

"...and that government of the people,
by the people, and for the people,
shall not perish from the earth."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The Volunteer

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Vets gain Spanish citizen-

MADRID 1937

Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade
from the Spanish Civil War

A Review and Reflections

By Robert G. Colodny

The editors, Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, and Routledge Press have produced a memorial for the Abraham Lincoln Brigade more beautiful and everlasting than any monument cast in bronze or carved in marble or enduring granite. With these letters the members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade who were able to pen them from the battlefields of Spain leap to life as full human beings with all their hopes, dreams and fears set down in their own words.

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade has up to now been rather fortunate in having in its own ranks able chroniclers of their exploits. One thinks at once of Edwin Rolfe's *The Lincoln Battalion*, the several volumes of Arthur Landis, including his posthumous *Death in the Olive Groves*, Alvah Bessie's *Men in Battle* and Carl Geiser's *Prisoners of the Good Fight*. Furthermore we have from *Monthly Review Press* a group of writings by veterans of the International Brigades, *Our Fight*. We also have probing biographies of Steve Nelson, Robert Merriman, and autobiographical works of Milt Felsen, George Watt, James Yates and many others. Gradually the individuals who made up the International Brigades ceased to be silhouettes against the background of death and destruction and emerge in all of their humanity with all of their idiosyncrasies, and as I have already indicated, with their dreams and hopes.

We might mention here the interviews of Gerassi and the probing

MADRID 1937
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Continued on page 16

A 60-year-old promise of President Juan Negrin was finally heeded by the Spanish Parliament on November 2. It unanimously passed a law approving citizenship for every International soldier, living or deceased, who fought in the Republican Army.

Sponsored by the United Left Party, the Socialist Party and the Basque National Party, the legislation, as required by the Republic's constitution, was quickly approved by King Juan Carlos. Spanish press coverage of the news was widespread and laudatory.

The demand for the IB citizenship had been a twenty-year focus of all the Republican veterans' organizations in Spain. It became the first priority of the Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales (ABI), founded last year, and the Center for Documentation of the International Brigades, headed by Santiago Alvarez, wartime commissar of the Army of the Ebro.

These organizations plan a major event in November of this year to mark the 60th anniversary of the war. A tri-city commemoration in Albacete, Madrid and Barcelona is contemplated. All surviving IB veterans are invited to attend and a national effort is underway to raise funds to defray the expenses of the overseas veterans.

The Spanish government has designated Delorez Cabra of the ABI to supervise the collection of the applications of the living IB veterans in contemplation of the November events. There will be a 3-year period for families to petition for the honor in behalf of deceased veterans. ■



Volunteer View



A few hundred surviving veterans of the International Brigades will journey to Spain next November for celebrations of their newly-granted Spanish citizenship, in Albacete, Madrid and Barcelona. At every one of these events there will be a stirring recollection of Dolores Ibárruri, the immortal La Pasionaria, who on a bleak November day in 1938 delivered her farewell, the immortal despedida (printed opposite) to the departing International Brigaders.

If every living IB veteran were asked to name the wartime leader most revered, inspirational, and unforgettable, "La Pasionaria" would be the unanimous response. They know that after almost sixty years her prediction of a *bienvenida*, a welcome, for them, has become a reality voiced by the people of a democratic Spain and applauded by all throughout the world who cherish the democratic freedoms which were at stake in the war they fought so long ago. ■

The Volunteer

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FAREWELL ADDRESS TO THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES

It is very difficult to say a few words in farewell to the heroes of the International Brigades, because of what they are and what they represent. A feeling of sorrow, an infinite grief catches our throat — sorrow for those who are going away, for the soldiers of the highest ideal of human redemption, exiles from their countries, persecuted by the tyrants of all peoples — grief for those who will stay here forever mingled with the Spanish soil, in the very depth of our heart, hallowed by our feeling of eternal gratitude.

From all peoples, from all races, you came to us like brothers, like sons of immortal Spain; and in the hardest days of the war, when the capital of the Spanish Republic was threatened, it was you, gallant comrades of the International Brigades, who helped save the city with your fighting enthusiasm, your heroism and your spirit of sacrifice. — And Jarama and Guadalajara, Brunete and Belchite, Levante and the Ebro, in immortal verses sing of the courage, the sacrifice, the daring, the discipline of the men of the International Brigades.

For the first time in the history of the peoples' struggles, there was the spectacle, breath-taking in its grandeur, of the formation of International Brigades to help save a threatened country's freedom and independence — the freedom and independence of our Spanish land.

Communists, Socialists, Anarchists, Republicans — men of different colors, differing ideology, antagonistic religions — yet all profoundly loving liberty and justice, they came and offered themselves to us unconditionally.

They gave us everything — their youth or their maturity; their science or their experience; their blood and their lives; their hopes and aspirations — and they asked us for nothing. But yes, it must be said, they did want a post in battle, they aspired to the honor of dying for us.

Banners of Spain! Salute these many heroes!
Be lowered to honor so many martyrs!

Mothers! Women! When the years pass by and the wounds of war are stanchd; when the memory of the sad and bloody days dissipates in a present of liberty, of peace and of well-being; when the rancors have died out and pride in a

free country is felt equally by all Spaniards, speak to your children. Tell them of these men of the International Brigades.

Recount for them how, coming over seas and mountains, crossing frontiers bristling with bayonets, sought by raving dogs thirsting to tear their flesh, these men reached our country as crusaders for freedom, to fight and die for Spain's liberty and independence threatened by German and Italian fascism. They gave up everything — their loves, their countries, home and fortune, fathers, mothers, wives, brothers, sisters and children — and they came and said to us: "We are here. Your cause, Spain's cause, is ours. It is the cause of all advanced and progressive mankind."

Today many are departing. Thousands remain, shrouded in Spanish earth, profoundly remembered by all Spaniards.

Comrades of the International Brigades: Political reasons, reasons of state, the welfare of that very cause for which you offered your blood with boundless generosity, are sending you back, some to your own countries and others to forced exile. You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend. You are the heroic example of democracy's solidarity and universality in the face of the vile and accommodating spirit of those who interpret democratic principles with their eyes on hoards of wealth or corporate shares which they want to safeguard from all risk.

We shall not forget you; and, when the olive tree of peace is in flower, entwined with the victory laurels of the Republic of Spain — return!

Return to our side for here you will find a homeland — those who have no country or friends, who must live deprived of friendship — all, all will have the affection and gratitude of the Spanish people who today and tomorrow will shout with enthusiasm —

Long live the heroes of the International Brigades! ■

Dolores Ibárruri, *La Pasionaria*
Barcelona, November 1, 1938



Rebels Without a Pause



▣ SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Ed Bender's speech at his 89th or 90th birthday.

The Bay Area Post, last June 24, hosted a double celebration for Ed Bender — his birthday and his recovery from a debilitating stroke. There was no uncertainty about his recovery as his platform presence proved, but there was a question, framed by the title above, as to the precise birthday that was being honored.

Well, I won't get into the argument — am I or am I not 89 or 90? See, my birthday was recorded by my mother in a prayer book according to the Hebrew calendar and it was lost on the way here from the Ukraine, 75 years ago. If I can get back to the Ukraine and find that book, I'll be able to prove that I'm only 89. It doesn't matter, really, 89 or 90.

Here I am and I'm glad to see all of my friends here who helped to restore my morale and rebuild my health.

About my life — well, it's been many years of living, and three quarters of those were years of participation and struggle. There were some good years, some bad — some happy years and some not so happy. But in all those years there was participation in the struggles that were taking place in this country and throughout the world.

The struggle was satisfying because it wasn't just to make one's own life better but was concerned with the life of all people in this country and throughout the world. I committed myself to it at an early age and at the time of the Great Depression when millions were out of work.

I marched then with thousands in demonstrations to relieve the people's misery. We marched in state capitals and in Washington, demanding action. As a result, there was action: the people elected a new government, a new president. The new congress responded to this cry and great laws were passed in those years: unemployment insurance, Social Security, and, later, Medicare, civil rights and work programs. Millions of Americans benefit from these today. I was a dot among them but if I contributed only this much to making life a little better, I think it worthwhile.

We not only had to fight for life here, but there were two world wars, the rise of fascism and the Spanish Civil War. Imagine our world if fascism had succeeded. We'd all be living in a global concentration camp.

My generation struggled against fascism. We fought it at great cost. One million died in Spain fighting the fascists, including 800 Americans who volunteered to help the republic fight against Franco.

Twenty-seven million perished in World War II. Fascism was defeated and the people of the world breathed easier.

As a very young man I committed myself to an ideal — to make the world a little better than I then saw it. I

hoped for a world free of unemployment, hunger, racial hatred and war. This was my commitment, along with many other people, and because of that I involved myself in the struggles of those days.

I had a dream, a dream of a better world. It hasn't yet been realized but I haven't yet given up on it. I believe that the generation that's entering the new 21st century will respond to their challenges as we responded to ours. The day will come when our planet earth will truly be a pleasurable place to live for all people.

Well, this is what I think after 90 years and I am happy to see so many of you with whom I have had a long association in the Good Fight. Thank you very much and I love you all.

▣ SAN FRANCISCO, CA

The *San Francisco Examiner Magazine*, Sunday, November 19, 1995, devoted its center four pages to Milt Wolff. Entitled "The Last Bell of the Lincoln Brigade," writer Edward Beitiks' story is a biographical interview. It is illustrated with exceptional photographs, some old, some new.

Ranging Milt's life from his wartime days in Spain to his recent novel, *Another Hill*, Beitiks, a Vietnam veteran, has caught the essence of the activism that typified and persisted for most veterans of the International Brigades. His final paragraphs read:

"Nothing is the same," said Wolff smiling to himself.

He talked about the time not too long ago when he was speaking in Santa Rosa and "some young rebel stood up, you know, with a beard, this real earnest look on his face, and said, 'What do you recommend we do?'"

I wasn't able to suggest anything like, 'Go to Bosnia or go to Rwanda or Somalia or Chechnya, all these battlegrounds.' So I said, 'The main threat to democracy in these times is the course now being taken by the radical right. The main line of resistance is the ballot box. That's our best chance of taking control of our lives, of our libraries, of our city councils and state offices.'

"And his response was — he was in high dudgeon as he said this — 'Are you telling us to vote?'"

Thinking about it, Wolff rubbed a hand through his white hair, looked around the small living room of his walkup apartment and laughed out loud.

▣ PORTRERO HILLS, CA

Sponsored by Global Exchange, Veteran Lincoln Brigade nurse Ruth Davidow last September attended the International Women's Conference in China.

Interviewed by her hometown newspaper, *The Portrero Review*, Ruth declared that she had gone to the conclave "not only as a woman but as an antifascist." She described the event as "a wonderful, wonderful conference, and the significance was in the people from all



Rebels Without a Pause



around the world, gathered together to get justice, women's rights and to combat poverty."

