

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Night on the Line from *Citizen Soldiers*

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*American historian Stephen E. Ambrose (1936–2002) gained fame for his popular histories, which often focused on stories of ordinary soldiers in times of war. This selection, excerpted from Chapter 10 of his book, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany* (1997), provides a vivid account of the nighttime experience of combat soldiers on the front lines in the European theater of World War II. He begins by comparing conditions on the line in the Civil War, World War I, and World War II.*

How do nights on the line during World War II differ from those during the Civil War or World War I? Imagine yourself spending many nights in a foxhole, experiencing the ever-present “life-threatening violence,” the trench foot and dysentery, sleep deprivation, bone-numbing cold, feelings of fear, helplessness, degradation, and depression, or any of the other horrors that Ambrose describes. Can you understand why the “million-dollar wound” or “getting out of there, honorably, was every man’s dream”? Can you also understand why, despite it all, the men preferred staying on the line to going to the stockade? How do you think such an experience might affect your own attitude toward death? Why does Ambrose conclude, “There are no unwounded foxhole veterans”?

In the winter camps of 1864–65, Civil War soldiers drilled, marched in closed ranks, built log shelters, repaired equipment, foraged for food. On outpost duty they swapped tobacco, coffee, and insults with the enemy. At night they cooked and ate, sang around the campfire, and retired to bunks. Night was the best time for Johnny Reb and Billy Yank.

Read the whole story in *Citizen Soldiers*:
<http://books.google.com/books?id=IUI76I0bjI0C>.