

★ EDITOR'S NOTE ★

*Gayle Wurst*

*The General and His Daughter* presents for the first time the complete and unabridged wartime correspondence between General James M. Gavin and his daughter Barbara. The 209 letters, which begin when General Gavin was thirty-six years old and Barbara was nine, constitute the majority of his private correspondence during World War II. Written between the eventful times of early spring 1943 and December 5, 1945, they start at Fort Bragg as (then) Colonel Gavin, commander of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, prepares to move to New York Harbor, where he will embark for North Africa and the European Theater of Operations to lead the first American mass regimental combat jump in Sicily. The correspondence closes upon his return to the United States as the commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, which he led in the Victory Parade up 5th Avenue in New York on January 12, 1946.

The letters Barbara received came in many varieties—V-mail, handwritten notes, “captured” German letterhead, Division stationery, and numerous other forms—and were written from shipboard, foxholes, field tents, cellars, palaces, and busy offices. They were often composed in haste and under duress, and several convey her father’s intimate thoughts just before or after a combat jump. Yet despite these difficult circumstances, Gavin writes with remarkable clarity, speaking intelligently, directly, and honestly to his young daughter. The letters, infused with love, concern for her welfare, and the desire to help her understand his absence and his many responsibilities, sparkle with humor, playfulness, and attentiveness to the everyday affairs of a precocious little girl. He also sent many curious, colorful, and fascinating mementos—shoulder patches, foreign coins, stamps, insignia, silk maps, pennants, and a cartoon drawn especially for her by her favorite childhood author, Munro Leaf. Barbara even received her father’s medals and decorations in the mail, sent to her for safekeeping.

The letters have all been carefully transcribed by Starlyn Jorgensen with a view to faithfulness to the author's originals. They have, however, been formatted into paragraphs to make for easier reading; many were written on wartime V-mail, with minimal space, so that the use of paragraphs was precluded. General Gavin's grammar has been preserved, including the (very few) errors, which are presented without editorial comment. In many instances, Gavin was writing on "captured" typewriters with a foreign arrangement of keys; we have thus corrected most typographical and spelling errors, which were nevertheless far and few between, and rectified capitalization and punctuation where necessary. Omissions were also rare, and we have silently supplied a missing pronoun or two.

With very few exceptions, General Gavin dated his letters, and they are here presented in chronological order, arranged into chapters that chronicle the six campaigns of the 82nd Airborne Division in World War II and the Allied Occupation of Berlin. Textual apparatus has been kept to a minimum, in order to preserve the flow of the letters as General Gavin's personal chronicle of the war. Starlyn Jorgensen has framed the letters within brief italicized overviews of the 82nd's operations, concisely and unobtrusively supplying essential biographical and historical information. Within the text of the letters, her short textual notes, contained within square brackets, identify places, people, and other significant references at their first mention. Longer personal notes within the text, bracketed, italicized and identified with the initials *BGF*, are provided by Barbara Gavin Fauntleroy, creating a subtle father-daughter "dialogue" between the lines.

Several contributions by people who knew General Gavin well and were close to him in different ways supplement the letters. The volume opens with a foreword by Dr. Rufus Broadaway, an aide-de-camp to Gavin, which testifies to life in the field with the General and to the admiration and loyalty he inspired in his "boys." Gerard M. Devlin, noted airborne historian, the author of a forthcoming biography of Gavin, and the general's friend in later life, has graciously supplied the introduction. Framing the letters themselves are essays by Barbara Gavin Fauntleroy, which look back to the years of her childhood. They chronicle her feelings, impressions, and experience as "the General's daughter," and discuss the circumstances that led her father to select her as his representative on the home front and special private correspondent. Factual notes and additional commentary by Starlyn Jorgensen appear at the end of the letters. A bibliography of cited sources and selected works for further reading and an index of proper names complete the volume.