Ruth is also working on a documentary film of her own life. She told reporter Lysa Allman, "In interviewing young people from San Francisco to Moscow, what I have been getting from them is how they see this world; what's happening with them; and what they think they need in education."

Topping off the interview, Ruth reported that her present plans include enrolling in a state program that teaches visually challenged people to use voice-activated computers, and "the last thing the San Francisco Mime Troupe did on the election was so hilarious, I told my daughter Joan, 'when I come back from China, I'm going to join it.'"

▣ PELICAN COVE, FL

A real life imitation of the Broadway drama, *A Walk in the Woods*, which featured a collegial dialogue between two retired Cold War rivals, was duplicated during the winter in this Sarasota resort. Lincoln veteran Bill Susman and Gus Tyler, columnist of the *Forward* (formerly the *Jewish Daily Forward*), took their prescribed morning constitutionals together.

The simpatico ambience of these strolls in the palm groves produced a column in the *Forward* (Jan. 26). It praised the decision of the Spanish government granting citizenship to all the men and women of the International Brigades, who were among the first to resist in the "war of dictatorship against democracy fought by Germany and Italy against Spain while the great democracies stood by."

▣ NEW YORK CITY

Subway Riders, a work by Lincoln Veteran Ralph Fasinella, on December 15 was chosen to be the first oil painting permanently installed in the New York City subway system. Completed in 1950, *Subway Riders*, in the collection of the Museum of American Folk Art, was presented by Ralph and his wife Eva to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for permanent public display on the subway mezzanine at the Fifth Avenue and 53rd St. station.

Speaking about the painting at the presentation ceremony, Ralph said:



Ralph Fasinella with his painting *Subway Riders*.

"I'd ride the subway every day, back and forth to my machine shop job. I'd ride and sketch. I love the subway. It pulls the city together, pulls people together in a magic way. Here I show the subway riders at night after a hard day's work. Everyone is separate, alone, but very much together. It's noisy with the creaks and squeals, but peaceful too, because we move in a rhythm and a cadence that gets inside us; that's comforting, like the music of the city itself. The city makes the city move, makes the city great. And behind the scenes — unseen and unheard — the transit workers drive the trains, grease the wheels, and keep the engines running. They perform miracles. They get us through another day."

▣ HAYWARD, CA

Lincoln vet Nate Thornton and his wife Corinne, last September donated their Spanish Civil War book collection to the local library. The gift sparked an interview in *The Pioneer*, Hayward's newspaper, where Robert Taggard, reported:

"In the shadows of their living room, the couple talk about why they want to make their donations to the local library and, in between the silence, one can only hear the incessant tick-tock of the large grandfather clock. The mood is perfect for a history lesson."

The family's history lesson was extraordinary, covering the service of both Nate's father, John, and his own as truck and ambulance drivers on the Madrid and Cordoba fronts, and their return to the Bay Area after the war in 1938.

In addition to their SCW books, the Thorntons gave several of Nate's art-quality wood carvings to the Hayward institution.

▣ KINGSTON, NY

The local *Daily Freeman's* letter column carried the following letter on November 2, 1995. Lincoln veteran Morris Brier heads the signatories, primarily for alphabetic and seniority reasons.

Dear Editor: In an hour-and-a-half on the afternoon of Oct. 27 in Kingston, four of us (the youngest 74, the oldest 84), collected 160 signatures on a petition addressed to President Clinton. It called on him to veto

Rebels

Continued from page 5

legislation that would balance the budget on the backs of the people who most need Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

We know the president has voiced opposition to the current budget legislation and said that he would veto any bills that cut taxes and shift the burden to the poor, elderly and disabled. Many of the people who signed were especially concerned with the cuts in Medicare and Medicaid. Many who signed told us, "My mother lives on Medicare and Social Security and I have to help her."

We are urging President Clinton to veto this legislation and not to compromise on cuts in Medicare and Medicaid. Polls show that the overwhelming majority of the American people support a veto.

signed: **Morris Brier**
Ruth Krauss
Esther Nason
Rosalind Stark

■ **NEW YORK CITY** — In a column, October 4, 1995, about home wine makers, *New York Times* feature writer Howard G. Goldberg uncorked the following vintage-quality news:

Some are in it for life. William Van Felix, an 80-year-old refrigeration instructor who makes wine in his Greenwich Village home, first became passionate about wine on 1937.

"I went to Spain to fight Franco," Mr. Van Felix said. "I was anti-alcohol. I thought it was the curse of the working class.

"But in Spain, wine was regular — you got wine with food," he said. "I learned to use it. When I came back, I bought a bottle. It tasted like vinegar.

"I decided to make my own. Now I got stuff in my basement that is 12 years old. You wouldn't believe how good it tastes."

'Shouts From the Wa

By Peter Carroll

ALBA Chair

Two girls take shelter beneath a stone bridge; their eyes search the skies: "The fascist aircraft flies over the capital of the republic. What are you doing to take cover?"

A mother and child shudder beneath a flock of fascist planes: "Madrid — What are you doing to stop this?"

A mother clutches her baby's corpse: "Criminales!"

A goggled pilot looks at a squadron of Republican airplanes: "Victory: Today more than ever."

Sixty years ago, innumerable gorgeous, passionate posters screamed from the walls of Spain's cities — stunning, luminescent images that articulated the dangers of fascist terror, the importance of public resistance, and the opportunities that would follow a victory of the people.

Everyone who visited the embattled Republic understood the power of this unique form of art: strong visual scenes in a variety of artistic styles matched to terse, defiant rhetoric designed to strengthen morale, impart lessons, spread news and advice, offer a reason to go on fighting.

There were, for example, images of women in diverse settings: fighting milicianas with rifles at the ready, nurses preparing transfusions, sainted mothers seeking to save their children, field workers with scythe and pitchfork in hand, athletes with bulging muscles, prostitutes reaching out the deadly hand of VD.

And these familiar wartime scenes appeared in various artistic styles: realism, art deco, surrealism, hasty watercolor sketches, photomontages. But whatever the technique or style, the messages were transparent, crystal clear, accessible to the busy, often illiterate masses who understood

the stakes of the war.

American volunteers in Spain commented frequently about this remarkable public art. Sometimes they posed for photographs in front of the posters or folded them into tight envelopes and mailed them to relatives and friends in America. Or, at the end of the fighting, they packed them into bundles of souvenirs and carried them home.

Over the years, many of these posters have found their way into ALBA's archival collection at Brandeis University. We now hold over 200 different posters, many of them restored to assure their safe preservation. During the 1986 50th anniversary commemorations of the Spanish Civil War, some were exhibited at Dartmouth College, where they provided a vivid backdrop to a series of panel discussions about the war.

At Brandeis they have appeared in library exhibitions and public forums. Copies of the posters have been reprinted in various books, among them Lincoln veteran John Tisa's *The Palette and the Flame*.

Now, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Spanish war, ALBA is launching a major national exhibition of the Spanish Civil War posters that will bring the wall art to a new generation of viewers. Thanks to a generous grant from the Puffin Foundation, *Shouts From the Wall* opens in New York City at the Puffin Gallery on April 19 and runs until May 30. Located at 435 Broome St. in the SoHo section, the gallery is open Wednesday to Saturday, 12 noon to 6 pm.

Curated by ALBA's Cary Nelson and myself, the exhibition includes 35 original posters, substantial wall texts, and a special Lincoln Brigade album consisting of photographs, wartime letters, and a color copy of the only wall newspaper to survive the war intact.

But New York is only the launching pad. In June, the poster exhibi-

- The ALBA poster exhibition

tion moves for a six-week appearance to the Berkeley Art Center in California (June 20 – August 10), then goes to the Museum of Albuquerque in New Mexico (August 30 – October 13), and ends the year at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery at the University of Washington in Seattle (November 6 – December 22). At each location, the posters will be linked with other public activities: lectures, panel discussions, screenings of films, gatherings of Lincoln veterans, families, friends.

The road show continues in 1997: The Meadows Art Museum at Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana (January 24 – March 9); the university art museum at Texas A&M in College Station (March 24 – May 4); the Emerson Gallery at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York (Sept. 5 – Oct. 19); the University of South Florida in Tampa (Nov. 8 – Dec. 23).

For 1998, the exhibition will appear at Mount Holyoke College, the University of Illinois, and other sites. Museums in England have also shown an interest.

Besides the gift from the Puffin Foundation, funding for the exhibition comes from various sources: the Charles Keith and Clara Miller foundation, Spain's Ministry of Culture, The Needmor Fund, the Blue Mountain Center as well as local foundations that support the independent museums.

When ALBA initiated this project in 1994, we had a good idea about the quality of the art and the political value of the posters' messages. When Cary and I traveled to Brandeis last March to make our final selections, we were confident that we knew what we were looking for. Brandeis archivist Charles Cutter opened the vaults for us on a Sunday morning and by that evening we had made our first picks.

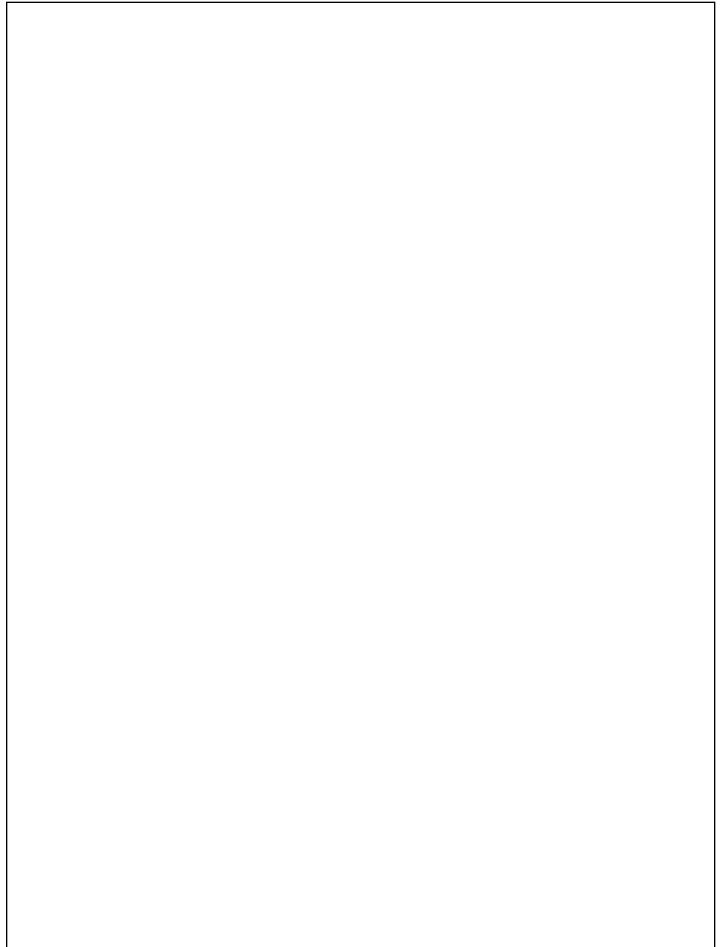
But the next day something unexpected occurred. ALBA's found-

ing archivist, Victor Berch, drew us aside to explain that he had recently received a gift of several posters, some of which were still in their original 1930s wrappings. Did we want to look at them too?

