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Author(s): Christopher P. Loss

Source: *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (Jul., 2003), pp. 811-834

Published by: [Society for Military History](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3397327>

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Reading Between Enemy Lines: Armed Services Editions and World War II



Christopher P. Loss¹

Abstract

This article examines the real and symbolic importance of reading books—especially Armed Services Edition paperback books—during World War II. Lingering memories of World War I propagandizing at home, coupled with knowledge of Nazism's hostility to books abroad, compelled the American publishing community to fight for the free production and dissemination of all reading matter during World War II. In addition to exploring what books soldiers read and why, this article shows how the emergence of the Armed Services Edition paperback became a critical source of liberal democratic rejuvenation during the war as well as a harbinger of the pluralist conception of liberalism after it.

SHORTLY before the D-Day invasion of France in June 1944, Special Services officers distributed cigarettes, candy, and, to each of several thousand American soldiers, one Armed Services Edition (ASE) paperback book.² As part of the army's effort both to entertain and to calm ner-

1. I am grateful to Terry Belanger, Bernie Carlson, and Joseph F. Kett for their helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay; to Derek S. Hoff, for his friendship and scholarly advice; to the editors of the *Journal of Military History*, for their kind assistance and helpful recommendations; to Catherine Gavin Loss, for all her support and knowledge of twentieth-century American education; and to our daughter, Susannah Marie Loss, who loves it when we read books to her.

2. John Jamieson, *Editions for the Armed Services, Inc.: A History Together with the Complete List of 1,324 Books Published for American Armed Forces Overseas* (New York: n.p., 1948), 26–31. According to John Y. Cole, the correct number of ASE books was 1,322. For his explanation, see Cole, "The ASE: An Introduction," in *Books in Action: The Armed Services Editions*, ed. John Y. Cole (Washington: Library of Congress Center for the Book, 1984), 10–11 n. 1.

Christopher P. Loss is a graduate student in education and history at the University of Virginia.

vous soldiers in the days and hours prior to embarkation, General Dwight D. Eisenhower's staff approved the distribution of these lightweight, foldable, and disposable books.³ *New Yorker* foreign correspondent A. J. Liebling, who covered the invasion from the American marshaling areas along the southern coast of England, described soldiers reading their custom-fitted, portable ASE volumes right up to and during their journeys across the English Channel. "Troops," Liebling reported, were "spread all over the LCIL (Landing Craft, Infantry, Large) . . . most of them reading paper-cover ASE books."⁴

At the outbreak of war, however, few people in or outside the military would have predicted that hip-pocket-sized paperback books would perform such a critical diversionary, much less strategic, role in the United States's worldwide military struggle. Initially, the U.S. Army assumed that a combination of book drives and its own miniscule library holdings would provide soldiers with enough reading material to last throughout the war.⁵ These initiatives proved inadequate: there were persistent book shortages, and the unwieldy sizes and weights of many of the hardback volumes the army collected made them difficult to ship and even more difficult for soldiers to carry. But while the British, Soviets, and Germans also provided books to their soldiers, they never formulated a cost-effective transportable alternative to the clunky hardback. The United States military did. Between 1943 and 1946 members of the United States Army Library Service (ALS) collaborated with the Council on Books in Wartime, the publishing industry's advisory group to the federal government, and successfully adapted available rotary-press technology to publish 122 million copies of 1,322 specially designed, lightweight, throwaway ASE paperback titles to meet the voracious reading habits of America's globetrotting soldiers.⁶ The story of what the *Saturday Evening Post* described in 1945 as "the greatest book-publishing project in history" is the subject of this essay.⁷

3. John Jamieson, *Books for the Army: The Army Library Service in the Second World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 159. According to Michael Hackenberg, eight thousand sets of Series "C" and "D" books were allocated for disbursement in southern England before the D-Day invasion. For more details, see Hackenberg, "The Armed Services Editions in Publishing History," in Cole, ed., *Books in Action*, 18.

4. A. J. Liebling, "A Reporter At Large: Cross-Channel Trip I," *New Yorker*, 1 July 1944, 38.

5. For information on the book drive shortage, see Frederic G. Melcher, "Editorial: Our Men Want More and More Books," *Publishers' Weekly*, 11 April 1942, 1393.

6. A brief discussion of the difficulties experienced by the German, Soviet, and British militaries in providing soldiers with books is included in David G. Wittels, "What the G.I. Reads," *Saturday Evening Post*, 23 June 1945, 11, 91-92. For a complete list of all the ASE titles, see Cole, *Books in Action*, 35-78.

7. Wittels, "What the G.I. Reads," 11.

To date, scholars have only partly uncovered the significance of the ASE paperbacks. The existing literature has treated the development of the ASE volumes in isolation, as a novel moment in American publishing and military history when disposable paperback editions—by authors from Charles Dickens and Mark Twain to Ernie Pyle and Max Brand—helped entertain bored troops, while they unexpectedly contributed to the expansion of the budding paperback book industry.⁸ This approach fails on two fronts. First, by focusing solely on publishers' financial self-interest, the conventional story neglects to address the publishing community's and army's ideological interest in providing paperbacks to soldiers. Second, the standard account does not capture the important role that reading books played in the army's overarching military strategy, both before and after the arrival of the ASE paperbacks in 1943. Despite well-publicized manpower shortages throughout the war, a quarter million recruits, many of them African Americans, were denied entrance into the U.S. Army between 1940 and 1942 because they could not read.⁹ During the war, the army relied on printed matter of all types—from the *Field Service Regulations Guide*, the soldier's primary source for training information, to *Stars and Stripes*, the daily army newspaper, to some nine hundred other army technical guides—to inform and instruct both new recruits and seasoned soldiers.¹⁰ In the civilian sphere, meanwhile, the American Library Association encouraged public libraries to double as “war information centers,” where citizens could obtain current news about the prosecution of the United States's war effort.¹¹ Towards the war's end, United States, Soviet, and British forces distributed “reeducation” books and developed anti-fascist reeducation programming, of admittedly dubious quality, to rehabilitate (or “denazify”) German prisoners of war in order to forge a lasting peace.¹² Considered more broadly, then, both in and outside the military,

8. For the best contemporary history of the ASE, see Jamieson, *Editions for the Armed Services, Inc.* For more recent treatments, see Cole, *Books in Action*; Kenneth C. Davis, *Two Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 56–82. For a thoughtful overview of the history of the ASE, see Daniel J. Miller, *Books Go To War: Armed Services Editions in World War II* (Charlottesville, Va.: Book Arts Press, 1996). Miller organized a museum exhibit on the place of the ASE paperback in publishing history at the University of Virginia.

9. Cyril O. Houle et al., *The Armed Services and Adult Education* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1947), 172–89.

