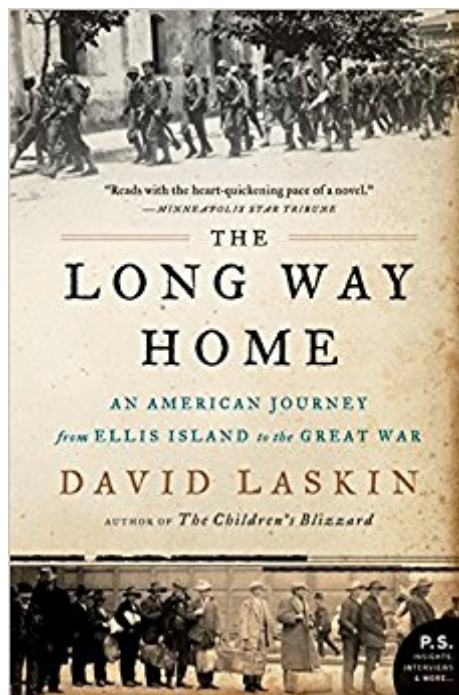




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# The Long Way Home: An American Journey From Ellis Island To The Great War



## Synopsis

“The Long Way Home is a riveting remembrance of the Great War by a master writer |. Deeply compelling.” — Douglas Brinkley “Moving, revealing, and lovingly researched, this book is a must read, and a great read, for any of us whose forebears came from overseas—meaning just about all of us.” — Erik Larson The author of the award-winning *The Children’s Blizzard*, David Laskin, returns with a remarkable true story of the immigrants who risked their lives fighting for America during the Great War.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an engrossing and moving story of 12 men, all of them immigrants to the U.S., who were transformed by their brief but intense experiences as soldiers in WWI. They included Italians, Poles, Scandinavians, Slovaks, Jews, and Irishmen. Most of them did not relish military service, and some of them fled their homelands to avoid conscription. Before they were drafted or enlisted in the U.S. military, few of them understood or cared about the issues that had torn apart a Europe that they had left behind. These men were not atypical, since an estimated 20 percent of U.S. military draftees were foreign born. Laskin tells their individual stories with eloquence and feeling while avoiding cheap sentimentality. As he traces their paths from bootcamp to combat in France, one can see their gradual merging with their fellow soldiers into a true band of brothers. This is a superb chronicle that illustrates how some young men were transformed into Americans. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"David Laskin's *The Long Way Home* is a brilliant blending of social analysis and personal narrative, which recovers the experience of a "lost generation" the immigrant "greenhorns" who became Americans through service on the battlefields of World War I. (Richard Slotkin, author of *Gunfighter Nation*) "Moving, revealing, and lovingly researched, this book is a must read, and a great read, for any of us whose forebears came from overseas meaning just about all of us. (Erik Larson, author of *The Devil in the White City*) "A riveting remembrance of the Great War by a master writer. David Laskin, by homing in on the lives of a dozen immigrants to Ellis Island, is able to tell a grand American saga about the true cost of democracy. All around a deeply compelling narrative. (Douglas Brinkley, author of *The Wilderness Warrior*) "Laskin's tracing of young immigrants, figuratively and literally, from Ellis Island to the trenches of World War I France blends moving personal stories, sociology, culture and military history. The result is a marvelous evocation of what it means to become an American and the many paths to that end. (Joseph Persico, author of *Eleven Month, Eleven Day, Eleventh Hour*) "Riveting. . . . With the epic history of the Great War as his backdrop, Laskin has vividly brought these extraordinary, colorful men to life and created, overall, an absolute masterpiece. (Andrew Carroll, editor of *War Letters and Behind the Lines*) "David Laskin's latest, *The Long Way Home*, reads with the heart-quickenning pace of a novel as he focuses his gaze on a band of real-life characters who emigrated to the United States in the years just before World War I. (The Minneapolis Star Tribune)

The author follows the lives of 12 men of varied backgrounds and ethnicities who immigrated to the United States and who later were drafted or enlisted into military service during World War I. The irony was that many of the men immigrated to avoid conscription in their countries of origin. He details the reasons why they came, the difficulties and prejudices they faced and the means by which they persevered. After unimaginable horrors experienced in the Great War, the survivors returned to be exemplary citizens. Poignant!

