

# WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

*The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*

## A Box Comes Home

JOHN CIARDI

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*John Ciardi (1916–86), American poet and translator, was a gunner in the US Army Air Forces, serving aboard B-29 bombers in the Pacific theater of World War II. Following the war, Ciardi taught at the University of Kansas, Harvard University, and Rutgers University. This poem (1955) recalls the flag-draped coffin of an otherwise unidentified man named Arthur, and reflects on the relation between the man, the box, the flag, and the republic for which it stands.*

*What does Ciardi mean, in verse 4, when he says “Once I saw Arthur dressed as the United States / of America. Now I see the Unites States / of America as Arthur in flag-sealed domino”? And what is the meaning of his prayer, regarding Arthur and regarding the United States? How does he think the life lived by Arthur should affect the way in which Arthur’s countrymen live? How is Ciardi suggesting that we remember the fallen?*

I remember the United States of America  
As a flag-draped box with Arthur in it  
And six marines to bear it on their shoulders.

Read the rest of the poem in *The Collected Poems of John Ciardi*:  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=qkcmAjKXJn0C&lpg=PR13&dq>.