Soon, Victor was unraveling a thick packet of multifolded newsprint. After each unfolding, a wrapped poster doubled its size, growing before our eyes, to a foot, to two feet, to four, to eight!

Finally we were looking at an immense orange and yellow portrait of a huge lifelike lion, something like the MGM mascot but with a slightly humanized face. The lion's front paw, slightly raised, stood upon a toppled *faces*, the ancient symbol of Rome's iron rule adapted by Mussolini. Above the lion's head was a simple word: ESPAÑA. Beneath the *faces* a smaller caption read: "Cuyas letras sonoras restallen hoy en nuestra alma con grito de guerra y mañana con una exclamación de júbilo de paz." ("Those six letters today resound in our soul as a war cry, and for tomorrow as an exclamation of joy and peace.") A small autograph displays the artist's name: Jose Bardasano.

We gazed silently at the poster for five minutes, ten minutes — totally amazed by the beauty and power of the image. Yes, we decided. The lion was the symbol of Madrid, of Spain, of the



incredible effort to save the Republic from fascist aggression. Yes, we would give the lion the place of honor in the exhibit. It would be the first image people would see, and it would be the last, too.

For the next two days, while we completed our work at Brandeis, we kept the lion unfolded on a big library table. And whenever we passed by, we shared a smile at our good fortune in finding that poster, in being the first to see what will soon become available to all the exhibition's visitors. We offer it to them with a defiant roar: "SHOUTS FROM THE WALL!" a mighty symbol of a heroic people's crusade. ■

New York Opening
April 19 — May 26
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(Corner of Broadway)

The course of true democracy in Spain is far from smooth

by **Gabriel Jackson**

Most of the headlined news in recent months in Spain has been bad. I say "headlined" because one always has to remember that crime and scandal are much more "newsworthy" than a tolerable daily life. The newspapers and airwaves continue to be full of new details about the mulcting of investors and the blackmail of the government by the ex-president of Banesto, D. Mario Conde, and by D. Javier de la Rosa, former head of the Kuwaiti investments on Spain.

The investigations of the former head of the Civil Guard, Luis Roldan, and the former head of the Bank of Spain, Mariano Rubio, grind along at the slow pace of most judicial investigations of white collar crime, especially those which have to be conducted without the cooperation of Swiss banks and against the obstruction of lawyers who can always find some procedural shortcoming in anything that smells of the unpleasant truth.

These continuing scandals show the weaknesses of the transition from the 39-year dictatorship to democracy, a transition whose 20th birthday is being celebrated in the media. In 1975, all the important political forces except ETA were eager for a consensus settlement on the basis of parliamentary democracy, a market economy and a modest version of the welfare state. The young king and his advisors, the conservative followers of Manuel Fraga's Popular alliance, the Catalan and Basque nationalist parties, the Socialists and Communists — all were determined to avoid another civil war and were ready to make the mutual concessions necessary to frame the consti-

tution of a democratic monarchy.

In terms of free elections, the freedom of the press and all other news and cultural media, separation of church and state, civilian control of the military, career opportunities for women, limited divorce and abortion laws, and substantial measures of decentralization and of autonomy for the Basque and Catalan provinces, the Constitution of 1978 and its complementary laws have been a great success. And that transformation of Spain into a European democracy was also accompanied by entrance into the Common Market and into NATO.

But there was no reform of the civil administration and of the police. In fact, decentralization and the establishment of seventeen different "autonomies" within the state has multiplied the number of functionaries and the number of police units. At the same time, it must be remembered that Spain's economic "takeoff" of the 1960s took place under the dictatorship and that all kinds of bribery and corruption were taken for granted as a normal feature of the process. While various banking controls have theoretically been established, the economic expansion during the democratic era has continued pretty much in the old style, with job preferences for friends and relatives, small cash handoffs for chauffeurs, accountants, etc., and Swiss bank deposits for important silent partners, functionaries and police. Thus a second transition is necessary, to establish honest, efficient administration of both private and public money, and to eliminate the extortionists and the torturers from the unreformed police forces.

Spain's economic "takeoff" of the 1960's took place under the dictatorship and that all kinds of bribery and corruption were taken for granted...

Spain also faces an important fishing industry crisis. Both Atlantic and African waters have been overfished in recent decades, and Spanish fishing trawlers have had serious conflicts with French, Canadian and Moroccan authorities. All nations share the ecological responsibility for more restricted exploitation of international waters, but the necessary transition here is extremely difficult for Spain, where many Galician and Andalusian towns have for centuries depended on unrestricted fishing in both North and South Atlantic waters.

One of the main results of the many scandals has been the insistent call for early parliamentary elections. These will take place in March 1996, and in them the Popular Party of Manuel Aznar is likely to replace the Socialist Party as the largest in the Cortes, though not necessarily with an absolute majority.

Since the Popular Party represents the conservative business classes, it is not likely to initiate either the necessary administrative and police reforms or the social-economic changes which would diversify the economy of the poorer fishing villages.

Thus Spain (along with Europe generally) faces difficult economic problems at a time when scandals have destroyed the prestige of Spain's first democratic Socialist Party government. At the same time, unemployment and pension payments, non-scandalous industrial and agricultural activity, and the flourishing tourist and host-to-international-congress activities in the big cities are permitting most Spaniards to stay afloat economically. ■

Culling the mail sack

NEW YORK — A holiday greeting sent by **Bill Susman** from the VALB to Madrid last December evoked the following response (translated) on a letterhead reading, “El Presidente del Gobierno”:

Dear Friend,

I have received your letter of last December 6th and I wish to thank you in these few lines for the kind words you wrote to me.

I send this with my best wishes for the New Year and my most cordial salud. ♣

Felipe Gonzáles Márquez

MISSISSAUGA, CANADA — **Joe Glenn** corrects any impression that the Veterans of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion have disappeared into history. He writes:

We are reduced in numbers to under thirty five but we have not disbanded yet. There are less than one dozen of us who are fully active and even then just sometimes. ... No one close to Toronto is active. Jules Paivio In Sudbury and Amedee Grenier near Montreal get around quite a bit. Marvin Penn of Winnipeg and Frank Blackman of B.C. seem to get about but the rest appear to get out only occasionally. ♣

NEW YORK — [from **Herb Freeman's** year-end letter] My son Josh Freeman, Pat Kelly and I went to Spain in late November. The reason for the trip was basically Pat. She is a specialist in AIDS research, who was invited to talk at a medical conference in Barcelona. I think she was the only American invited and was very well received.

They had suggested that I come along and that we could check out a note left by my father that repeated a rumored possible location of my brother Jack's grave.

Tom Entwhistle, whom I had arranged to guide us, met us in Madrid and flew with us to Barcelona where we rented a car

and drove to Gandesa.

The note said that Jack was killed on Hill 282, the military identification located the Lincoln Battalion's line on Sept. 7, 1938. Tom scouted it out that evening and took us there the next morning. It seemed futile to look for a cemetery in an olive grove because even from that low elevation, we could see dozens of cemeteries — all on private property and, of course, there were no gravestones.

However, the hill itself was a different story, very evocative of strange emotions — even those experienced on the 1986 trip. Because the terrain was not arable land, and covered with brush and trees, the trenches and refugios were pretty much intact even after 57 years.

We climbed into them and looked out across the valley and the terrain that stretched for kilometers in a 200-degree arc where the Lincolns would have seen the advancing fascist troops, tanks, etc. On the ground we found pieces of iron that Tom identified as shrapnel. On another hill there were remnants of rusted sardine cans and grenade casings.

Josh, [a Chicago community-physician] found a piece of an arm bone. It may not have been Jack's but it was one of ours. So much for that. One day, I will try to write with some clearer perspective of my overloaded feelings and of what was unfolding at that time in Spain, just 3 weeks before the Americans were pulled out of the front to be sent home. ...

Here's hoping that you all remain well, or reach that condition, in the new year and that we get a chance to give them “Bulyakas” in Washington hell and retirement. ♣

NEW YORK — [VALB office skepticism about a photo in an ancient Mexican newsclip led to the letter reproduced below. The photo purported to show the late John F. Kennedy in 1937, accompanied by

Nehru and Krishna Menon, visiting Enrique Lister, then a commander on the Madrid front. — Ed.]

Dear Mr. Smorodin:

I wish that General Lister were right; but, so far as I can ascertain, JFK never visited Spain during the Civil War. He tried to go to Spain as a Harvard sophomore but could get no further than St. Jean de Luz. If you will look at Nigel Hamilton's biography or at my *A Thousand Days*, (p. 82), you will find his thoughts about the war — initially sympathetic to the republic but somewhat distressed by atrocity tales he was told at St. Jean de Luz. Moreover, had JFK met Nehru and Krishna Menon in Spain in 1937, he would surely have recalled the meeting when Nehru visited America in 1962.

General Lister very likely remembered meeting JFK's older brother, Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., later killed in the war. Young Joe was sent to Spain by his father on a fact-finding mission in 1938 or 1939. His report, which I vaguely remembered having seen years ago, was, as I recall, mostly factual and did not espouse either side. Young Joe, like his father, was a strong isolationist. (The ambassador was not pro-Nazi; he was anti-war and felt that trying to do business with Hitler was better than sending young men to their death. He had the same attitude toward Stalin in another decade and consequently opposed the Cold War, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan and the intervention in Korea.) ♣

Sincerely yours,

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

VANCOUVER, CANADA — A letter from **Mary Norris** informs us of her husband Len's death in White Rock, B.C., on September 6, 1995, at the age of 91. Len a MacPap veteran, for several decades edited the newsletter of the

Added to Memory's Roster

William C. Miller

This appeared in *El Ojo del Lago*, Guadalajara, Mexico, in November.

Ideals, humanity and vision brought to William Colfax Miller a touch of greatness. Few men achieved as much in a lifetime. He passed away on the 8th of September, but his memory will live forever in the hearts of his family and friends.

His friends included several of the artists who made history in the 20th Century: Orozco, Siquieros and Revueltas in Mexico; John Huston, Cole Porter and John Steinbeck in the United States. Bill himself was a prominent man in the arts. He had directed, produced or worked on more than 150 films. He even acted

in a few of them. His most notable credits were *Forgotten Village*, *Salt of the Earth* and the documentary *Walls of Fire*, the story of the murals of Mexico, a film that was later nominated for an Oscar and which won a Golden Globe Award.

Bill was also deeply admired for his commitment to political causes. In the '30s, feeling that fascism was destroying the great cultures of Europe, he joined the famed Lincoln Brigade and fought in the Spanish Civil War. Thereafter, the Spanish people would occupy a special place in his heart.

