



Franklin L. Lavin. *Home Front to Battlefield: An Ohio Teenager in World War II.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017. 380 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8214-2255-7.

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In April of 1942, when Carl Lavin turned eighteen, he registered for the draft just like all American boys after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Not hearing anything, he started college at the University of Miami-Ohio. Fully expecting to be called up at any moment, Lavin and his friends did not take their studies too seriously. In May, having just turned nineteen years old, Lavin received the call to serve in the United States Army. He would continue to serve until the end of the war. *Home Front to Battlefield* is a collection of Lavin's transcribed letters home, snippets of interviews with him, and the recollections of others.

Lavin grew up like any 1930s middle-class kid in Canton, Ohio. Once in the army, he realized that maybe infantry life was not for him. Officer Candidate School was out, so Lavin applied and was accepted into the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at Queen's College New York. ASTP was a year-long academic program mixed with military rules and regulations, but when a soldier finished, he was assured a commission. A common theme emerges in these early letters: Lavin asking his parents to send him something—hangers, fudge, news articles, or photos. Lavin loved his time at Queen's College, but it ended after only five months as the demand for bodies overseas grew.

Lavin crossed the Atlantic in November of 1944 as part of the 69th Division. He spent a little

over a month in England training before crossing the channel to France on Christmas Day, 1944 as a member of the Third Platoon, L Company, 3d Battalion, 335th Regiment, 84th Infantry Division. His first baptism of fire was in the Battle of the Bulge. Once in the fight, Lavin's letters were subject to increased censorship and become shorter, filled with less detail, relying on asking more questions about home or requesting his parents send him items, especially sweets. It was here where you really see him navigating between being a teenage son and a soldier. Through the Battle of the Bulge, Battle of the Roer, and the fighting over the Rhine River, Lavin opined philosophically in his descriptions of his time in the army. "There's the hopelessly unrelated relationship—of objects, of course, of people. The superbly unusual becomes common. In fact, unusualness itself is common" (p. 203). He also described, as much as he could, what he was doing and what he was seeing as he fought through France and Germany. Most of the time he remained positive, but sometimes a darkness seeped through. "I never could actually tell you [about the war]. And I'll be eternally grateful that you'll never know, when I see how many are affected by war, and to what extent" (p. 204).

After Lavin's last battle at Gertow and V-E Day, his life involved guard duty and trying to determine when he was going home. Lavin had time to

wonder why he fought: “Freedom from the army” and “because everyone else was doing it and we were expected to do it too” (pp. 236-7). He also opined on the differences between Russians, Germans, and the Americans. Lavin’s time in the army gave him one thing, “a great fear of militarism. It’s a terrible thing for one man to have power over another.” He argued that he accepted the army “physically” but not “mentally” (p. 246). He stated that the army “is a monarchy and is large. And there is one more reason why I hate and fear government other than democratic” (p. 279). Lavin’s days in Germany contemplating life were long. He did not leave for home until January of 1946.

Homefront to Battlefield is a rich addition to World War II literature. Too often we forget the individual soldiers who fought and their private struggles to be both a teenage son or brother or father and a combat soldier. As you read Lavin’s letters, you see the son change and struggle to understand what he has experienced. This book is a must-read for everyone exploring the wartime experiences of soldiers on the western front.

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