

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Over There

GEORGE M. COHAN

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George M. Cohan (1878–1942) was a noted composer and lyricist, famous for such songs as “The Yankee Doodle Boy” and “You’re a Grand Old Flag.” He started his musical career as a violinist and dancer at the age of eight, started touring with his family’s vaudeville musical act—“The Four Cohans”—at the age of twelve, and made his Broadway debut when he was fifteen. In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt presented Cohan with the Congressional Gold Medal for his contribution to American morale during the war years, the first time Congress had bestowed the award for the writing of songs. In 1942, Cohan was immortalized in the film Yankee Doodle Dandy, with James Cagney starring as the songwriter.

“Over There” was one of the best-known songs of World War I, originally published in 1917, just as the United States was entering the stalemated European war. Nora Bayes, the popular singer and vaudevillian, helped make it famous, and by the war’s end, more than a million records had been sold. (It was later revived during World War II.) What mood does the song display regarding going off to war? How do you explain the national and personal enthusiasm for the war and the confidence about its outcome? Do you think this song and these attitudes survived World War I? Could they survive other wars?*

Johnnie get your gun, get your gun, get your gun,
Take it on the run, on the run, on the run,
Hear them calling you and me,
Ev’ry son of liberty.
Hurry right away, no delay, go today,
Make your daddy glad to have had such a lad,
Tell your sweetheart not to pine,
To be proud her boy’s in line.

(Chorus)

Over there over there

* Listen to Nora Bayes sing “Over There” here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aed8-0C6XcY; Billy Murray’s version can be found here: [/www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbggEGUaE28](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbggEGUaE28).

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Send the word, send the word over there
That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming,
The drums rum-tumming ev'rywhere
So prepare say a pray'r
Send the word, send the word to beware
We'll be over, we're coming over,
And we won't come back till it's over over there!

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Johnnie get your gun, get your gun, get your gun,
Johnnie show the Hun you're a son of a gun,
Hoist the flag and let her fly,
Yankee Doodle do or die.
Pack your little kit, show your grit, do your bit,
Yankees to the ranks from the towns and the tanks,
Make your mother proud of you
And the old Red White and Blue.