Later Bill migrated to Mexico and soon became the official photographer for President Lazaro Cardenas. He also edited and produced several films on the Revolution for the Mexican government. Yet despite his many achievements, he always wore his laurels with great modesty. He is survived by his wife, Virginia, and his four children. ❏

The Mail

Continued from page 9

Veterans of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. He and Mary were especially well known in the White Rock community where they lived and were active in the progressive movement.

Among those who sent tributes to a Vancouver memorial meeting for Len were Bill Alexander from London, on behalf of the British IB veterans, and Bob Reed from Seattle for the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. ❏

FRANKLIN, MAINE — The Molasses Pond Writers Retreat / Workshop has announced an annual award in honor of the late Jimmy Yates. VALB author of the autobiography, *From Mississippi to Madrid*. Jimmy attended several of the summer Retreat/Workshops. The award, a gift of \$250, will be given each May and the winner will be invited to give a reading at the Maine center: Molasses Pond Writers Retreat, RFD, Box 549, Franklin, Maine 04634. ❏

José Antonio Valledor

When the Abraham Lincoln Battalion was withdrawn from the Ebro battlefield for repatriation in September 1938, the commander of the 15th International Brigade in which it had fought throughout its service was Major José Antonio Valledor. He died on December 7, 1995, at his home in Alicante.

Valledor, a valiant and courageous fighter for freedom all his life was born in the Asturias where he had taken part in the brutally suppressed revolt led by the miners in 1934. An officer in the Loyalist forces that were overrun when the Asturias fell to Franco in 1936, Valledor was captured. He managed to escape from prison and rejoined the Republican Army in the spring of 1938.

At the July 4, 1938, Independ-

ence Day celebration of the 15th Brigade in Marsa, Colonel Vladimir Copic, who had commanded the Brigade for two years, introduced Valledor to the assembled battalions as his replacement.

When the Republican army was finally defeated in the spring of 1939, Valledor and the remnants of the 15th Brigade crossed over into France where they were forced into concentration camps. During World War II, Valledor, along with many of the Republican internees, escaped and joined the French partisans in the struggle against the Nazi-fascist forces. At the end of the war he returned to Spain and participated in the resistance movement that fought the fascist regime and established the Third Republic.

José Antonio was a frequent guest of the IB veterans in Britain and France. He was praised and honored as a lifelong fighter for freedom, for the rights of the poor, the hungry and the working class. Comrades wishing to express their respect for this remarkable man, can address them to his widow:

Sra. José Antonio Valledor
Urbanización Banyets 9
Campello, Alicante, España ❏

— Howard Goddard

David Epstein

A defender of democracy in two wars against fascism, David Epstein died in New York City on December 5, two months short of his 83rd birthday.

David, an artist, was an early-on volunteer for the International Brigade. He was wounded at Jarama and repatriated to the U.S. later in 1937. After returning from Spain he worked on the WA art project as a painter.

In World War II, for the second time defending democracy, he served in the U.S. merchant marine.

David is survived by his wife Sylvia and two daughters. ❏



News From Abroad



❑ **STOKE-ON-TRENT, England** — A brochure from Wedgewood Memorial College, forwarded by British veteran **David Goodman**, describes a 5-day summer school course on “The Spanish Civil War: 60th Anniversary” to be given in July. Lecturers on a full gamut of the subject include Bill Alexander, leading British veteran; Professor Sally Alexander (University of London); Andy Croft (University of Leeds); Helen Graham (London University); Manus O’Riordan, researcher/historian, son of Irish veteran Michael O’Riordan. Full information may be obtained from: The Secretary, Wedgewood Memorial College, Station Road, Barlaston, Stoke-on-Trent, ST129DG, England.

❑ **MOSCOW** — IB veteran **Percy Ludwick** writes:

Mac Pap vet Salman Salzman and his wife Sonia, who live in Tel Aviv, spent two months in Moscow last summer. He was doing research in the International Brigade archives at the Russian Center. At 80, Salman continues to be very active and plans to be back next summer to continue his research.

Moscow shops are now well-stocked, but customers are few because of the biting prices. Most people have to economize on basic foodstuffs. One sees women with small children begging in the passages of the subway. But hundreds of villas are going up in Moscow’s suburbs. Some three million Muscovites now own their flats.

The privatization of industrial plants has begun in earnest. The fall in industrial output seems to have stopped. This year’s grain harvest is bad due to drought.

Some 40 parties and movements of diverse orientations are contesting the December parliamentary elections. We only hope that nationalistic and chauvinistic forces will not come to power. Many people still believe in communism. Religion has come to the fore. New churches are being built. A couple of Hebrew synagogues have opened in Moscow.

Our “Spanish” (veterans) Bureau activities continue on a lesser scale. Our work among the schools has stopped. International Brigade idealism is not in vogue here now.

We are interested in the Beijing Spanish Civil War Conference. Some 100 Chinese volunteers fought in Spain. During the 1918-1920 Civil War in Russia several thousand Chinese volunteers fought in the Red Army. In China, workers were recruited to make up for the labor shortage in Russia. During World War I thousands of captured Germans, Austrians, Yugoslavs and other nationalities fought in the International Regiments of the Red Army as precursors of volunteers of the IB.

Sasha and I are still on our feet. She is 84. I’m 87, a little hard of hearing and a little dizzy but otherwise all right. Your *Volunteer* is very inspiring.

We had a reunion of our “Spanish” vets some time ago. Some sixty were present. I told them of the activities of the Lincoln veterans. They were very impressed.

Sasha and I send all the Lincoln vets our best regards and wish you all a happy New Year. Salud!

❑ **LONDON** — A December 17 letter from **Bill Alexander** reads (in part):

The “spin-off” from the Loach film has created considerable interest again in the Spanish Civil War. When our approach has been put it wins general approval except for a few way-out ultra-leftists.

About your questions: First, I want to make the point about the internal Spanish situation. The unanimous vote in the Parliament is very, very significant. It means at the top level the bastards on both sides have abated. Why? There will be a general election in Spain next March and Felipe Gonzalez has now said he will run again. It is generally accepted that the Partido Popular [Right wing alliance — ed.] will win because of the neo-Thatcherite economic policies and corruption in the PSOE [Socialist Party— ed].

The PCE [Communist Party — ed] has just concluded a Congress — it was not mentioned in any of the British press, including *The Morning Star*. But the Spanish press paints a picture of considerable internal wrangling on the left — public disagreements between the PCE [the Socialist Party] and the Worker’s Commissions, disagreements with the Catalan Communists — very little unity to defeat the PP or solidarity with the French workers.

Our [the International Brigade Association] position is absolutely clear — we do not want to align with any political party or group on any issue other than the united opposition to fascism and racism in all its manifestations.

About Spanish citizenship — we have already sent off information on 62 of our 82 members. We have also told our members to reserve the November 3-13 period as announced by the Amigos.

I was very interested to read of your activity planned for next year. We have ambitious plans which are beginning to take shape. We have just corrected the proofs of our book *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, which will be on sale for May Day, 1996. We plan to make a special drive in the trade unions, which are showing the first revival of militancy.

❑ **CAMDEN, England** — A monument dedicated to the International Brigaders from the Borough of Camden was dedicated last April. Of the 2,100 men and women IB volunteers who went from Great Britain, 65 were from the Borough, and, on the honor roll of the 526 British dead in Spain, there are 22 men from Camden. Among the Camden IBers were 22 men of Cypriot origin, 9 of whom lost their lives in Spain. Two of the Camden volunteers were IB nurses; Patience Edney, one of them, chaired the Camden Memorial Committee.

An early poem on the Abraham Lincoln Brigade

He was known as “one of Kansas’ finest poets. Professor Kenneth Wiggins Porter (1905-1988) Harvard graduate in history, prolific author, life-long socialist and antifascist, was a noted author on African American history who corresponded with E. B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson and Rayford Logau was published in their scholarly magazines. Porter became the first important expert on African America in the Old West, laboring virtually unknown and hardly noticed for decades.

Harvest: June 1938

by Kenneth Wiggins Porter

For Donald Henry (Dodge City, pre-medic, University of Kansas) first-aid man, mortally wounded, Belchite, September 1937; Ray Jackson, Jr. (Syracuse), missing, Ganges, 1, 1938; also: James Cleveland Hill (ex-U.S. soldier; Dodge City oilworker), lieutenant, killed in action, Corbera, September 9, 1938; Kenneth Graeber (Lawrence, student of journalism)

Half-waking in the day-coach east from Denver
an elevator named the town. A month
before my low-keyed mind might momentarily
have drifted down associative pathways:
“... Sicilian city, Athens’ great misfortune. ...
town in New York where I once spent a month
slapping the dust from documents century-old ...”
as well, of course as: “... western Kansas village —
home of the Negro who answered instructor’s
compliments
on his Spanish accent by reference to the doubly
fortunate presence in town of a Mexican barber. ...”
But now Syracuse is a name:
Ray Jackson. ...

The wheatfields were a heliograph. The porter passed
through the car with his warning.
“twenty-five minutes. ...”
'til the zero-hour? No time allowed for breakfast.
What did I think of, leaving the train a year
ago? Boot Hill and Wyatt Earp. ...
the heaps of buffalo-hides in the 1870's—
bones in the decade after. ...
a college-girl who named this town as hers. ...
But now
forever
Dodge City is
Don Henry. ...

O prairie-village,
your houses hiding among the wheatfields—

prairie-chickens in the bunch-grass—
only your grain-elevator against the sky,
a giant metallic gopher;
O prairie-towns
insulated by ocean and 2,000 miles of complacency—
blubber of wood-pulp, of celluloid-reels, and of air-wa-
—against the fierce currents of death that are
crackling through Europe,
what voice pierced deliberate static and ear-plugs
to call
your sons from these plains to the fight on the
Spanish *meseta*?

*Young men, with their minds sharpened pitchforks, to
through the foul tangle
of lies, sheathing bales of horstpapers heaved off
at the stations,
as threshers strip off the tough mildew from wheatsta-
to come
at last to the good central grain of the truth.*

These men were Americans—blood of America’s heart
their names say “America”:
1776
the long Dechard rifle
Donald Henry
Ray Jackson
They were Kansans
their schoolbooks had not yet forgotten
John Brown
They were men from the wheatfields

In recent years, Porter's pioneering works on the have inspired a host of scholars. In 1965, Porter began a professional and personal relationship. In I became the editor of his book, *The Negro on the ican Frontier*. My five books in this field have ified themes he had pioneered. After his death I was curator of his unfinished s and saw that they were transferred to New York ; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. ng the Porter materials was the poem *Harvest: June*

1938 (written at the time) comparing Lincoln Brigade volunteers from Kansas to John Brown's anti-slavery band of 1856.