10. Frank M. Rahill, “Army Books—and an Army Bookstore,” *Publishers' Weekly*, 30 October 1943, 1694–96.

11. Julia Wright Merrill, ed., “Library War Information Centers,” *Libraries and the War Circular* 5 (4 June 1942): 1.

12. See, for instance, Arthur L. Smith, *The War for the German Mind: Re-educating Hitler's Soldiers* (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 1996); Ron Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World*

print culture served a multitude of important functions that extended well beyond the use of books as mere amusements.

The Council on Books in Wartime also thought of its ASE paperbacks as more than just a way to occupy soldiers' spare time. As other scholars have noted, the Council's publishers hoped to expand the growing paperback trade by working with the federal government and the military during the war. But the nature of the publishing-military wartime partnership remained unclear until the two sides collaborated to publish the ASE volumes in 1943. The circumstances that resulted in the decision to produce the ASE paperbacks constitute only half of this story, however. The other, more interesting, half deals with the Council's efforts to promote the free production, dissemination, and reading of books as a vital source of liberal democratic rejuvenation in the face of Nazi fascism abroad and memories of World War I propagandizing at home. I argue that the Council's institutional commitment to the spread of liberal-democratic ideology in the fight against anti-democratic enemies, and not simply profit-driven self-interest, was central to its book promotional campaigns and to its decision to publish ASE paperbacks with and for an army patron sometimes hostile to the complete exercise of democratic freedoms. By considering the interplay between the Council's and the army's institutional and ideological motivations in providing soldiers with books, I situate wartime reading in a broader historical context, offering a new understanding that accounts for the real as well as symbolic importance of books and reading in wartime.¹³

War II (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); James F. Kent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Kent is the most generous interpreter of the American denazification efforts: "The American experience suggests the naïveté implicit in the assumption that one people can 'reeducate' another toward democracy. It also suggests that example and exposure to alternatives are more effective in the long run" (p. 318).

13. American historians, except those of the New Left, have tended to downplay the importance of ideology—especially liberal democratic ideology—in their work, considering it, as Daniel Bell once famously suggested, a "dead end." This is a mistake. Recently, scholars as divergent as Richard A. Primus and Mark Mazower have shown that liberal democratic ideology explains as much about the twentieth century as do the century's other major political ideologies, Nazism and Communism. For Mazower's ideological history of the European twentieth century, see *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage, 1998); for Primus's excellent history of the explosion of liberal democratic discourse during and after World War II, see *The American Language of Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

American Publishing Goes to War

The American publishing community, like other segments of the education, leisure, and entertainment industries, initially did not know how to respond to the U.S. entrance into World War II. Following a pattern of activity pursued by other non-essential wartime manufacturers in the several months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, leading professionals from across the publishing community organized their industry in support of the United States war effort. A working committee of publishing luminaries—consisting of G. P. Putnam’s Sons director of publicity Clarence B. Boutell, Donald S. Klopfer of Random House, Frederic G. Melcher of *Publishers’ Weekly*, W. Warder Norton, president of W. W. Norton & Company, Robert M. Coles of the American Booksellers Association, George Oakes and Ivan Veit of the *New York Times*, and Stanley P. Hunnewell and Malcolm Johnson of the Book Publishers Bureau—convened to chart a responsible course of action for the industry. Calling themselves the Council on Books in Wartime, they sought to make the book publishing industry essential to the prosecution of the war effort. The process was not easy. One member of the working group later characterized its formative weeks in the spring of 1942 as a period of considerable uncertainty, describing the group as “a committee in search of a project.”¹⁴

On 18 June 1942, all but two of the Council’s seventy-two members voted to continue the organization’s activities for the duration of the war. In order to guide their activities, they elected a sixteen-member board and drafted a list of war aims to help shape their wartime activities. Believing that “books are useful, necessary, and indispensable,” the Council articulated three principal uses for books in wartime: to influence the “thinking” of the American people concerning the war effort; to help maintain the nation’s morale; and to communicate essential information about the importance of each individual’s contribution to winning the war against the Axis powers. Although vague and blandly jingoistic, the Council’s stated objectives gave Norton, the organization’s first chairman, the necessary freedom to experiment with a wide array of book-promoting activities.¹⁵

Experiment Norton did. The Council could not look for guidance to the World War I period, when the publishing industry did not collectively mobilize on behalf of the war effort. During that conflict, the American Library Association, with the assistance of individual voluntary organizations—such as the YMCA, YWCA, Knights of Columbus, Salvation Army, and, in particular, the Red Cross—collected and distributed hard-

14. Robert O. Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books in Wartime, 1942–1946* (New York: The Country Life Press, 1946), 4–5.

15. *Ibid.*, 8–11. The Council’s Board was elected on 26 June 1942.

back books to the army's embryonic library service and, in many cases, directly to the soldiers themselves. A lack of centralized planning and a dearth of available first-run hardback books, coupled with the relative briefness of U.S. involvement in World War I, curtailed the success of these book drive efforts. At the end of the war, the army downsized its library network along with almost all of its other nonessential operations.¹⁶

To the extent that the publishing industry's participation in the First World War was remembered at all, it was remembered negatively. Much of the public considered the mass media, and, by association, the publishing industry, as a hapless pawn of the federal government's maligned wartime propaganda agency, the Committee on Public Information (CPI), also known as the Creel Committee after its director, George Creel. As David M. Kennedy has noted, President Woodrow Wilson originally created the CPI to fulfill a broad democratic-educational mandate in the nation's businesses, schools, and homes. Wilson's belief in the possibilities of democratic propaganda, however, proved naïve, for the difference between enemy and democratic propaganda was not at all clear to most contemporary observers, who echoed political scientist Harold D. Lasswell's alarming assessment "that propaganda is one of the most powerful instrumentalities in the modern world."¹⁷ In the wake of Lasswell's and other experts' reports, Americans in academic and popular circles concurred that the use of propaganda had increased the frequency and ferocity of mob attacks against innocent German Americans; undermined the nation's "Home Front" morale; and, worse still, duped the wider American public into supporting Wilson's war to end wars.¹⁸ According to Allan M. Winkler, the American public's experience with the CPI during World War I left an undeniable legacy of public and congressional "suspicion" of state propaganda that implicated the entire mass media, including book and newspaper publishers, well into World War II.¹⁹

16. Jamieson, *Books for the Army*, 12–13.

17. Quote in Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942–45* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978), 149. For more information on World War I propaganda, see David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 45–92.

18. Christopher Capozzola, "The Only Badge Needed Is Your Patriotic Fervor: Vigilance, Coercion, and the Law in World War I America," *Journal of American History* 88 (March 2002): 1354–82.

19. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 5; Brett Gary, *The Nervous Liberals: Propaganda Anxieties from World War I to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 15–54. For the best account of World War II propaganda, see Winkler, who explains why the CPI's World War II federal institutional counterpart, the Office of War Information, never enjoyed the latitude and freedom afforded to Creel.

The publishing community, with the unsettling memories of World War I never far from its mind, therefore hoped not to repeat its murky service to the state a second time. To ensure a different outcome, the Council decided its interests would be best served by working directly for, as well as alongside, the federal government and military during World War II. Because of wartime cutbacks and governmental indecision, however, the Council's initial course of action favored the latter, focusing almost exclusively on voluntary promotional activities to advance the needs of the bookselling business.²⁰ Selecting "Books as Weapons in the War of Ideas" as its motto, Norton and the board decided to promote books, reading, and thus the publishing industry itself, as the utter antithesis of German fascism. The Council presented the war as a battle between two ideologies—one free and the other slave, one democratic and the other dictatorial—and linked the seemingly mundane act of freely selecting and reading books with the perpetuation of American liberty itself. The Council's earliest publicity campaign suggested that to read books was to strike a blow at the illiberal core of the Nazi racial state, which by 1938 had banned eighteen categories of books totaling 4,175 single titles, as well as the complete works of 565 authors, including nearly all Jewish authors.²¹ An article in *Publishers' Weekly* warned of how a Nazi-like cultural surveillance in America might affect publishing institutions and readers: Not only would publishers lose their "creative, productive [and] distributive capacity," but under such a system "the police or F.B.I. would have power to confiscate any book against which there was a complaint."²²

Actual Nazi military tactics throughout Europe reinforced fascism's real if remote threat to America's liberal democratic culture of freely exchanged information. Libraries in Great Britain—at Bootle, Bristol, Exeter, Liverpool, Plymouth, and the University of London—were devastated by indiscriminate German bombing raids in 1941–42; and throughout Western Europe, despite librarians' and curators' attempts to transport their most valuable holdings to caves and castles for safekeeping, entire libraries, including irreplaceable monastic collections, were

20. Most of the Council's efforts to work directly for the federal government prior to the publication of the ASE were unsuccessful. For a description of some of these projects, most of which amounted to little in the way of sales, see Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books*, ch. 3, pp. 54–63.

21. Leonidas E. Hill, "Nazi Attack on 'Un-German' Literature," in *The Holocaust and the Book: Destruction and Preservation*, ed. Jonathan Rose (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 28. Some Jewish authors' books, especially those of a specialized scientific nature, remained available in Germany during the war.

22. Frederic G. Melcher, "Editorial: Democratic vs. Totalitarian Publishing," *Publishers' Weekly*, 21 March 1942, 1163.

scattered and destroyed.²³ But Jewish and Slavic repositories and cultural centers located in Eastern Europe, the key military theater of Adolf Hitler's race war, suffered the most. During the war, Hitler created the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR) to accompany advancing Wehrmacht troops in order to confiscate books and other treasures from across occupied Europe for the purpose of developing a national library at the Hohe Schule, the planned Nazi University to be constructed in Chiemsee, Bavaria, after the war. In Eastern Europe alone, ERR units of twenty to twenty-five men looted and burned 375 archives, 402 museums, 531 institutes, and 957 libraries.²⁴ According to the *Library Journal*, the Nazis destroyed or stole one-half of all books in Czechoslovakia, three-quarters of all books in Poland, and, unbelievably, an estimated fifty-five million books from the Soviet Union, including the complete holdings of Russia's oldest library, located at the Peryaslavl School of Theology; the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences Library; and both the State Historical and State University libraries in Kiev.²⁵ Reports such as these undoubtedly emboldened the Council's membership and provided the organization with all the ammunition it needed to advance its principal claim: National Socialism was not only anti-democratic, it was inherently hostile to American freedom and thus to the American publishing industry itself.

The Council decided to build its wartime promotional efforts around the menace of German fascism. Hastily, the Council divided itself into discrete committees that subsequently developed plans for war-themed radio shows, a forum speaker series, films, reading lists, and a book-of-the-month club. Despite the Council's best intentions, however, most of these informational campaigns enjoyed marginal success. For instance, the speaker series lacked any real depth, and when speaking events were held, usually at public libraries, the crowds tended to be less than spectacular. The film series, meanwhile, held great promise for furthering the Council's wartime promotional agenda, but a nationwide shortage of film stock prevented the Council from developing film footage beyond a couple of newsreel clips.²⁶

The Council's radio programming aimed at children and adults proved far more successful. The Council's first attempt at radio programming turned out to be its most successful. In May 1942, the Coun-

23. Kenneth R. Shaffer, "The Conquest of Books: Part I of II," *Library Journal*, 15 January 1946, 82; Shaffer, "The Conquest of Books: Part II of II," *Library Journal*, 1 February 1946, 144.

24. Hill, "Nazi Attack on 'Un-German' Literature," 29.

25. Shaffer, "The Conquest of Books: Part I of II," 82-86; Shaffer, "The Conquest of Books: Part II of II," 144-47.

26. For a discussion of the limited success of the Film and Forum Committees, see Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books*, 39-41.

cil supported a dramatic reading of Stephen Vincent Benét's poem "They Burned the Books" to commemorate the 10 May 1933 Nazi book burnings, when brown-shirted university students seeking favor within the Nazi regime torched twenty thousand "un-German" books in bonfires at the Opernplatz in Berlin.²⁷ On the tenth anniversary of the episode (10 May 1943), the Council again orchestrated a nationwide day of remembrance at bookstores, schools, and libraries. In advance of the commemoration, the Council's Promotion Committee distributed five hundred window streamers reading "Books Like These Are Burned in the Slave Countries" to bookstores and schools. A suggested reading list covering the causes and consequences of the Nazis' destruction of supposedly racially inferior cultures was also included with the banner.²⁸

The Promotion Committee extended itself beyond its most obvious constituencies in an effort to inform still more Americans about the Nazis' disdain for books. Several of these campaigns were surprisingly successful. The Committee identified and contacted 1,500 newspapers, 1,000 writers, and 350 clergymen with a letter suggesting that the "They Burned the Books" occasion be used as a source for both sermons and newspaper columns. The point of this day of remembrance was not to sell books, asserted one publisher, but to "make real to American readers the danger to freedom of speech as well as to all freedoms that is inherent in the mentality and actions of fascism."²⁹

But the Council also hoped to sell books. To this end, the Council developed several initiatives that dovetailed nicely with increased book sales at stores around the country. Two interrelated programs, the "Reading List" and "Imperative Book Plan," begun shortly after the Council's founding, offer evidence of just such a tactic. The Library Committee and the Recommended War Books Committee organized and distributed the Council's "short" and "long" book lists to booksellers, libraries, and educational institutions around the country. The Library Committee issued a monthly short list, as it was known, which contained between eight and ten recommended titles designed to improve average Americans' understanding of the war effort. The first list, for instance, sought to inform readers about how American soldiers were trained and where they were stationed. Subsequent lists covered a host of other important wartime issues, including "Germany," "Japan," "The Home Front," and "What to expect in the postwar period?" While the Recom-

27. *Nazi Book Burnings and the American Response* (Washington: United States Congress, United States Holocaust Memorial Council, 1988), 1–4.

