

We Don't Need to Hate

By S/SGT. HOBERT SKIDMORE



Sergeant Skidmore.

Some weeks ago, a well-known newspaper correspondent made the statement that American soldiers don't hate our enemies enough. Hate, he said, was a necessary emotion in war; it made fighting men fight more vindictively and, hence, better. Subsequently the Post, in a plain-spoken editorial, took issue with this philosophy, and many readers, both soldiers and civilians, wrote us to applaud our stand. One of those who read the editorial was S/Sgt. Hobert Skidmore, stationed on a far-away island in the Pacific. A gifted writer, author of several distinguished short stories which have appeared in the Post, Sergeant Skidmore promptly sat down and wrote the following article, which we consider one of the finest expressions of soldier philosophy to come out of this war.—*The Editors.*

WE THINK of our old hats you have so carefully stored in the wardrobe, our civilian shoes you dust occasionally—perhaps more often than necessary—the shirts laundered but not yet starched or ironed because you didn't know when we would be home. We think of these things and imagine the day when we will be trying them on again. Will they fit? We wonder about it as much as you do.

Perhaps we have changed. Maybe not in a way that our clothing will no longer fit, but a great many other things won't rest so comfortably on our shoulders. The things that have changed in us will not affect the contour of our clothing, just the shape of our lives.

Out here, we have come to know America. We have learned the love a man can have for his homeland. It is an unexpected love for us to have, for we were almost disinherited. In our day we have booed the display of the flag, hooted the President, laughed at Congress, scorned a country that had no place for us and then fought for all those things and some of us died for them. Things that meant nothing to us before are valuable now, for they have been threatened and we have secured them.

We wonder why people deplore our lack of interest in hatred. We know the quality of hatred. We have felt it for those of our country who have failed us. But charity is greater in us than hatred. And patience is greater, and tolerance. And the knowledge of the transitory nature of things is strong in us. Those who were with us yesterday aren't here today. What we felt yesterday, we cannot feel today. We cannot afford to hold a single emotion for long, except loneliness and honor—which is not an emotion, but a state of living.

Anger, a quick and ready thing, we know well. It is not an abiding and continued feeling. It is the thing that makes a soldier in combat achieve the nearly impossible. But it must be controlled. An angry man has his guard down. He endangers himself and the other members of his ship, or plane, or gun crew or foxhole. There is a word we have in the Army for a guy who is always filled with anger and hatred. It isn't a pretty word.

At the right time and for the right thing, anger is valuable. A continuing hatred isn't worth a damn. Do our civilian law officers hate criminals and lawbreakers? No, they have contempt for them and arrest them and punish them. It is a very satisfactory and democratic solution.

It is very disturbing to know that we stack up with any soldier of any country, that we are winning, and then to have people shout that we don't know what it is all about—we do not hate enough!

Perhaps we don't know what it is all about, but America is a big country, there are a lot of us and we can't all be brilliant and we shouldn't all be statesmen. The big issues should be left to the men

trained to handle them. We are deeply proud of our leaders. We know America has such men. The big issues will be handled.

Never believe that we are not aware of them. We know the immensity of this war. We have seen it in the death of just one man, in the part-life of another, in the unbelievable knowledge that we are still alive. We know the issues are large, greater than we can realize; and all of us, all who have been to battle, have asked God to help us. He can see the pattern of things.

If there is anyone else who alone can comprehend all things involved, will he please step forward, where we can all see him and hear him?

Hatred we know. We are fighting an enemy capable of hatred. They really loathe us and no fooling about that. They hate us with a blind fury: you probably have noticed that they are losing the war, will lose the peace, will lose something the people of a nation should never lose.

We wish these people who want us to hate could see the G.I.'s in the embattled corners of the earth doing more to spread democracy and the liberal, Christian way of life than was done by anyone during the time of peace. Our buddies who share anything they have with those who need it, whatever their background has been, are bringing a new stature to our people. They are showing the American way of life to the world.

