgement of their continued love for each other despite the separation. However, they also write quite a bit about daily details. Jill tells Alfred about family skiing trips, letters from family members, and the weather. From one of Alfred's letters, one can sense that the information shared in war letters was often a joy to read, but soldiers did not want to feel "mothered." Once again, the affirmation of love is always the closing note. "But to you, my darling, I will be very sweet & gentle. I need it and you - the gentleness

& the one to whom to be gentle. I want you to have fun, but don't rub it in. Just as I want to be sympathized with, but I don't want to be mothered or pitied or doctored. Except, of course, that I want to love you very much & do despite this or that distance. Believe me, only the army could do it. Take care of yourself and I'll do the same. Love, Al”
I used these letters to get a better sense of how people wrote in the 1940s and what they wrote about.

Soldiers' Experiences

Terkel, Studs. *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II*. New York: The New Press, 1997.

This book contained oral histories from a large range of angles about the war. It was the perfect tool for my narrative on Thomas because it contained the stories of soldiers from every step of the war process, from signing up, to training camps, to transportation, to culture shock, to battlefield action, to camaraderie, and PTSD. I used the oral history of a soldier who spent time in Pine Camp, the camp where Thomas was trained, so I knew my narrative was accurate about the details of that experience. Another oral history told the story of his battalion discovering an abandoned concentration camp in Holland, a story that I also adapted with Thomas. There was a story about the racial segregation between soldiers on a ship across the Atlantic, another aspect of Thomas' story that I incorporated. Another important detail that I gained from multiple oral histories was the strong bond of camaraderie in battle, a bond that I emphasized with Thomas and his friend, Will.

The Thin Red Line. Directed by Terrence Malick. 20th Century Fox, 1999.

This film tells the story of American soldiers fighting in the Pacific during WWII. The screenplay for this movie is poignant, and the story's depictions of the dehumanizing effects of war were useful for my narrative of Thomas' unraveling. I wanted Thomas to enter the war with ambition and an open mind and later find the cruel forces of war to be so destructive that he loses his hold on life. A few of the movie quotes that struck me are:

Pvt. Bell: “My dear wife. You get something twisted out of your insides by all this blood, filth and noise. I want to stay changeless for you. I want to come back to you the man I was before. How do we get to those other shores? To those blue hills?”

Pvt. Witt: “This great evil. Where does it come from? How'd it steal into the world? What seed, what root did it grow from? Who's doin' this? Who's killin' us? Robbing us of life and light. Mockin' us with the sight of what we might've known. Is this darkness in you, too? Have you passed through this night?”

Lt. Col. Gordon Tall: “All the sacrificed for me... Poured out like water on the ground. All I might have given for love's sake; too late. Dying. Slow as a tree.”

Rationing

“An Emergency Statement to the People of the United States.” U.S. War Production Board. Des Moines, Iowa. 1942.
<http://www.ameshistoricalsociety.org/exhibits/events/rationing.htm>.

This article gives a brief overview of World War II rationing, listing the commodities that became rationed during the course of the war. This also includes primary source photos of ration books, ration coins, ration stickers, and political cartoons.

“Expect Few Nylons Until Late 1947.” United Press. 1946.
<http://www.ameshistoricalsociety.org/exhibits/events/rationing.htm>.

I found this article useful in the way that it describes how women love nylons. It describes how nylons and other women’s apparel items were becoming rationed. It includes an article from *Life* magazine in April 1942. It begins with the line, “Uncle Sam last week assumed the role of fashion designer.” This information correlates with the PhD dissertation that I listed earlier about women’s fashion and how it was affected by war rationing.

Writing Fiction/Character Development

Epstein, Eric. *Crafty Screenwriting: Writing Movies That Get Made*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2002.

Chapter three of this book helped me learn how to construct complex and interesting characters for my fictional narrative. Main characters need specific, unusual details about them that the audience could not predict just by knowing the character’s purpose in the story. I made Donna a religiously trained young woman who secretly loathes church. Thomas is a patriot who does not want to kill. He has a “ghost” or something that haunts him and drives him to war—his father’s death (KIA in WWI). Donna has low self-esteem and minimal life goals, but after finding purpose through working in a factory, she discovers that she has a limitless potential and wants to continue working and become a powerful woman. As both stories unfold, I show how the war had dreadful as well as inspirational impacts on those involved.