28. "Currents in the Trade: News and Comment on the Trends of the Week," *Publishers' Weekly*, 1 May 1943, 1721–23.

29. *Ibid.*, 1723. For a discussion of the Radio Committee's activities, including its organization of the "They Burned the Books Day of Remembrance," see Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books*, 32–39.

mended War Books Committee's long lists were similar to the short lists, they were distributed far less frequently. In all, the Council issued fifty-eight separate recommended reading lists during the war.³⁰

The Council inaugurated the "Imperative Book Plan" in August 1943. According to Norton, a five-member War Book Panel selected "outstanding books representing important contributions to the country's war effort." Unlike the short and long lists, imperative books were not selected at any standard interval. Rather, the Council affixed its "imperative" seal of approval to only those books that were demonstrably related to the war effort and that seemed destined to sell a significant number of copies. Whether the "imperative" logo by itself spurred sales is impossible to determine. What was certain, however, was the Council's knack for choosing winners: All seven titles awarded the "imperative" badge were runaway national bestsellers. Among the chosen, Wendell Willkie's utopian travel memoir *One World*, published in 1943, sold the most copies—well over two million volumes in less than two years. One reviewer of the book described it as perhaps "the most influential book published in America during the war."³¹

It is difficult to determine whether the Council's voluntary patriotic promotional activities helped the publishing industry or the American war effort. The best that can be said about the Council's earliest initiatives is that they did not hurt the industry in any readily apparent way. In spite of War Production Board (WPB) cutbacks that decreased by 10 percent the availability and quality of essential bookmaking materials, the industry more than made up for these shortfalls by refining and increasing its production and distribution of paperback books.³² Although paperback books had existed for centuries, the late 1930s marked the first time that publishers profitably mass-produced and mass-distributed paperbacks. Just as America's industrial core profited during World War II rearmament, the publishing industry, in large part thanks to the availability of the new mass-market paperback, boomed.³³

30. Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books*, 43–46.

31. Sales figures and quote in Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.: America During World War II*, 2d ed. (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2000), 39.

32. The WPB forced book publishers to work under two orders during the war. L-245 placed restrictions on the use of paper that "goes directly into a book"; L-241 placed restrictions on publishers' use of "wrapping and other non-printed papers." For more information, see *Publishers' Weekly*, 23 January 1943, 332–33; Frederic G. Melcher, "Editorial: The Binding Cloth Shortage," *Publishers' Weekly*, 12 June 1943, 2223; Frederic G. Melcher, "Editorial: Books Must Be Streamlined," *Publishers' Weekly*, 3 July 1943, 23.

33. For an overview of publishers' attempts to profit by selling paperbacks during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 33–37. Davis provides a complete history of the development of the mass-distributed

American paperback book sales grew dramatically between 1939, when publishers moved fewer than two hundred thousand paperbacks, and 1943, when they sold more than forty million.³⁴ Interrelated changes in commerce, the culture of bookselling, and technology made the expansion of the paperback market possible. First, the cost of producing paperbacks dropped significantly. WPB rationing (unintentionally) benefited the publishing industry by forcing manufacturing departments to experiment with “smaller formats,” which used thinner paper and printed more words on each page.³⁵ Second, traditional book publishers had begun to overcome their own aesthetic misgivings about the paperback book trade. Pocket Books’ robust paperback sales eased the fears of publishers everywhere by demonstrating how the paperback business could augment, rather than atrophy, the sale of pricier hardback editions. In a practice first honed by England’s Penguin Books, Pocket Books pursued product diversification, offering readers light (westerns and travelogues), serious (William Shakespeare and Ernest Hemingway), and special (customized collections) titles from which to choose. Finally, Pocket Books managed to overcome the paperback industry’s single greatest obstacle: distribution. Throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, American paperback book publishers struggled to overcome the refusal of booksellers to sell paperbacks in their stores. Rather than fight a losing battle with the elite publishing community, whose disdain for paperbacks and the types of people who read them was well known, paperback publishers sought out alternative distribution networks.³⁶

The U.S. mail was one network that several entrepreneurial publishers used to good effect. But the reading public liked to handle their books upfront, to peruse available titles, and to buy books after having engaged them in some meaningful way. Thus, an even more promising distribution method emerged in the form of nationwide retail store chains. In 1935, paperback publishing pioneer Allen Lane of Penguin Books first partnered with Woolworth’s retail stores. Lane managed to do this only in his native England, however, thus leaving it up to the American publisher Robert Fair de Graff, owner of Pocket Books, to exploit the method on the American side of the Atlantic. Following Lane’s lead, de Graff partnered with national drugstore and five-and-dime chains in order to

and mass-produced paperback. For a less extensive account that focuses on cover art and design as well as paperback content, see Thomas L. Bonn, *Under Cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass Market Paperbacks* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982).

34. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.*, 38.

35. Frederic G. Melcher, “Wartime Bookmaking,” *Publishers’ Weekly*, 4 March 1944, 1019.

36. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 44–45.

sell paperbacks. The real distribution breakthrough came in 1941, however, when de Graff joined forces with a national magazine distributor, the Rocky Mountain News Company, to give Pocket Books access to newsstand business around the country.³⁷ Dozens of smalltime publishers recognized a good thing when they saw it. Additional upstart operations—such as Red Arrow, Ballantine, and Avon—quickly followed, creating a chain reaction that dramatically reorganized the bookselling world and led to the paperback industry's massive wartime expansion.³⁸

In 1943, the editors of *Time* magazine gave their own optimistic assessment of the flourishing paperback book trade when they declared it “the most remarkable in the 150-year-old history of U.S. Publishing.” Significantly, concluded *Time*, the year “seemed to mark . . . a time when book-reading and book-buying reached outside the narrow quarters of the intellectuals and became the business of the whole vast literate population of the U.S.”³⁹ The paperback revolution had arrived.

The Army's Need for Books

The growth of “book-buying” and “book-reading” lauded by *Time* failed to take into account the publishing community's and the military's collective inability to reach those individuals arguably most in need of new and interesting reading material: American soldiers stationed in remote overseas locations. Dangerously low soldier morale—and concerns about its effect on American soldiers' performance—dogged the armed services throughout the war.⁴⁰ The “morale problem” was believed to be so serious that, under orders from Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, the army created a separate Morale Branch to investigate and address the problem once and for all.⁴¹

37. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 44–45; see also pp. 12–55 for an overview of the rise of Penguin Books and Pocket Books. For a history of Penguin Books, see J. E. Morpurgo, *Allen Lane: King Penguin: A Biography* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1979), 80–114.

