

Study Questions for Paul Fussell, *Wartime*

Below are study questions to help guide your reading of Paul Fussell's book, Wartime. Remember that you are only required to read **chapters 1-3, 5, 7, 9-11, 13, and 18**. The number in parentheses is the chapter to which the question corresponds.

1. What specific examples does Fussell cite to show the naïveté of the British and American military establishments? What kinds of things did they say and do before the war that, in hindsight, seem rather silly? (1)
2. Fussell argues that over time the war moved “from light to heavy duty.” What does he mean by this? What characterized the changes from “heavy” to “light” duty? (1)
3. According to Fussell, why do wars “begin in complacency?” Why don't people anticipate how terrible things will get? (1)
4. After reading chapter two, why might you laugh at the phrase “precision bombing?” What evidence does Fussell cite that convinces you that you should laugh? (2)
5. What effect did bombing from the air have on the course of the war? Were its effects intended or unintended? (2)
6. What was Operation COBRA? Why does Fussell discuss it in this chapter? (2)
7. What sorts of “blunders” occurred throughout the war? Why did the military, and soldiers in particular, commit so many “blunders” during World War II? Why did they remain largely unknown to the public? (3)
8. What role did “bright ideas” play in World War II? (3)

9. What happened to the officers in Gavin Ewart's poem "Incident, Second World War?" How does this poem support Fussell's case that the essence of the war was "blunders?" (3)
10. For many soldiers, why did service in the military seem much like school? For civilians, why did the war effort also seem much like school? (5)
11. Why do "school" images and idioms seem appropriate when describing the war? (5)
12. How does Fussell define "chickenshit?" What are some examples cited in chapter 7 that would qualify under his definition? (7)
13. What caused so much "chickenshit" to happen during the war? How did it affect morale? (7)
14. What do you think are some of the important lessons Fussell is trying to teach his readers in his chapter on "chickenshit"? (7)
15. What is the "idiom" of chickenshit? (7)
16. Describe the stereotypes assigned to various nationalities that emerged during World War II. Why did such widespread stereotyping occur (or *have to occur*)? (9)
17. According to Fussell, soldiers "reduce[d] the world to a simplified sketch featuring a limited series of [military, civilian, and enemy] classifications into which people...[were] fitted." Why did troops create classifications and how did they determine who belonged in which category? How did the troops behave differently toward members of different classifications? (9)
18. How did the American media, particularly through advertising, "type cast" U.S. soldiers? (9)

19. Why, in World War II (and unlike in other wars), did “general disillusionment precede the firing of the first shot”? (10)
20. In what ways was World War II perceived and remembered differently than World War I? Why did people have a different attitude toward war the second time around? (10)
21. Why did the soldiers of World War II fight? What were they fighting (and dying) for? What motivated them to keep going? (10)
22. What does Fussell mean when he argues that the war was fought in an “ideological vacuum”? If his arguments are correct, to what extent is it appropriate to call World War II, “The Good War?” (10)
23. What was the purpose of “keeping up morale?” How was manipulating language – for example the use of euphemisms – employed as a tactic for raising morale? (11)
24. Why was Winston Churchill’s “V” for victory gesture ironic? How was the *whole campaign* to boost morale ironic? (11)
25. What were some of the tactics intended to boost soldiers’ morale? (i.e. “credit”) How did these tactics differ on the Allies and Axis sides? (11)
26. Did attempts to boost morale help the war effort? What legacy did the “morale culture” of World War II have for the postwar media? (11)
27. Why did it matter that radio, popular music, and movies all spoke with “one voice” during the war? How did the government assure that all spoke with “one voice”? What changes in music, movies, and other forms of entertainment occurred as a direct result of the war? (13)

28. What judgments does Fussell make of wartime magazine and radio advertising? How was it different – and perhaps more troubling – than the ads during World War I? (13)

29. According to the author, “Americans were unable to grasp the meaning of the war and wartime combat experiences.” (268) Why was that so and why does it matter? (13)

30. Why did the troops come to believe that “optimistic publicity and euphemism had rendered their experience so falsely that it would never be readily communicable?” (268) (18)

31. Why did front line troops get angry at those who viewed the war from afar? Why couldn’t those at the rear or on the home front come to terms with the reality of the war? (18)