In the late 19th and early 20th century, millions of immigrants came to America, fleeing poverty, pogroms, and the draft. When the U.S. entered World War I, thousands of immigrant men enlisted or were drafted to serve in the military, returning to Europe in similar ocean liners to the ones that had brought them. David Laskin sees this military service as a critical step in the Americanization of the immigrants -- even though they returned to often virulent xenophobia during the Red Scare. As he did in *The Children's Blizzard*, Laskin makes vivid a sweeping story by focusing on a small

number of individuals (in this case, 12 men). He begins with the immigrants' lives in Europe -- the Italian boy in a rocky farm, the Norwegian man who left the farm to work on a fishing boat, the Jewish scrap hauler in the Russian pale. And then he follows them on their journeys to America in the fetid barracks of steerage. On they go to their new homes: the copper mines in Butte, a blanket factory in New England, the Lower East Side. A couple of them enlisted long before World War I; one was part of Pershing's force chasing Pancho Villa (earlier he'd been a mercenary selling arms to Pancho Villa). And then there's the military. The transition from civilian life was difficult. How could the Army train a crowd of recruits who spoke dozens of languages and were often malnourished and in terrible shape? How could the immigrants get past the ethnic slurs flung at them by the native-born soldiers? And what sort of soldiers would these immigrants make? Eventually, they shipped out, fully trained or not, and Laskin takes us to the trenches and the shattered forests of the Great War. Using the immigrants' own words -- from letters home, diaries, and, in a couple of cases, interviews (he met one veteran who was 107!) -- and accounts from others who were in the same battles, he gives detailed accounts of the horrors and the heroism of war. This isn't a war book just for military history buffs. Recommended for those interested in the immigrant experience and U.S. history generally.

David Laskin has written another great book that talks about my favorite subject-genealogy and how our country was built with the hard work of immigrants-our grandparents and in some cases our parents. I truly recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn about their past and their present lives.

My father was born in Lithuania in 1891, learned to be a tailor working his way across Europe, came to the US shortly before WW1, joined the Army and fought in France. After the war he opened a tailor shop and did well until the Depression. My mother was born in Bialostock and lived through the pogrom of 2005. This book gave me details and insights into what they went through and never talked about.

I chose this book to learn about the participation of the many immigrants to this country who fought for America in World War I even though they weren't citizens of this country. It tells the story of men from many countries who had come to America for many reasons but decided to fight for this country or were drafted but choose not to use the legal exemptions available to them. Many spoke no English and were "fresh off the boat". It mirrors to some extent the situation today in which many

non-citizens have volunteered to fight for a country resents their presence here.

This book follows the stories of approximately a dozen immigrants to the United States and also three of its citizens. The author did an outstanding job of researching and weaving the stories into a coherent whole. The author provides a graphic description of life on the World War I battlefield and the actions and thoughts of citizens back in the U.S. As an immigrant and veteran myself, I can identify with and verify that a lot of the trials and perplexities which beset the men featured in this book were not confined only to the World War I era. I thought so much of this book that I ordered numerous copies for gifts to members of our family and friends. Every one of the friends and family member has thought it fantastically well done.

As compelling, well written, and researched as the other books of David Laskin, and in today's climate around immigration, timely also.

This was great history of early America at the turn of the century. I was amazed to see how little attitudes towards immigrants have changed in 100 years. Its easy to see how nationalities group together in a new land...for survival. This book, also, did a good job of portraying war at its worst. And how war breaks down the nationality barriers to create life long friendships regardless of your place of birth.

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