38. A complete list of American paperback publishers and their dates of operation can be found in Allen Billy Crider, ed., *Mass Market Publishing in America* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982).

39. *Time* quotation excerpted from “Currents in the Trade: Book Reading in 1943,” *Publishers' Weekly*, 1 January 1944, 37.

40. For more on the military's concern with morale, see Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), ch. 1; Eva Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self Fulfillment* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), ch. 4.

41. Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 100–48, especially 125–31.

Opinion polling data gathered by social psychologists in the Morale Branch indicated that soldier morale improved with the increased availability of off-duty entertainment and educational programming.⁴² According to additional data, reading ranked high among soldiers' off-duty recreational options.⁴³ Unlike the army's educational programming, which required real work, and its entertainment options, which required no work at all, reading, as both educational and entertaining, afforded the lonely, sexually frustrated, or intellectually ambitious soldier with a relaxing as well as potentially productive way to pass the time. Books and reading matter of all sorts offered soldiers a real and imaginary escape from the rigidity and banality—from what Paul Fussell described as the “anonymity” and “chicken-shit”—of waging war.⁴⁴ Make-believe adventure stories, such as Westerns and seafaring tales, offered soldiers flight from the utter monotony of military life while providing them with a mythological context within which to couch their own wartime journeys. In addition, books with sexual situations—such as *Star Spangled Virgin*, *The Lively Lady*, and *Is Sex Necessary?*²—were consistently among the most hotly demanded by soldiers. Though most of these books included relatively little explicit erotica and were made available by army librarians because of their overall literary merit, sex-starved soldiers evidently found pleasure and fantasy in racy passages, which, according to one such GI, were as “popular as pin-up girls.”⁴⁵ In these ways, books provided soldiers with an accepted means of emotional retreat in a military environment hostile to nonconformity and individualized behavior. At the same time, the free availability of all sorts of different books functioned as a symbolic reminder of the freedom and liberty for which their government had enlisted them to fight.⁴⁶

But the organization tasked with meeting the reading needs of the common soldier was ill equipped to do so. The Army Library Service (ALS), founded in 1919 just before the end of World War I, fell into

42. The Army Research Branch conducted some three hundred separate studies of soldier opinion during World War II. For the complete results, see Samuel Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*, 4 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949).

43. For the Army Research Branch's specific findings detailing soldiers' reading habits and use of army libraries, see *What the Soldier Thinks, 1st Quarterly Report* (Washington: Special Service Division, Research Branch, 1942), 58–59, 62–63.

44. Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 72, 80.

45. Quote in Wittels, “What the G.I. Reads,” 91.

46. See, for instance, Benjamin L. Alpers, “This Is the Army: Imaging a Democratic Military in World War II,” *Journal of American History* 85 (June 1998): 129–63. I agree with Alpers's contention that the military used recreational and educational programming to create a sense among American soldiers that the Army could be an extension, rather than cessation, of civilian life.

considerable disrepair during the isolationist interwar years, to the point that by the start of World War II the ALS was barely functioning at all.⁴⁷ Thanks to increased military funding and heightened soldier demand, within several months of the U.S. entrance into the war, the ALS's domestic operation increased its number of libraries, its staff, and its holdings. In 1940, for instance, there were only 147 functioning army libraries, most of whose holdings were in poor shape and extremely out-dated. By 1944 the number of such libraries in North America had increased to 791.⁴⁸ As more ALS locations opened, the need for professional librarians and qualified support staff naturally increased. The army mainly hired civilian librarians (most of whom were women) to operate its largest post library locations (posts with five thousand men or more); posts with fewer than five thousand men, meanwhile, relied on enlisted personnel to handle all lending services. The growth in library personnel was accompanied by an improvement in the quantity and quality of the army's holdings. In 1941 there were an estimated one million books in army libraries across the United States. By the end of the war this figure exceeded twelve million. Increased federal appropriations spurred some of the increase, but the real source of the ALS's growth stemmed from the 1942 "Victory Book Campaign" of the American Library Association (ALA). Spearheaded by the ALA and publicized by the Council on Books in Wartime, the nationwide book drive managed to collect approximately ten million hardcover and paperback books on behalf of the ALS.⁴⁹

The ALS's attempts to provide its overseas camps and bases with quality reading material proved more difficult. In the early years of the war the requisitioning and procurement of books and magazines were not regulated in any way, and, as a result, the military's overseas bases possessed far less reading material than bases located in the United States. The convenient packaging and distribution of multi-sized hardcover and paperback books posed the greatest challenge to members of the ALS; after all, the organization of an efficient nationwide distribution network was one thing, the timely delivery of books on a global scale quite another. And the problem of worldwide distribution of randomly sized books—both cloth and paperback—continued to get the best of the ALS during the first few years of the war. On one occasion, for instance, a book purchase of four hundred thousand paperbound and one hundred thousand clothbound books intended for forces in North Africa did not arrive because the commander of the naval convoy commissioned to

47. Houle, *The Armed Services and Adult Education*, 151–52.

48. Jamieson, *Books for the Army*, 33.

49. Houle, *The Armed Services and Adult Education*, 152–55.

transport it unilaterally determined there was not enough space to do so.⁵⁰

In response to persistent overseas distribution difficulties, ALS administrators developed specially designed, shippable “book kits” to provide soldiers around the world with fresh reading material. Starting in 1943, the ALS began the overseas deployment of four different “book kits” built from crates that doubled as bookcases when opened: the RB (reference book) Kit included one hundred hardback reference books; the RB Library Kit included one hundred reference books plus four hundred assorted paperback books and pamphlets; and the C Kit included nineteen hundred paperback and one hundred hardback books. Innovative though it was, the book kit program was frustrated by a combination of book shortages and more pressing military demands. By 1944 the ALS had stopped the shipment of all RB Kits and significantly decreased the availability of the other three kits.⁵¹

The most consistent supply of reading matter for overseas locations was provided via the MK (magazine kit) Program, which replaced a cumbersome bulk subscription method used earlier in the war. Developed at the same time as the RB Kit program, the MK Program succeeded where the RB Kit failed because of lower unit costs and greater flexibility in terms of packaging and distribution. The ALS decided that a set of fourteen popular magazines—including *Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Popular Mechanics*—would be mailed every week to all overseas company-size units and to all hospitals. By saturating the overseas locations on a routine basis, the ALS hoped the contents of its magazine kits would, in time, filter down to soldiers in detached units and isolated outposts. Whether this literary trickledown occurred is debatable. What is certain, however, is that the number of ALS magazine titles and magazine kits sent overseas eclipsed the ALS’s most optimistic expectations. By October 1943, tens of thousands of each seventy-magazine set were being shipped per week. Within one calendar year the ALS sent approximately sixty-two million magazines to GIs in overseas locations; and by 1945 the ALS dispatched in excess of twelve million magazines every month.⁵²

In spite of these incredible, if little known, wartime achievements by the ALS, what soldiers in overseas posts truly craved were books: hardbacks, paperbacks, comic books, old books, and new books. The difficulty of achieving cost-effective production of new paperbacks for overseas consumption, however, continued to vex the ALS. It possessed neither the means nor the ability to transform copyrighted classic and contemporary bestsellers into portable paperback editions. The only

50. *Ibid.*, 160.