The natives on these atolls out here, people in Italy and Africa and China and France are finding G.I. Joe a very wonderful guy. They are learning that a lot of things they have been taught about him, that he is cruel and filled with hatred—the cunning propaganda that has convinced them that the American soldier will cut out their tongues and lop off their hands—is not true at all. They are finding that he is charitable and kind, that he is capable of humanity and friendship and ready laughter. They have seen him go without food, that their terrified children might eat. They have seen him hold his fire when enemy snipers shove women and children before them. None of these things have the quality of hatred in them.

We know there aren't going to be any pfc's or sergeants at any peace table anywhere. But we know that the peoples of the world will not forget us. They will remember us with kindness and love. They will remember that we came and freed them. Never again will fanatical leaders be able to convince them that the American people are contemptible and greedy and soft. These things will help to secure the peace. That's a big issue.

We are coming home with this feeling. We know what we are like now. We wonder if you have changed.

Last night a guy came through here, a kid who got out of Ohio State in '40, and out of Guadalcanal in '44. He got a furlough (Continued on Page 46)



ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES R. BINGHAM

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back to the States, like almost all pilots, to see the wife he lived with a few short months, and the son he had never seen. He is back here, going down under again, and he would rather not do it. But he must and he will.

We asked him how it was back there: the clothing in the closet, the chair, the worn, comfortable shoes. We asked him if there was just enough space to pass between the sideboard and the table, there in the dining room; if you turn just so, can you pass to the kitchen?

He said, "Yes, yes, it is still like that."

You have passed these remembered things of our lives so many times, so many days, so many hours that they may not mean so much to you, without us there. We can understand that. But one day we will be coming home. We will take the brown hat from the wardrobe and put it on our head. It will seem strange after a steel helmet, strange and known and welcomed, and we will go through the dining room and pass by the chair and shove the kitchen door open and say, "Darling, let's take a walk. Let's go out and see the town."

Listen when we say that! Listen, beloved, for we have learned.

We have come to know our towns and our country and our people. We have learned most about them in lonely, homesick hours in alien places. The things we have sacrificed during war have availed us a great deal. We will never thank anyone for causing us to war, but we didn't know the quality of our country until we were out of it.

We will be back sometime. We could throw ourselves on the earth of America, onto her soil, trying to hug her. The way we are going to hug you, with the knowledge that it will never be enough, that never in our lives will our arms be strong enough and great enough to express what is in our minds and our hearts.

Yes, we are coming home, and this is the love, human and plentiful, that we bring you. This is what we have been writing you about. Something is coming with us, something that will fit easily into the blue suit with the pin stripe and the white shirt—the shirt will be loose around the neck, but we will catch up with it—something that will fit readily into the good feeling of being at home; but when we go out the door we want

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something else to fit, too. And before it fits it will have to contain tolerance and charity and kindness, honesty and, darling, an odd word for us, nobility. These qualities we have gained.

To us, nobility always meant some lord or lady, somebody in a book we borrowed at the drugstore. It isn't like that at all. Nobility is a guy sitting alone in his foxhole, scared and worried and homesick and ready to fight. He's sitting there alone with his head nodding down between his knees and his hands stiff with dirt and weariness, and he thinks to himself, *I hope they're all right. I hope they're feeling good. O God, take care of them.*

That's better than being a lord.

Nobility is the guy who sees it coming. He's Jimmy —, the tail gunner in the B-24 we called the Happy Harpy. He sees it coming and he knows the jig is up for him. And he says, loud and quick, so that his throat vibrates against the two little disks and we all hear it in the intercom, "Guys, take good care of America. I never met her socially, but she's a wonderful girl."

And the nurse. We called her Deanie. She never told us her name, but when we came in, dirty and bloody, with our beards and our hunger and pain and loneliness, she washed us and we said, the way we did when we were kids getting scrubbed, "Hey, you're too rough. You'll kill a guy!" But we were thinking how good and real and selfless she was to come out here and live in the field with us and help us. We thought that when we got patched up and well, we would build a nice latrine for her so she could live like a lady. We thought about that when she washed the blood from our faces, but all she said was, "All right, don't blow your top, bub, there's a war on!"

That's better than being a lady.

These are the things that wait in our minds when we think of coming home. America is bigger than we thought, and we have made ourselves bigger. Things that used to fit will have to be enlarged.

You'll understand when you see us.