









By Pvt. Clarence Weinstock, winner second place, in North African theater of operations "Why I Fight" essay contest.

SOME weeks ago I was at a hospital to which sick and wounded men are sent from the front. Every evening those of us who were well enough to be up went to the dayroom to read, work jigsaw puzzles, or listen to the guitar players. We sat around in the handsome maroon bathrobes of the Medical Department of the Army. The robes were initialed MDUSA and the boys, with the wry humor of men who live dangerously, claimed this meant *Many die U shall also*.

One night we sang. Old American songs, souvenirs of other times of crisis, "John Brown's Body," "There's a Long, Long Trail A-Winding," songs of the land, "Red River Valley," "Shenandoah," songs of cities, "East Side, West Side," "St. Louis Blues." We stopped for a moment and the man with the guitar said, "Ever hear this one?" He hit the strings and sang. We knew the tune—everyone does—but here were the words:

*There's no one on the skyline,  
That's sure a pretty good sign  
Those eighty-eights are breakin' up  
That old gang of mine.*

*Gee, you get that lonesome feelin'  
When you hear that shrapnel whine,*

*Those eighty-eights are breakin' up  
That old gang of mine.*

Many of the boys laughed, but not as you do at a good joke. They grinned because they could still make fun of death, because brave men kid when there is really nothing to laugh about.

Afterward, lying on my cot, I kept thinking, "Do these boys who are so good in a fight, and so gentle and thoughtful toward each other here, have to be asked what they are fighting for?" Isn't that one of those questions you cannot grasp because the answer seems so obvious? "Why do you want to live?" "Is happiness good or bad for one?" I heard the question put another way in the same dayroom. The boys were talking about going home, where there were no "C" rations, no shells, bombs, booby traps, and machine pistols. "Sure, everybody wants to get out of this," someone said, "but which one of us, one man alone, would take a personal trip ticket to the States and wish the others good luck in their foxholes?" It was in the song of the 88's and through the dayroom speaker that I began to find my answer.

No man stands alone. In war you leave your family and peacetime friends and

the comrades of your company lessen your fears and your loneliness. In them you rediscover your country, the men of all states, the people who made America, with their hundred ways of speaking, their tall stories and their fast answers, their clever repair-job hands and their clear making-something minds, their easy giving and willingness to be shown, their big laughter at false fronts and their quick comeback for injustice. You hear their songs of longing and battle, of loneliness and solidarity, the songs of the whole history of your country. And then you know why you fight on the cold Italian beaches and hills: If you failed these men it would be like walking out of your own house and never coming back again.

Yet that isn't all you fight for. You can live in a house and not know who built it; but you have got to remember the thoughts and blood that made our house, America, if you value your freedom. I'm not thinking of the school textbooks where you see pictures of noble gentlemen in lacy shirts and velvet breeches signing the Declaration of Independence. I mean Franklin when he joked like the men in the hospital—"We must all hang together or we will all hang separately." I mean Tom Paine