Harvest: June 1938 — which begins with Porter's own introduction — appears in a booklet called *Kenneth Wiggins Porter: The Kansas Poems*. (Washburn University of Kansas Bookstore, Topeka, Kansas, 1982, introductions by Thomas Fox Averill and Lorrin Leland).

— William Loren Katz

ersity of Kansas), ambulance driver, honorably dis-
ted; Paul O'Dell (Wichita, worker and student),
try and engineers, honorably discharged; for all
awkers of the Lincoln-Washington Battalion, in the
or out of the body.

ain was a furious sun which drew them along paths
of light
he water ascends from the trickle through sand, from
the buffalo-wallow,
swoop like a billion bright *chatos* which speed
to relief
the drought-besieged fields.
eirs too was a lean and stubborn land.
r five years it had known
e dictatorship of the drought, the black-shirted
dust storm. ...
e dust still swirls in a gas-cloud,
ads had fallen. ...
t the lines hold. ...
igation-canals have brought up reinforcements....
o *pasaran!*

è which lay seemingly buried has broken
the darkness
ie stones of their prisons shall split) and the germs
which today
ll hide underground shall next season leap forth
with a shout—
dying, enrich with their spirit the soil for their
comrades....
saremos!

ucks in continuous caravan are rushing
e new combines to the fields of the west, and wheat
urs into Dodge City and Syracuse bins (but O where
e the bullets, the guns and the planes for the
wheatfields of Spain?);

at Valencia the comrades
feet on the earth are shouldering the sky. ...

If a Spanish trench gashes a ripened wheat-field with
gigantic and sterile furrow
there are men who are rubbing the heads between
powder black palms
men who winnow the kernels with battle-hot breath,
and who wonder
about the Three A's, the FU, and about yields per acre
weight per bushel, and protein-content—
above all, the price—
of wheat at the Dodge City co-ops....

*John Brown of Kansas still goes marching on—
his tread is on the plains of Aragon!*

'Land and Freedom' — a VALB view

by Abe Smorodin

Readers of *The Volunteer* [Fall, 1995] may remember Gabriel Jackson's comments on *Land and Freedom*: "Ken Loach's movie ... has been a box office hit in Spain and, with mild reservations, I recommend it to all vets who are still not fighting the Stalinist/Trotskyist battles of the thirties."

He ends his review with this comment: "My main reservation is that the movie exploits the current fad for blaming all sins on the Communists. You would think it was Stalin and not the appeasing democracies, who killed the Spanish Republic."

Our few surviving Lincoln Brigade veterans should certainly see the film, as urged by our dear friend Gabe, the pre-eminent U.S. historian of the Spanish Civil War. He didn't detail his "minor reservations" but we certainly can bear witness to reinforce Gabe's "main reservation."

A number of VALB staff members and friends had the uncomfortable experience of previewing the film. Let us sketch the plot.

A young English Communist Party member, David, goes to Spain in the early days of the war and joins a POUM militia group operating in Catalonia. The motley band has other volunteers from England and one American, Lawrence.

A village is captured. A priest who has been firing on the militia from the bell tower of a church is executed. A meeting then is shown where villagers and soldiers debate a proposal to collectivize the farms. The discussion is spirited and totally democratic. One peasant pleads for the right to retain his small plot. The American volunteer argues that the first order of business should not be land seizure but the defeat of the fascists. His is a lone voice.

In a hand vote, collectivization wins. The American quits the militia to join the International

Brigades. This is a fine scene on an important subject

The English volunteer subsequently goes to Barcelona where he becomes involved in the May 31, 1937, putsch against the government of Catalonia. The rebels' failure, followed by their arrest, impels the Englishman to shred his Communist Party card.

The focus then reverts to the POUM militia unit, rejoined by David, in the countryside where it is surrounded by troops of the Spanish Republican Army. Their colonel, with the American reappearing at his side, orders the POUMists to surrender their arms. An outcry follows. Invectives against Stalinism fill the soundtrack as the Republican troops stolidly watch. Then an accidental shot is fired, killing a militia woman.

This is the climactic scene of the film. Loach brazenly uses his cinematography to stand history on its head. He depicts an unidentified

Republican force, uniformed and jackbooted like a detachment of the Nazi Wehrmacht, led by a pitiless colonel. Loach here compounds his skewed fantasizing by zooming in on the American, Lawrence, who has inexplicably found his way into this unit.

Film viewers may never know that the International Brigades could not have been involved in such a confrontation. They all were then embattled elsewhere. More significant, giving the lie to Loach, the IB never veered from its reason for being. The IBers had come to Spain to defeat fascism, not to interfere in Spanish politics.

The narrow focus of Loach's tale ignores, perhaps deliberately, the critical dangers confronting Spain's democratic Republic in the Spring of 1937. Madrid, the capital, remained under siege; the Non-Intervention Pact was denying arms and sustenance to the Republic and

Continued on page 22

ALBA & Adolph Ross underwrite biographical VALB project

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives and Lincoln Veteran Adolph Ross have underwritten a project to compile an authoritative biographical dictionary of the Americans who served in the International Brigades.

The project's aim is to produce a comprehensive, computerized (CD-ROM) of every American volunteer. The CD-ROM format will enable a researcher to read a sketch about a volunteer, see him or her in photos, and, when audio records are available, to listen to them. Three sections will be devoted to each veteran: a photo with a biographical summary; a detailed biographical sketch; and a bibliography noting sources of information on the volunteer.

Groundwork for this project was laid by the decades-long labors of

veteran Ross to produce the most definitive, up-to-date list of U.S. volunteers who served in the IB. He made a generous personal contribution to ALBA to fund this new project and it was equalled by *The New York Times* in conformity with a policy to match such donations by their retirees.

Christopher T. Brooks has been hired as Research Coordinator. While a graduate student, for many years he researched and wrote papers on the U.S. volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. In January 1996 as the first phase of the project, he mailed a comprehensive questionnaire to every surviving Lincoln veteran. Inquiries about his work may be addressed to him at 9272 E. Hanover Crossings Drive, Mechanicsville, VA 23111. ■

This is not the war that I knew

by Martha Gellhorn

Ken Loach's film, *Land and Freedom*, comes here garlanded with Cannes prizes. His talent at work on the powerful subject of the Spanish Civil War promised a thrilling movie, the real thing, untainted by Hollywood glitz. I was an eager audience, hoping to see fresh images of the war I had reported in 1937-38.

I could not believe my eyes the first time I watched [the film] so I watched it again. It was just as dull, unconvincing and filled with absurdities and dogma the second time around...

If a film is merely boring, you have wasted your time and money but it is not the end of the world. *Land and Freedom*, however, pretends to give us a true picture of Spain during the war and as such it is partly comic and partly an outrage.

For entertainment, no movie is helped by having as its hero a short, colorless, jug-eared young man with about as much fire and appeal as a doughnut. The hero, David, a lad from Liverpool, is supposed to represent the British working class in its fight against fascism. The British working class deserve better, it doesn't have to be that dreary.

David reaches Spain, claiming to have walked alone and unguided over the Pyrenees. This is absurdity number one...

If the chronology of the film makes any sense, David arrived in Spain in the late summer of 1936, when he could and would have taken a train from Marseille, where he landed, to the French-Spanish border, walked across the line and taken another train to Barcelona. The heinous Non-Intervention Committee, organized by the British Foreign Office, had not yet started its successful job of isolating the Spanish Republic.

Our falsely footsore hero is actually seen on an unspecified Spanish train where he takes up

with a French volunteer and is led by him to join the socialist POUM militia. He goes off to the front with an Italian and an American volunteer and a Frenchman. The film is the story of David's adventure in POUM-land. Loach's POUM-land, to be exact. Not Spain, but a tiny corner of it, a stretch of the Aragon front north of Barcelona.

POUM — meaning "Workers' Party of Marxist Unification" — was a small political party, one of too many parties in Spain. It was localized in Catalonia. POUMists were anti-Stalin communists who felt they were the only true believers, the pure in heart. It was a fervid cult, irrelevant to the great drama of the war. Its day of glory was 19 July 1936, when members took to the streets of Barcelona with their stronger ally, the Anarchists, and prevented the military garrison from seizing power for Franco. They saved Barcelona for the Republic.

POUM fought then in the streets and never fought again, apart from a skirmish or two...

The simple plot unfolds through flashbacks from David's letters to his English fiancée, found by David's granddaughter after the old man's death. The plot would be all right if not befogged and driven by political rhetoric, the POUM party line. David writes home that the summer is pretty dull, they just sit in their trench, talking politics and scratching lice (he later writes that the winter was also spent sitting in their trench, but bitterly cold). Then he and we are relieved by a little action; the POUM militia in force storm a Fascist-held village. The special effects are noisy but odd since the large explosions fail to bring down masonry...

After this we are treated to a peasants' meeting that goes on and on, every one shouting at the top their lungs and at once, as is the style of this movie. The peasants vote to collectivize the land, a

POUM victory for the Revolution. This is all too much for the American volunteer, Lawrence, who says sensibly and in a normal tone of voice that you can't win a war with a bunch of amateurs and goes off to join the International Brigades. A traitor to the POUM.

According to POUM doctrine, Stalinists controlled the army and the International Brigades, to say nothing of the government, hence the Republic is Stalin's puppet and the Spanish War is run to suit him. This outrageous rubbish is the basic message of the film, underscored by the final big dramatic scene.

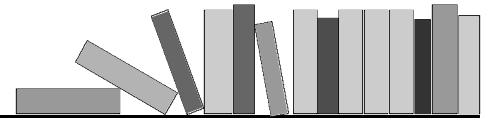
Lawrence, now dressed as no one ever was, a captain in an International Brigade, returns to David's group of POUMists with three truckloads of extras, neat as pins, in their new army uniforms, with their curious kepis primly straight on their heads. Lawrence even wears highly polished boots, unheard of in Spain, an over-the-top Gestapo touch. Unreality here reaches supreme heights. Amid incessant bombing, Lawrence's mission becomes clear, he is to disband this POUM outfit, since POUM has refused to integrate into the Republic's army. Shooting breaks out. The heroine — David's brief lover — is killed. David has had enough of this crazy mixed-up war and is going home.

Loach has blown up a minor sideshow of the war. Does it matter that a dull movie misinforms a new audience about the terrible heroic two-and-a-half years when the people of the Spanish Republic and the International Brigades fought alone against united Fascism?

I do wish that Loach hadn't made the Spanish into a nation of screamers. The stoicism and dignity of the Spanish in the worst trials of the war were awe-inspiring. ■

*This review, slightly abridged here, appeared in the **London Evening Standard** of Oct. 5, 1995.*

Book Review



Madrid 1937

Continued from page 1

biographical sketches of the dear friend of the Brigade, Peter Carroll. It is to be observed that an interviewer, no matter how empathetic he might be with the subject of his investigation, sets the agenda of the interview. But when veterans from the battlefronts find a quiet moment away from bombs and bullets and put pen and pencil to paper to write to fathers, mothers, wives and sweethearts, they set their own agenda and thus they emerge, as I have said, in full humanity.