51. *Ibid.*, 160–61.

52. *Ibid.*, 162.

body that could do this was the American publishing industry, which collectively owned the book rights and had access to the printing equipment required to produce paperbacks. The Council on Books in Wartime, which had been seeking a direct partnership with the federal government since 1942, believed its member publishing companies might be interested in helping out. So, as the war entered its third year, publishing leaders and military officials agreed that something had to be done. Members of the Council and the ALS sat down to figure out a plan that would simultaneously benefit both overseas soldiers and the American publishing industry.

The Armed Service Editions

The plan to which the Council and ALS agreed led to the production of inexpensive, disposable Armed Services Edition paperback books. Two men outside the publishing industry's inner circle originally suggested the idea. The director of the ALS, Colonel Ray Trautman, dismayed by his organization's inability to deliver paperbacks in sufficient numbers to the army's overseas locations, turned for help to H. Stahley Thompson, a graphic artist in the Army Special Services Division, for help. Thompson, who had a background in printing, arrived at the idea of the Armed Services Editions. Although Thompson's plan did not materialize until after Trautman presented it to the Council, these two men deserve credit for developing a workable plan to print cheap, disposable paperback books using rotary (magazine) presses.⁵³

Malcolm Johnson of Doubleday, Doran & Co., whom Trautman and Thompson contacted, approached his fellow Council members with the rotary-press paperback plan in the spring of 1943. W. Warder Norton and a majority of the publishing industry responded enthusiastically to the idea of using rotary presses, idle since the imposition of WPB paper rations, to print paperbacks. A memorandum issued by Norton captured the mood of the publishing industry on the eve of the ASE project:

The Council has worked out a plan for making these books available in an expendable, easily shipped, and extremely cheap form—and at the same time keeping them wholly out of the civilian economy. Those persons in bookselling . . . who have examined this plan . . . are of the conviction that civilian sales will, if anything, be increased. . . . The very fact that millions of men will have an opportunity to

53. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 69. The official history of the Council on Books in Wartime, written by Ballou, provides a slightly different interpretation of the development of the ASE books. See Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books*, 65–66, for the Council's alternative interpretation, which privileges its role without mentioning either Trautman's or Thompson's contribution.

learn what a book is and what it can mean is likely now and in post-war years to exert a tremendous influence.⁵⁴

The publishing industry thus agreed to the arrangement with the ALS, and viewed the opportunity, in the words of John Y. Cole, as “a kind of splendid but free advertising of the hardbound titles whose copyright they controlled.”⁵⁵

Other members of the publishing community—perhaps concerned about repeating the misfortunes of World War I—worried that the army-issue paperbacks might taint the publishing industry’s reputation or squeeze the industry’s postwar market share. To prevent this from happening, the Council fought for additional contractual protection that rendered the ASE project a virtually risk-free endeavor for the publishers involved. In the end, the Council and the ALS agreed to a set of provisions intended to protect the publishing industry both then and in the postwar period. Namely, the parties agreed that the government would provide all of the bookmaking matériel—including paper and printing plates—free of charge; pay a modest one-cent royalty fee to the publishing firms and their authors; limit the distribution of ASE volumes to overseas locations; and, finally, in a provision related to the previous one, prevent the “dumping” of remaindered ASE books on American markets following the war. The physical construction of the books inadvertently contributed to the carrying out of the final requirement: The publishers printed the ASE books on thin paper and substituted stapled for glued spines, thus guaranteeing the books’ self-destruction after multiple uses.⁵⁶ In return, the ALS received uniformly sized, easy to ship, first-run bestsellers, including classics and customized collected works, at a cost of less than six cents per copy. All told, the publishing venture generated over 122 million editions of some 1,322 titles at a cost to the government of less than eight million dollars.⁵⁷

Five printing firms—the Cuneo Press, Street & Smith, W. F. Hall, the Rumford Press, and the Western Printing and Lithographing Company—handled the actual production of the books. The army’s only real requirement was that the books be small enough to fit into a soldier’s fatigue pocket. Available printing technology, however, determined the physical design of the books, which the five publishing houses produced in two sizes: 5 1/2-by-3 5/8 and 6 1/2-by-4 1/2, both of which contained two columns of type per page. The seemingly eccentric size and format of the ASE volumes resulted from the method of printing used and the

54. Memorandum quote in Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books*, 66.

55. Cole, *Books in Action*, 17.

56. *Ibid.*, 17; Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books*, 69–70.

57. For a summary of the cost of producing the books, see Ballou, *A History of the Council on Books*, 80.

perceived reading habits of American soldiers. Rotary presses, which typically produced magazines rather than paperbacks, printed “two-up,” that is, titles were printed two at a time and then separated with horizontal cuts, which resulted in unusually short spines. Printers selected the two-column format because it let them squeeze 12 percent more words onto each page and resulted in shorter lines of text. The former helped contain costs; the latter, publishers believed, benefited battle-weary soldiers who would find shorter lines of text less exhausting than the standard 4- and 5-inch lines found in most regular-sized paperbacks.⁵⁸

The method of printing the ASE volumes affected the entire selection process, for while cutting printed pages may have been cost effective, cost savings came at a price. Printing two-up constrained publishers to collate texts with more or less identical numbers of pages and characters—the determination of which was both time consuming and tedious. Luckily, printing difficulties were mitigated by the relative structural uniformity of certain literary genres; for instance, most murder mysteries and westerns, two soldier favorites, tended to be about the same length. Overall, however, the two-up format made the ALS’s requirement for a varied selection of reading materials more difficult than it would have otherwise been.⁵⁹

Even with the challenge presented by the two-up format, the final list, according to one contemporary observer, “was broad and often challenging.”⁶⁰ To ensure that this was the case, the army and the Council utilized a two-phase selection process to guarantee soldiers a broad range of reading choices. The Council’s only stated selection criteria was that each book strengthen “the spirit of American democracy,” which is to say the Council afforded itself plenty of room to operate.⁶¹ A group of publishers, critics, authors, and librarians handled the first phase. Using the at-large list as its point of departure, a smaller joint-conference of ALS and Council officials then vetted the list to determine what books would be printed as ASE titles. Generally speaking, the respective members of the joint-conference had decidedly different ideas about what types of books embodied the “spirit of American democracy” to which they dedicated their cause. Members of the ALS placed soldiers’ reading preferences ahead of their own and favored the publication of westerns, adventure books, humorous books, mysteries, and virtually all best-selling contemporary fiction titles. Council representatives, though not

58. Houle, *The Armed Services and Adult Education*, 168–69.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Quote in Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 73.

