The key word in this title is “family.” Although this is a collection of letters written during the Civil War, the military aspects are more background than centerpiece. Lynn Heidelbaugh and Thomas J. Paone, both curators at the Smithsonian, have meticulously edited the documents that in many ways seem commonplace—both in their content and in the lives chronicled.

To say any family is “typical” of a particular time period begs all kinds of questions, but there is little that is unexpected or extraordinary in these letters. And perhaps that is what makes them worthwhile. *Between Home and the Front* is mostly the story of an ordinary family in the crucible of war. Amid separation, trials, and considerable anguish, family members reported on their activities and their emotions as their lives proceeded through the course of the war.

In December 1860, Rachel Ward married David Walters. Their families had both migrated from Ohio to northwestern Indiana. Between July 1861 and August 1862, four Walters brothers enlisted in the Union army. The surviving correspondence is largely from Rachel, her husband David, and his brother Isaac. Another brother, Eli Walters, served only a few months before returning home on a medical discharge. In June 1864, John Wesley Walters, who had campaigned with the 46th Indiana Infantry, died of disease in Royal Center, Indiana.

Concerns about health—everything from fevers and headaches to wounds—crop up often. News of deaths, both soldier and civilian, receive brief notice. Hatred of the enemy occasionally bursts forth, such as when, on seeing a Rebel prisoner being brought into Fort Monroe, Isaac remarked, “I would have given fifty dollars to have had one Shot with my riffle” (p. 27).

Readers looking for military details or battle descriptions will be disappointed. From Glasgow, Kentucky, David noted that the common soldier knew little about what the generals were up to, but when it came to fighting, the privates “deserve more credit than any of their superiors” (p. 74). In January 1863—and this was typical of many sol-
diers—Isaac decided not to share any details about the recent battle of Fredericksburg because Rachel had likely already heard about the engagement. David was proud of how his regiment (the 5th Indiana Cavalry) performed against the Confederate raider John Hunt Morgan, but his letters included few details. In early 1864 he simply mentioned that his outfit had been in twenty-five engagements. Unfortunately, there is no surviving correspondence from Isaac about the 20th Indiana Infantry's fighting on July 2, 1863, at Gettysburg. His letters covering the period of the Overland campaign through the Petersburg campaign to the end of the war are likewise short on military detail aside from some mention of casualties.

Occasionally the Walters brothers groused about how the war was being conducted. Isaac claimed that he would almost have preferred to die rather than be wounded and endure neglect arising from a shortage of surgeons. But from the very start of the war, it is the separation of family and the management of everyday life both in the field and at home that dominate the correspondence. David, Isaac, and Rachel often commented on how much they missed each other and their hopes that the war would end soon. Each of them at times would spend nearly half a letter complaining about or explaining the lagging correspondence. There were problems in sending money home and in Rachel's case delays in picking it up. Isaac regretted not being home during butchering season because “they Generally have a merry time & plenty to eat & that is what makes a person happy” (p. 98).

In July 1861, less than a year before David enlisted, Rachel had given birth to a son. She wrote of young Willie cutting teeth, cheering for Lincoln, and informing visitors that his father was off fighting the Rebels. Her letters were usually longer and more revealing than those of her menfolk. Rachel took up school teaching but struggled with attracting enough students and with being away from Willie; while teaching, she had to board at several different places. Muddy roads and children helping out with crops also depressed school attendance; Rachel took some time off to help her father with his corn crop. Rachel lived modestly but worried what people would think if she bought new clothes, given local talk that soldiers' wives were spending all that their husbands made. David told her to “Clothe your self well and not listen to every shit ass” (p. 130). Aside from a good volume of home news, Rachel's letters often alluded to the progress of military conscription in Indiana. Being an older married man with a son set David apart from many other recruits, and Isaac bluntly thought that his brother should have stayed home to take care of his family. Rachel often referred to her own faith and religious activities while pressing her husband to lead a Christian life. There was talk of loved ones meeting in heaven, especially after the death of the family matriarch, Hannah Walters. During the war, members of the family had photographs taken, often miniatures, but none of these are extant.

The soldier letters included the customary details about camp life, including an extended discussion about a coat needed for David. Marching orders were issued and then countermanded, and there was the usual speculation from the brothers about where their different regiments were headed next. In May 1864 David was taken prisoner at Resaca, Georgia; Rachel never heard from her husband again. Indeed, David's death remains something of a mystery. He most likely died at the Confederate prison camp in Florence, South Carolina, in February 1865, and the editors recount their mostly futile search for details. Having served for nearly four years, in April 1865, Isaac was “happy to Say ... that my life & health is spared to See the close of his cruel war” (p. 166).

The editing of this volume deserves high praise. An extensive introduction describes the main characters and lays out the highlights of the correspondence. Heidelbaugh and Paone analyze the conditions under which Civil War letters were
written and delivered. Each chapter has a substantial introduction of its own that guides the reader toward the most interesting pieces of correspondence. Given the often sketchy references in the letters themselves, the editors have done a superb job of annotation, though it would have been preferable to have used footnotes rather than endnotes. The introductions and notes provide much-needed military context. Family trees, useful maps, and brief accounts of the family's postwar lives round out a model work that other editors of Civil War documents would do well to imitate. Of somewhat limited usefulness to scholars, the Walters correspondence nevertheless merits the attention of general readers.

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