I mentioned above that we have had good historical writers dealing with our experiences on the Spanish battlefields, but the point to be made here is that these writings depict with more or less accuracy the exploits of a collectivity, and we tend to forget that always a military formation — be it the phalanx of Alexander, the Roman legion, the British squares that held off Napoleon at Waterloo or the American battalions fighting in the streets of Belchite — these formations are nothing other than the collection of individual wills, individual stamina, individual determination, and individual loyalty. However, we have this ancient tradition that began with Thucydides and Herodotus which tends to personify in an abstract collectivity the actions of individuals. It is an abuse of language or at best a poetic metaphor to ascribe to a military formation those qualities which can only be possessed by a living, breathing, human individual.

Now as to the organization of *Madrid 1937*: the editors, with great insight, have set aside a section for what was written while the Americans were en route to Spain and what was written while departing; and then the main central section. These letters are grouped around the individual campaigns

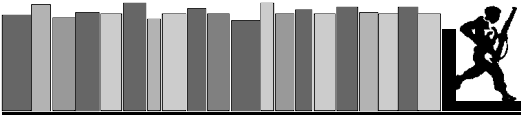
from Jarama to the last stand in the Sierra Pandols. There are also sections which depict the work of the transportation corps and a wonderful section dealing with the medical services that did so much to sustain the Brigades in their hours of greatest need. There is an all too brief afterword which introduces us to the 400 veterans who served in World War II and 100 ex-sailors who went on to man the ships in the perilous seas of their second war. Each section is always preceded by a wonderfully compressed precis depicting the conditions of the battlefield or the politics of the moment which are antecedent to the actual military engagements.

When I first received *Madrid 1937* in galleys I was reminded immediately of the account that the public broadcasting service did of the American Civil War, inasmuch as that wonderful production relied heavily upon letters from the soldiers. Some of these I can recall now were heart-wrenching in their beauty and in their melancholy. They were largely of the form of Rupert Brooke's World War I poem *The Soldier*: "If I should die, think only this of me." Or that we shall meet again, if not in this world then in a better one. Or they reflected some of the horror of places like Shiloh, Antietam, and Bull Run. But rarely did one detect any interest by these writers in such events as the conscription riots in New York or the terrible overarching issue of African slavery or the maneuvers of some of the generals to replace Abraham Lincoln. Nor were they curious about the British Tories arming the Confederate raiders. In other words, their horizons were limited to their own terrible moments. One can forgive them for this and in no way does this lead us to honor them less. But in the Spanish conflict and particularly in the ranks of the International Brigades there was always a broad-

er global vision sustaining the soldiers in their hours of trial. One finds this quite often in the letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. We must note that they were intensely curious about the shifting politics in the United States: Is there any effort to raise the embargo? What is the meaning of Franklin Roosevelt's speech about neutrality, about quarantining the aggressor? Why did the democracies, England, France and the United States, maintain their embargo against the Republic while Germany and Italy poured in the most modern and the most devastating types of weaponry and the Republic was left to face this with men armed only with World War I machine guns and rifles and hand grenades?

It is said that the war in Spain was a passionate war and it certainly was, but one must agree that it was passionate on both sides. We diminish our own cause if we forget that. But our enemy never had to face the enormous disparity in material means that was the lot of the Spanish militia and of all of the battalions which were made up of the volunteers who came from all over the world to sustain the Spanish Republic. In doing so they were fully aware of the fact that this was not a parochial issue confined to the Iberian battlefields, but that the fate of the world hung in the balance.

Over and over again one will find mention in these letters of the fact that should the Republic go down to defeat the armies of Germany and Italy and their Asian partner, Japan, would be on the march against London, Washington and Paris. To make this point, that it was a thinking man's war, permit me to draw an historical example of the opposite. In the eighteenth century the armies of the King of Prussia were known all over the world as the most efficient and the best drilled. There was a time when King Frederick had his regiments lined up in parade formation and a



royal visitor from another country came to view the spectacle. And he said to the king, this Frenchman, "Well what do your grenadiers think of all of this?" And the king, without hesitation turned to the foreigner and said, "If they could think, they wouldn't be here."

The point that I want to make about the letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade is that these letters reflect the thoughts of thinking men. It was thought that brought them there in the first place, and it was continued thought that maintained their morale in the face of insurmountable difficulties.

I now wish to refer to the content of some specific letters. I make these selections from those which cast the most light on the general collection.

I start with the pilgrimage from America to the Spanish front. As we shall see, this journey was not without its alarms and its lethal dangers. It is in this section that I encountered for the first time that beautiful boyish letter of Jim Lardner to his mother, where he weighed the pros and cons of putting down his journalistic hat and putting on the helmet of the Lincoln Battalion. He did this at a time when it was well known to all and sundry what the risks were, what the casualty rates were. For example: around this time, of the 900 men who had made up the Thaelmann Battalion in November 1936, on February 17, 1937, there were 90 left alive. And yet young Lardner, knowing full well what the risks were, decided to share the fate of the Lincoln Battalion and marched off to become a legend — the last Lincoln to die in action.

We notice also in the journals across the United States to the ports of embarkation on trains running through the Jim Crow south, the volunteers encountered in some

Godforsaken place in Texas a dining car that would not serve a black woman. The volunteers saw to it that the young lady got fed. Canute Frankson, whose beautiful literate letters fill many pages of this book, encountered Jim Crowism of a very subtle but mean type on board the luxury liner, the *Queen Mary*, where he was shunted off to a table for one in a corner of the dining room. I mention this because the whole question of the social content of American politics was never absent from the minds of the members of the Lincoln Battalion and will appear over and over again in the letters that they write home.

I found a particularly touching note from William Sennett when a group of Americans in Paris encountered a repatriate from Spain, a young man who was now a paraplegic. And of course, the journey across France was not without its complications. Edwin Rolfe informs us in one of his early letters that as the train went through an area where there were section gangs of railway workers, these French workers knew who was on the train and raised their fists in the Popular Front salute. The Americans were much impressed by learning that in many of the small towns through which they passed, once they left Paris, that the mayors and the council members were members of the Communist Party, something which they had not seen back home.

In this section there is an extraordinarily informative letter from Joe Dallet who was with a group of Americans who had been thrown into jail by the French police while trying to enter Spain. This group once was marched from the jail to the courthouse across the square around which were assembled hundreds of the French population. They knew who these Americans were; and when the Americans raised their right fists in the Popular Front salute and began to sing the *Internationale*, the

Frenchmen around the square joined in that anthem and their voices blended with the Americans. One might note here that this anthem will appear again and again in the pages of *Madrid 1937*.

If I were ever to have an opportunity to write a movie script about the International Brigades this would be my opening shot: the Americans in chains raising their fists in the Popular Front salute and intoning the *Internationale* into which blend the voices of the French; closeup of the French faces; then fast-forward to 1942-43 when the same faces now belong to men of the French resistance, the *Maquis*; watch them placing mines on the railroad tracks to greet an oncoming Wehrmacht troop train. This is the France that had shut the frontier to the passage of volunteers and to the passage of arms to defend the Republic. Now a few years later, betrayed, defeated, humiliated, occupied, there will be those Frenchmen who will remember the Americans who passed through in 1937 en route to die in defense of Madrid.

I find another letter from Jack Freeman who took ship in Marseilles aboard the *City of Barcelona* along with hundreds of other volunteers for the International Brigades who wished to bypass the well patrolled foothills of the Pyrenees. When the ship was not far from safe anchorage in Barcelona it was torpedoed by an Italian submarine. It was a small ship so it went down fast. Those who were on the upper decks could leap into the water and be picked up by an armada of small boats which immediately set out to the scene of the disaster. Those below decks had no chance of getting out and those who were on top, as they heard the rush of the water, they also heard the voices below raised in singing the *Internationale* until

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finally there was no sound but splintering wood and metal, the hiss of steam, and then silence. There were 50 Americans aboard that ship. Five of them perished. Of the several hundred volunteers who came ashore, only one wanted to go home. There was an American in this group who went through the rest of the war with the Lincoln Battalion, and after the war volunteered, because he was an able-bodied seaman, to sail on the dangerous North Atlantic route to Murmansk. Here he was torpedoed again and he froze to death adrift in a lifeboat in the Russian arctic.

Madrid was the heart of Spain, the crucible in which was formed the Republican Army which went through its thirty months of heroic dying. Many of the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, as well as veterans of other brigades, visited this city and all of them expressed amazement at the calm discipline with which the ordinary people of Madrid stood up against the incessant bombing and shelling, with the front lines within short walking distance of the center of the city. Rolfe and Wolff and many others in their letters have expressed the immense educational value of their short stay in the beleaguered city, and some have interpreted it as a kind of spiritual epiphany.

There was one thing, however, that few of them seemed to have noticed. The writer of these lines spent several weeks in a hospital in the center of Madrid in what had once been the luxury Hotel Palacio. And what I noticed was that due to the vibrations occasioned by the bombing and shelling, the bell towers of the churches of Madrid had gotten out of synchronization. In the dead of night one would hear a carillon start to toll, say, the hour of three and one would hear the three

bells, and maybe a minute or so later another church would begin to toll the same hour. It always struck me that these bells were tolling, as the poet told us, for all of us and for what was to come. Bombed Madrid was warning the cities of Europe of what the Axis had in store for them. A French correspondent flying over the city in January of 1937 reported: "Madrid is but a sea of flames reflected in a pool of blood."

Sometime later, the great friend of the Republic, Harold Laski, wrote: "At no time in our generation will anyone forget the heroism of the ordinary man and ordinary woman in Madrid. The way they defended their city from fascist attack, behind which there stood the armed might of Germany and Italy, will always make the siege of Madrid an event in working-class history comparable to the Commune of Paris."

In this regard one might remember that the veterans of the International Brigades, while gathering in Paris before the clandestine transit of France, were fed in a great wooden warehouse-type building belonging to the trade unions. Along the walls, along with the pictures of Marx and Engels were two banners in French, one of which said, "Without a revolutionary theory there will be no revolutionary practice," and the other, "The liberation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves." Now the visitors to Madrid saw the great banners across the Grand Via and the other main streets of the city that read "No Pasaran" and "Madrid shall be the tomb of world fascism."

Eighty percent of the members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were from the working class. They came from our factories, from our mills, from our mines, from the decks of ships, from the wharves where the freight was unloaded, from offices. But there were also some students. Some of our records indicate that perhaps ten percent of

them came from the university and college campuses. I frankly think this figure is too high or else the casualty rates among the students and the intellectuals was much higher than among the rest of their comrades. But at any rate, I think one letter can stand for all of them, namely, what was written by the 23-year old John Cookson to his aunt.