61. Quote in William M. Leary, Jr., “Books, Soldiers and Censorship during the Second World War,” *American Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1968): 237–38.

averse to recommending bestsellers, also insisted on the publication of titles that they must have known would be of little interest to the average soldier-reader. Nevertheless, the number and names of the “serious” writers selected for publication as ASE paperbacks—Henry Adams, Willa Cather, Joseph Conrad, Hemingway, Homer, Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, Herman Melville, Plato, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Leo Tolstoy, and Voltaire, to name but a few—indicates that the Council’s members exerted a strong influence in the book selection process.⁶²

The fact that many of these bookish titles undoubtedly remained unread by most soldiers does raise an interesting question: Why were such explicitly highbrow texts included in the ASE library at all? It is tempting to dismiss the Council’s selections out of hand as the product of its members’ elitist literary sensibility. To do so, however, would be a mistake. A closer look at the Council’s ASE choices reveals their construction of an ideologically charged, if idealized, definition of liberal democratic citizenship. This probably accounts for the inclusion of works by such foundational liberal democratic thinkers as Locke, Jefferson, and Voltaire. But the Council’s ideological outlook also helps explain why works by contemporary critics of liberal democracy such as Charles Beard, Sinclair Lewis, and John Steinbeck—all of whom championed a return to an uncorrupted form of liberal democracy respectful of the rights of every individual—were also prominently featured ASE authors. Elsewhere the Council’s unabashed ideological commitment expressed itself less subtly and less convincingly. For instance, one can only imagine the bewildering mixture of empowerment and rage many African-American soldiers must have felt when presented with triumphant ASE biographies of George Washington Carver, Frederick Douglass, and Joe Louis by a military segregated along racial lines. More likely than not, of course, the Council’s liberal democratic vision probably registered very little with soldiers of either race. Yet the complete library of ASE volumes—from George Lowther’s pulpy *Adventures of Superman* to Lillian Smith’s complex study of interracial love, *Strange Fruit*—suggests that the members of the Council and army’s ASE selection committee were sensitive to, and in many ways anticipated, the pluralist conception of democracy and culture that was to become an important animating principle of liberalism in the immediate postwar period.⁶³

The Council’s ideological belief in pluralism, defined as the celebration of real-life political and cultural differences, was not absolute, and on occasion members of the army and ALS committed outright acts of

62. Houle, *The Armed Services and Adult Education*, 169.

63. An excellent discussion of cultural and political pluralism is provided in Olivier Zunz, *Why the American Century?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 138–55.

book censorship in the name of protecting American democracy. For example, even though he ranked among the soldiers' favorite authors, the army rejected Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* because, ALS reviewers argued, it was anti-Mormon.⁶⁴ Likewise, George Santayana's philosophical tome *Persons and Places*, "though brilliant," according to one ALS official, was rejected because his views seemed "dubious as to democracy."⁶⁵ Relative to the number of books that moved in and out of the army during the war, however, the actual percentage of banned books was quite small. In 1947, John Jamieson, who served in the Army Library Section of the War Department, claimed that "about a dozen books and magazines retailing Axis propaganda and not more than two or three other books, clearly not Axis-inspired, were" rejected by the ALS during the war.⁶⁶ Historian William M. Leary, Jr., reached a similar conclusion several decades after Jamieson. Overall, commented Leary in 1968, the ALS and its army members exercised their censoring authority "with great discretion."⁶⁷

The army's surprising restraint in the area of book censorship did not extend to the growing conservative coalition within the United States Congress, which had become increasingly critical of what it perceived to be the bureaucratic excesses of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's imperious New Deal regime. To be sure, strong political opposition to the New Deal had been percolating within Washington since Roosevelt's failed 1937 Supreme Court "court-packing" scheme, which for the President's political enemies highlighted New Deal liberals' disdain for the legislative branch and their desire for policymaking authority independent of congressional interference. But during the economically robust war years, when New Deal social and economic planning appeared increasingly irrelevant, Republican and Dixiecrat opposition intensified, making it nearly impossible for Roosevelt's fragile New Deal coalition to replicate the legislative victories of the heady early New Deal era. As Alan Brinkley has argued, the dismantling in July 1943 of the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), the administrative wellspring for the President's postwar planning program, epitomized the strengthening of anti-statist conservative sentiment during the war while simultaneously offering a glimpse into the future of social and economic policymaking.⁶⁸

64. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 74.

65. Quote in Leary, "Books, Soldiers and Censorship," 238.

66. John Jamieson, "Censorship and the Soldier," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 11, 3 (1947): 367.

67. Leary, "Books, Soldiers and Censorship," 238.

68. Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 227–64, especially 254–58. For additional information on the history of the conservative backlash against the New Deal, see James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of*

At the time, however, the rising tide of anti-New Deal congressional conservatism had important implications for the free production and consumption of reading matter in the United States military. In an attempt to swing the “soldier vote” from Roosevelt to his Republican challenger, Thomas E. Dewey, anti-New Dealers, led by Ohio Republican Senator Robert A. Taft, who helped kill the NRPB, orchestrated a ban on the dissemination of virtually all reading material—including ASE volumes—in the months prior to the 1944 presidential election. Taft believed Roosevelt, as commander in chief, held an unfair political advantage in that he controlled all overseas communication links and could thus unfairly influence soldiers’ political opinions and party allegiances. Taft argued that the addition of the book ban provision (Title V) in the 1944 Soldier Voting Law only sought to compensate for the President’s alleged campaign advantage by prohibiting the circulation of all army reading matter containing, in the ban’s own words, “political argument or political propaganda of any kind designed or calculated to affect the result of any (Federal) election.”⁶⁹ Most Congressmen agreed with Taft’s appraisal of the campaign, and, at least tacitly, with his depiction of the White House as a hub for the generation and diffusion of campaign propaganda targeted at soldiers in overseas locations. The ban went into effect on 1 April 1944, without Roosevelt’s signature.⁷⁰

The Council assessed the situation far differently. Immediately following the War Department’s decision to enforce the book ban provision of the 1944 Soldier Voting Law with strict scrutiny, the Council’s new director, Archibald G. Ogden, organized an effort to amend, if not completely overturn, the legislation. On 17 May the Council elected Marshall A. Best of Viking Press and Curtice N. Hitchcock of Reynal & Hitchcock to draft a resolution of protest, which was approved by the Council and released to ten thousand newspapers and magazines on 18 June. Similar to the Council’s book promoting efforts earlier in the war, Hitchcock and Best couched their resolution in the language of democracy, decried the ban as an “alarming encroachment on freedom,” especially freedom of the press, and demanded that Congress revoke the law immediately.⁷¹ To reinforce its point, the Council attached a partial list of banned books to the release. “The following [ASE] books,” the release read, “have already

the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933–1939 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967); David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 323–62; Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

69. Quoted in Wittels, “What the GI Reads,” 92.

70. For the best accounts of the 1944 Soldier Voting Law, see Leary, “Books, Soldiers and Censorship,” 237–45; Jamieson, “Censorship and the Soldier,” 367–84.