He starts out by reminding her how, when he was a child, she had pointed out to him the position of the North Star in the Wisconsin sky, and that thereafter he had given his mind and heart to the study of nature and science. And he had been called crazy when he warned of the menace of fascism before the invasion of Ethiopia, and when he predicted what the Axis was going to do.

Now there he was in Spain and he recalled how many people back home failed to understand the nature of the fascist threat. And he goes on to give a strictly Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the role of finance capital in the goal of crushing the working class and all of its organizations. Then he says, "Well, here I am in Spain. Perhaps I will be able to continue my study of mathematics." Unfortunately, whatever his thoughts may have been about the nature of differential equations or non-Euclidian geometry, they were cut short by a fascist bullet.

Without further bibliographical and biographical data, I could not select from these letters those which came from students, but I think the young man from the University of Wisconsin spoke for all of them — those who died and those who didn't.

Though my space here is very limited I do want to mention one letter from a veteran whom we all know. He has served as a spokesman in New York at the headquarters of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade for many decades. I

refer to Moe Fishman. Wounded in the Aragon conflicts, left out in the blazing sun without medical attention, without water, until a 24-hour period had passed, eventually, fortunately, he was brought back to a hospital. When he wrote his letter, describing his wound and all the rest of it, he very casually mentions that he is going back into action. I mention this because practically every veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade was wounded at least once, and what Moe said about going back into action held for all of us. Those of us who could walk, even though wounded, found that they could render some service to the beleaguered Republic.

I want to say a few words about the letters from the medical staffs in Spain. Peter Carroll has told some of this story in his new book, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, but there are some wonderful letters in this book from the medical personnel themselves, and I have found one which I think can stand for all of them. It is from Lini Fuhr, dated March 1937.

She says the following: "One morning from 4:00 a.m. till 5:00 a.m. I stood with a Dutchman while he was going out. His last words were 'No Pasaran'. He asked me to sing to him. With tears streaming down my face I sang the Internationale. One doctor accused me of being sentimental, staying with him instead of sleeping. I had been up since 6:00 the day before. If that's sentiment let's have more of it. These are not ordinary soldiers, dying for the imperialists, but going out in the struggle against fascism for you and for me and for the Spanish people and the whole world proletariat. I could weep when any of them go out before my eyes."

Now a few words about the history and performance of that medical service. There was an appalling lack of everything, not only of personnel but of the most basic equip-

ment of a surgical hospital. Nonetheless with that genius for improvisation which is so American, order was made out of chaos. They found wood to keep a stove going for hot water, they improvised sterilizers. The ambulances managed to keep going across bomb and shell-rutted roads against the imminent threat of strafing. The medical staffs stood their positions come hell or high water and did what they could to save thousands of lives. We might recall here that it was the medical service of Spain, backed up by international personnel, that made the great innovation of bringing blood to the assault lines so that the wounded soldiers could immediately have a transfusion and not go into often fatal shock. This was pioneered by Norman Bethune and his associates.

We might recall here that wonderful American biologist H. J. Muller, who though not a member of the International Brigades, was a member of the Bethune team bringing blood to the front lines. In 1946 he won the Nobel Prize for his work on the induction of mutations by x-rays, which he did at the University of Indiana. But considering this medical service in Spain, let it not be forgotten ever, by anybody of this generation or future generations, that the methods and techniques perfected there were adopted by the U.S. Army and its allies during World War II.

In that long bloody trail that leads from Guadalcanal to Okinawa, from Kasserine Pass to the Elbe River in Germany, thousands upon thousands of Allied soldiers survived their wounds because of the work pioneered in Spain. And it is incredible to recall here that when the war was over and these thrice heroic men and women returned to the United States, they were subjected to such violent harassment by J. Edgar Hoover (the

unparalleled subverter of the Constitution) so persecuted that many of them had to leave the country to practice their profession. And Dr. Barsky, the thrice heroic surgeon, went to jail when he defied the inquisitors of the McCarthy epoch.

The rumor that the government of Spain, the government of Juan Negrin, was planning to repatriate the International Brigades began to spread as a rumor as early as September 1938. As far as we could make out, these many years later, the decision of the government was based upon the somewhat forlorn hope that by stripping the Republic of its few thousand foreign volunteers, the world community, meaning England, France and the United States, would somehow or other pressure Germany and Italy to withdraw their support from Franco. This belief, nonetheless, was probably held by a majority of the government. What should be noted here is that, as the rumor spread, there was no breakdown of discipline in the ranks of the International Brigades, and remarkably not in that of the American battalions which were then in a very difficult position, defending mountains where they could not dig trenches and where they were mercilessly pounded by artillery day and night.

This brings me, however, to one of the last of the letters that I want to draw our attention to. It came from Commissar Sandor Voros and was apparently in response to a letter from his sweetheart, urging him perhaps to take advantage of his rank to obtain an early return to the United States. In no uncertain terms, the American officer repudiated the very idea and told his beloved so in no uncertain terms. I mention this because when I read that letter it reminded me of some-

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thing from my schoolboy years. A line of verse from the English poet Richard Lovelace, from the very small poem entitled *To Lucasta on Going to the Wars*. It reads simply, "I could not love thee dear so much, loved I not honor more." I think that to this, all of the soldiers still fighting in the trenches of Spain would have said "Amen."

On the way home there were some extraordinary letters written by the Rolfes, by Joe Gordon, and by Archie Brown, the longshoreman from San Francisco. A number of veterans passing through France on the way to Paris were able to hear and see something of the plight of the half-million or so Spanish refugees and International Brigaders who had retreated from the Franco armies in Catalonia. One of the veterans said that the camps they saw were probably worse than anything the Germans had constructed to house their enemies in the Vaterland. And perhaps many of them who, as late as the operations in the crossing the Ebro, had believed in a turnaround, somehow or other, by the French government—even those began to realize that the France they had viewed so hopefully in late 1936 and 1937 had taken an immense step towards its ultimate defeat at the hands of the Germans and towards the launching of the infamous Vichy regime.

Many had believed up to the very end that the France that had made a Popular Front government in June of 1936 would recognize the monstrous threat to French security if the Axis entrenched itself south of the Pyrenees.

What perhaps most of these writers did not realize was that, after the great defeats and retreats at Aragon the Spanish government had sent its great aviator hero, Ignacio Cisneros, to Moscow as

ambassador plenipotentiary to try to get the Soviet Union to replenish the immense arsenal lost by the Republic during the campaigns at Teruel and during the great retreats at Aragon. The mission of Cisneros was extraordinarily successful. For the first time since the war had begun, a large convoy of Russian freighters set out from Murmansk destined for the French port of Bordeaux with an enormous bounty of weapons: airplane engines, tanks, machine guns, artillery — the whole arsenal needed to give the remaining Republican forces a chance to resist.

The cargoes were unloaded in Bordeaux. They were moved to Toulouse in the south of France, but then there was another shift in the crumbling ranks of French democracy. The new minister of the interior, in control of the police and the border, banned the further movement of weaponry from Toulouse to Spain. Then in 1942, subsequent to the American landings in North Africa, the Germans occupied all of France. They found this immense booty in warehouses and it became part of the arsenal of Hitler's army.

In all of this one must never forget the complicity of the French government in the ultimate defeat of the Spanish Republic. It was, after all, Leon Blum, the socialist prime minister, who knuckled under to British imperial pressure and called into existence the infamous Non-intervention Committee which supervised the strangling of the Spanish Republic. Leon Blum ended up, with time to consider his sins, in a German concentration camp. He did not become a whiff of smoke from the ovens of Dachau or Buchenwald or Auschwitz because some of the Nazi bigwigs, anxious to preserve their own skins, saved some of these foreign notables as bargaining chips. And so Leon Blum

survived the catastrophe that overwhelmed France and that had previously overwhelmed Spain.

It comes now to a brief summing up. A recent issue of *The Volunteer* reported the closing down of posts of the Veterans of the International Brigades in Sweden, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland. As we all know, our last rally will take place in November of 1996 when the survivors of the International Brigades, at the invitation of the Spanish government, will gather in Madrid on the 60th anniversary of the International Brigades. I do not know what those ceremonies will be like. There will be very few of us there. And we must recognize this, I suppose, as our last great rally.

This brings me again to the role of the book that I have been discussing. When we are no longer here to speak for ourselves, the veterans who wrote those letters will speak for us.

And in an epoch when even in our own country there lurk the lengthening shadows of right-wing reaction and potential fascism, where a great chunk of western Europe is now a moral swamp, where in the Italian parliament the granddaughter of Mussolini proudly sits, where skinheads and neo-Nazis flourish, where militias lurk in the forests of Montana and Wisconsin, when all of this comes to fruition and the call goes out for Americans to rally against the potential thrust of local domestic fascist barbarism, then our voices will be heard again and what we saw and what we wrote about in Spain will steel our children and our grandchildren to make a stand and to be able to say ultimately, successfully, "They shall not pass. They did not pass. They never shall pass." ■

Robert G. Colodny is Professor Emeritus, History, University of Pittsburgh.

Dr. Tio Oen Bik – a global warrior

by Len Tsou
and Nancy Tsou

In the vast literature about the International Brigades, there is scant mention of the Asian volunteers. They are rarely identified and background information about them is almost nonexistent. Jack Shirai is probably the only exception, thanks to the American veterans who, in a number of memoirs, remember him as a brave fighter and, perhaps even more uniquely, as a good chef in the Lincoln Battalion.

Tio Oen Bik came to our attention through American veteran Jim Persoff, who served with him in an IB anti-aircraft battery. After extensive research and interviews in the U.S., Holland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, France and China, we reconstruct here, as best we can, the life of Tio Oen Bik, an Indonesian doctor.

Tio fought fascists on two fronts, first in Spain and then in China. He participated in the Chinese revolution as well as the movement for Indonesian independence.

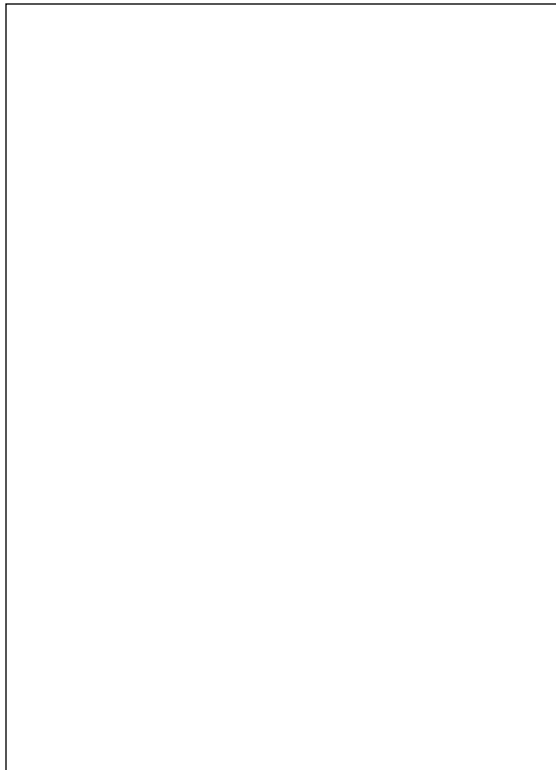
Tio Oen Bik was born to a Chinese Indonesian family in Java in 1906, although he used Bik as his surname (Bik, Tio Oen instead of Tio, Oe Bik) when he was in Spain and China. He studied medicine at the Netherlands Indische Artsen School in Surabaya during the mid-1920's.

By 1929, Tio was in Holland continuing his study of medicine at the University of Amsterdam. With Tan Ling Djie, a law student and Tjoa Sik Ien, a medical student, he formed a small leftwing group called Sarekat Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia (SPTI) — the Union of Peranakan Chinese of Indonesia.

SPTI took a strong stand for Indonesian nationalism. It kept close ties with Perhimpunan Indonesia (PI), made up of indige-

nous Indonesians studying in Holland. Members of SPTI also aided unemployed Chinese seamen trapped in Holland as a result of the Great Depression.

Tio's Holland activism was not confined to the student movement. In 1932, the World Anti-War Congress was held in Amsterdam. Annie Avernink, a member of the Holland Young Communist League, gave Tio admission tickets to it for Indonesian delegates.



The front of the Bay Area Post's invitation to the 59th Anniversary celebration of the founding of the International Brigades.

It was very likely that members of the SPTI had a close association with Musso and Alimin, who were then prominent Indonesian members of the Dutch Communist Party. Tio had also traveled to Germany and met Ernst Thaelmann, the General Secretary of the German Communist party, who was later jailed and executed by the Nazis.

In 1935, Tan Ling Djie returned to Indonesia and actively participated in the independence movement. The following year, Tjoa Sik Ien

joined Tan in Surabaya after graduating from the University of Leiden. Both played important roles in establishing the Indonesian Republic. Tan became General Secretary of the Communist Party of Indonesia, the PKI, in 1948.

Although these two SPTI close associates of Tio went back home to work for Indonesian independence, Tio made a different choice. When CHH, a Chinese Indonesian organization in Holland, was raising funds to help China against the Japanese invasion, Tio expressed his strong preference for another priority. He knew Japan was a fascist and imperialist country, but China was far away and there was a fascist threat right at their doorstep in Europe. He firmly reminded CHH members, "Spain is in immediate danger, we should help her defeat world fascism."

Like so many anti-fascist fighters of that time, whose "feet followed their mouths," Tio Oen Bik crossed the Pyrenees to join the International Brigades in March, 1937. Commissioned a lieutenant in the medical corps, he was first assigned to work in Hospital No.1, Centro de Reeduación Profesional (Rehabilitation Center) in Mahora near Albacete.

Usually, the medical staff in the International Brigades had to serve in the field after working some time in a base hospital. In April 1938, Dr. Tio was transferred to Denia to join an anti-aircraft battery where he met Jim Persoff and seven other American volunteers. One of them, Ben Iceland, recollected that he had been treated by "Dr. Bik" for a shrapnel wound when he was serving in this unit.

There were about 90 in this battery — with volunteers from Norway, Sweden, Poland, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the USA. At

Dr. Tio Oen Bik — global warrior

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that time, fighting was severe and casualties were heavy. During one six-week period, the battery fought during daylight hours and moved at night without rest. In addition to treating the wounded, Dr. Tio examined every soldier in the group after every long march.

Leo Rosenberg, an American who was with the unit, recalled Dr. Bik “as a conscientious, hard-working, but very quiet man who performed his medical duties efficiently and unpretentiously.”

In September 1938, following the Spanish government’s decision to withdraw all international volunteers, Dr. Bik crossed into France with the Internationals who were headed for repatriation. Along with the Chinese brigaders, he had no documentation for returning to his homeland. They all ended up in the harsh conditions of the repatriation camp at Gurs in the south of France.

During months of the repressive incarceration that followed, they appealed for aid to the expatriate Chinese communities in Europe and

A VALB view

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its people. The Republican Army, under constant combat, was in its formative months. Mussolini was pouring in his Italian divisions; and Hitler’s Condor Legion was making history by bombing Guernica.

Most menacing was the imminent fascist invasion of Asturias and the Basque country, its eventual success assured by a Catalan front, quiescent throughout the Spring of 1937. A film maker may tell any story for which he can obtain financing but the Barcelona events did not happen in an isolated place. They were integral to a larger whole: the Spanish War of National Liberation. ■

the USA. A letter to the New York based Chinese newspaper, *The Salvation Times*, June 22, 1939, described their difficult living conditions. It firmly expressed the veterans’ desire to use their military experience against the Japanese invasion of China.

When, in October 1939, they at last received travel documents, they had no money to buy rail tickets for embarkation at Marseilles — the four Chinese for home and Tio for a stopover in Holland before heading for China. Ljubo Ilic, a Yugoslav IBER, who was the camp leader, recalled, “Members of the International Brigades in the camp got together and collected donations for the tickets.”

Tio made his way back to China and was able to reach the liberated area in 1940. He immediately was attached to the Central Hospital in Yen-an where he worked five years. During that period he lived in the Wen Hua Gou (Culture Ridge) community along with many internationals, including Drs. George Hatem (USA), T. Basu (India), Hans Muller (Germany), as well as revolutionists from Indonesia, Vietnam and Korea.

While participating in that remote area in China, Tio did not change his global perspective. His article to celebrate International Women’s Day in 1941 listed contributions of women from many countries. When, in December of that same year, he learned of Ernst Thaelmann’s execution by the Gestapo, he wrote in the Yen-an newspaper about Thaelmann’s achievements.

After the defeat of the Japanese in August 1945, the Chinese revolution entered a new phase. Dr. Bik did not return to Indonesia. He went to Chefoo in Shantung province to work for UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. There he met Dr.

We all agreed that Tio Oen Bik had lived a most extraordinary life.

Rolf Becker who, with seventeen European doctors, after serving in Spain, went to help China. They worked together until the Kuomintang troops reoccupied the area in the summer of 1947. Later that year, Dr. Becker returned to his homeland in Germany.

In February 1948, Tio travelled to Calcutta to attend the Second Congress of the Indian Communist Party, probably as a fraternal delegate of the Indonesian CP. At that time Calcutta also was hosting a “Conference of Youth and Students of the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students.” At that conference there was a strong attack on a newly signed Indonesian-Dutch agreement. It put the Indonesian students at risk and Tio arranged for them to return home secretly and safely.

When the People’s Republic of China triumphed in October 1949, Tio was on a mission in Moscow. There, in November, he met up again with Annie Averink, the Dutch woman whom he had known in Amsterdam back in the ‘30s. They travelled together to Beijing where Tio attended the Trade Union Conference of Asian and Australian Countries. She recalled having been surprised by Tio’s wide acquaintance among Chinese government cadres.

Three months later, Tio was in Prague where he stayed for a year. During that span, in November, 1950, he was visited by Dr. Tjoa Sik Ien, the colleague and schoolmate from his pre-Spain student days in Holland.

Tio told Tjoa that he had

worked too long for the World Health Organization and wanted to return to Indonesia. He recounted, too, his experience in a harsh labor camp — a Czechoslovakian mine — because of a partisan dispute within the Czech Communist Party. He was fortunate to have been rescued by a chance visit to the mine by Soviet Marshal Malinovsky whom he had known in Spain.

Tio finally returned to a greatly changed Indonesia around 1953. In 1949 Holland had transferred sovereignty to the Indonesian Republic. There also had been a drastic change in the leadership and program of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Tan Ling Djie, who had worked closely with Tio during his '30s time in Holland, was removed from the PKI's Central Committee in October 1953.

Tio initially settled in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta where he worked long, arduous hours in a government treatment center for lepers. There, his honest and uncompromising personality resulted in problems with the bureaucrats among whom he worked.

He was transferred to Surabaya where he lived alone in a house provided by the government and where he frequently visited his old Holland chum, Dr. Tjoa Sik Ienn.

In 1960 Tio was reassigned to the remote island of Ambon as a doctor in the port authority. There he married a nurse but the insular existence was an unhappy one. He revealed this in a 1965 letter sent to Dr. Rolf Becker in the GDR.

That same letter sadly mentioned the tragic death of Dr. Fritz Jensen, an Austrian who also had gone to China after serving in the International Brigades. Working as a journalist, he was killed in a sabotaged plane crash on his way to Indonesia for the Bandung Conference in 1955.

Back in Indonesia, Tio seemed to retreat from involvement in political activity. His correspondence with Dr. Becker, however, showed his continuing interest in the discussion of philosophical and political issues.

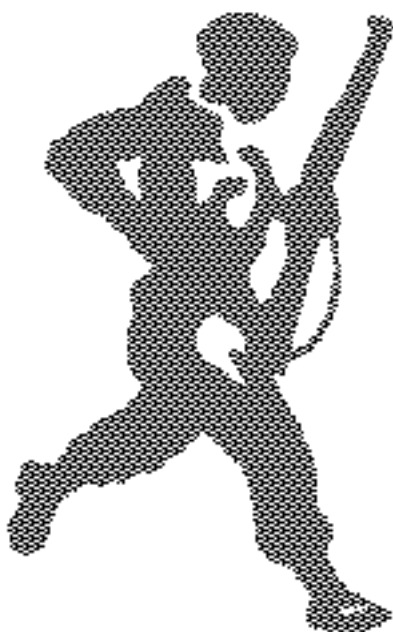
A letter to Dr. Becker expressed Tio's disagreement with the GDR's stand on the Sino-Soviet dispute. When Marshal Malinovsky, then Defense Minister of the USSR, visited Indonesia in 1963, Tio managed

to visit him in Jakarta.

After Suharto's military coup in September 1965, a quarter of a million people were executed. One year later, Dr. Becker received a letter from Tio. Its envelope showed that it was mailed from Bojonegoro on August 1, 1966. That was the last letter Becker received from Tio. He believed that "Tio was murdered along with thousands of communist sympathizers." However, a woman doctor, related to Tio, told Dr. Tjoa's son that Oen Bik died from illness in Bojonegoro.

"Was Tio only sixty years old?" we asked young Tjoa. "Tio had gone through a very tough journey," he replied. But we all agreed that Tio Oen Bik had lived a most extraordinary life. ▀

The authors are grateful for the earnest help from many people. Special thanks to Joop Morrien, who provided much information from his research on the same subject and arranged our interviews with Indonesians in exile, and to Dr. Gabril Ersler, who shared with us information from his own research. This article is dedicated to Dr. Rolf Becker, who, like Tio Oen Bik, served both in Spain and China.



An appeal

Yes! I believe that a contribution to the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade has a unique quality. It brings The Volunteer to its readers, free of charge, helps meet the expenses of the office where the persisting Veteran staff carries on; and assures VALB support for causes consistent with its 60—year tradition.

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Contributors



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