71. Jamieson, “Censorship and the Soldier,” 381.

been banned: *Yankee from Olympus* by Catherine Drinker Bowen . . . *The Republic* by Charles Beard . . . *Slogum House* by Mari Sandoz . . . and *One Man's Meat* by E. B. White.⁷² Even more shocking was the army's decision to suppress the *Official Guide to the Army Air Forces*—published by the army itself—because it contained a portrait of the commander in chief on the inside flap.⁷³ For members of the Council, whose commitment to the democratizing power of books in the face of fascist aggression had been central to its wartime mobilization, the government's ban on army reading matter was an outrage. Other members of the mass media agreed, and in the several days following the issuance of the Council's press release, the *Chicago Sun*, the *New Bedford Times*, and the *San Antonio Evening News*, among others, roundly denounced the ban in their respective editorial pages. "The motive behind the Taft amendment is not obscure," wrote the editors of the *New York Times*, "[i]t was enacted to create fear that the incumbent would propagandize the services." Yet, the *Times* editorial continued, "there is no proof that the Administration contemplated committing such a serious offense against democracy."⁷⁴ Although the army was originally the focal point of national editorial ire, within several weeks of the Council's press barrage, newspapers and magazine editors began to concentrate on, and scrutinize, Senator Taft's instrumental role in the policymaking process.⁷⁵

The Council's pressure tactics worked, and by July Senator Taft was ready to discuss ways of modifying the book ban provision of the Soldier Voting Act. On 20 July, members of the Council and representatives from the book and magazine industry convened with Senator Taft and representatives of the army in New York City. After weighing the relative strengths and weaknesses of the ban, which Senator Taft still fundamentally supported, he agreed to amend his legislation. On 17 August 1944, the Green-Lucas Revision (named after the sponsoring Senators) nullified much of the original law. While all electioneering pamphlets and partisan magazine issues containing, in the words of the Revision, "political propaganda obviously designed to affect the result" of the election remained banned, all general circulation books, magazines, and newspapers, and, most important, ASE volumes, were not.⁷⁶ Having played a key role in modification of the book ban, Ogden later remarked of the Council's activism: "[I]t is a refreshing example of democracy in action," he

72. *Ibid.*

73. Wittels, "What the GI Reads," 92.

74. "What Shall a Soldier Read?" *New York Times*, 10 August 1944, A16.

75. Leary, "Books, Soldiers and Censorship," 242.

76. Jamieson, "Censorship and the Soldier," 382–83.

mused, “to bring a complete turn-about . . . within the space of less than two months.”⁷⁷

Soldiers were perhaps the biggest beneficiaries of the Voting Act resolution. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the ASE books meant many things to American soldiers. A colonel in the Army Air Forces described the books “as a godsend to book-hungry Americans.”⁷⁸ A hospitalized army officer in England shared similar thoughts: “From the Airborne Infantry . . . to the chair-borne Finance Corps, you can find boys reading as they have never read before.”⁷⁹ In a letter printed by *Publishers’ Weekly*, Frank Irwin, a soldier from Detroit, Michigan, expressed the same view. Admitting that “these books don’t stand up,” Irwin agreed that the idea “is good and I am happy to add my thanks to the Council for all its good reading.”⁸⁰ A young Marine expressed similar sentiments in a letter he wrote to Betty Smith, author of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*: “I am a 20-year-old Marine. . . . I went through hell in two years of combat overseas. For the last two weeks I’ve been flat on my back . . . with malaria . . . [and] read your book twice.”⁸¹ A sailor stationed in the South Pacific likewise found therapeutic value in his own collection of ASE volumes. “They helped in no little manner,” he said, “to preserve my sanity.”⁸² The best gauge of the ASE’s success, however, can be gleaned from one other fact: Due to the soldiers’ overwhelmingly positive response to the ASE volumes, the War Department extended its contract with the Council to last throughout the demobilization process. Apparently the military agreed with one soldier’s assessment of the ASE volumes: “These little books are a great thing,” he said. “They take you away.”⁸³



In the United States’s current period of patriotic fervor, it is especially easy to be cynical about the Council’s real intentions during World War II. Indeed, the Council’s partisan wartime political and business agenda was by no means completely disinterested. The publishing industry’s use of patriotism to increase profits was a feature of the Council’s

77. Quote in Leary, “Books, Soldiers and Censorship,” 244.

78. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 75.

79. Houle, *The Armed Services and Adult Education*, 171.

80. “The Soldiers’ Vote Act and its Effect on the Distribution of Books,” *Publishers’ Weekly*, 17 June 1944, 2244–45.

81. *Ibid.*, 2446.

82. Quote in Wittels, “What the GI Reads,” 92.

83. Quote in Jamieson, *Books for the Army*, 159. Additional soldier comments on ASE paperbacks are available in John Jamieson, “Armed Services Editions and G.I. Fan Mail,” *Publishers’ Weekly*, 12 July 1947, 148–52.

promotional efforts during the war. Although it is impossible to measure the “bottom-line” impact of the publishing community’s patriotic campaigns, there is no doubt that publishers exited the war in better financial condition than when they entered it.

Yet the Council did not mobilize on behalf of the war simply to sell more books. In the face of fascist dictatorships abroad and the memory of the propagandistic excesses of World War I at home, unrestricted access to the printed word—both in and outside the army—took on a new urgency during World War II. Although there was state-sanctioned censorship, the Council’s ideological commitment to liberal democracy restrained the worst impulses of military and congressional censors; in doing so, the Council’s interpretation of the war as a “war of ideas” pitting democratic against anti-democratic forces, where books were weapons, gained increased potency. Reading books, especially ASE paperback books, performed important real and symbolic functions in World War II: Books provided soldiers with a temporary escape from the traumas of war, while at the same time the free availability of books helped remind all Americans of why precisely they were fighting.