

*James Lardner writes to his mother, explaining why he has left his job at the Herald Tribune in order to join the ranks of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.*



The second of four sons of writer Ring Lardner, James was born in Chicago in May 1914 and grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut, and Great Neck, Long Island. Educated at Andover and Harvard, he went on to become a reporter for the New York *Herald Tribune*, and in 1938 joined their Paris bureau. He wrote a

number of articles about the volunteers in Spain for the *Tribune*, and eventually enlisted in the Lincoln Brigade. He was among the last men to enter the battalion, in April 1938. He became a corporal and squad leader by July, and occasionally contributed verse to the battalion wall newspaper. He was wounded at Gandesa in July and was asked to do a speaking tour of the US after his convalescence, but instead he chose to return to the front. He was reported to be the last American soldier to die in the war, after being captured in the Sierra Pandols in September 1938.

This typewritten letter, dated May 3, 1938 (page two shown here), is one of the most treasured and compelling documents in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. It was recently featured in the museum show "Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War" at the Museum of the City of New York.

Because I believe that fascism is wrong and must be exterminated, and that liberal democracy or more probably communism is right.

Because my joining the I. B. might have an effect on the amendment of the neutrality act in the United States.

Because after the war is over I shall be a more effective anti-fascist.

Because in my ambitious quest for knowledge in all fields, I cannot afford in this age to overlook war.

Because I shall come into contact with a lot of communists, who are very good company and from whom I expect to learn things.

Because I am mentally lazy and should like to do some physical work for a change.

Because I need something remarkable in my background to make up for my unfortunate self-consciousness in social relations.

Because I am tired of working for the Herald Tribune in particular and newspapers in general.

Because I think it will be good for my soul.

Because there is a girl in Paris who will have to learn that ~~my~~ my presence is not necessary to her existence.

Because I want to impress various people, Bill for one.

Because I hope to find material for some writing, probably a play.

Because I want to improve my Spanish as well as my French.

Because I want to know what it is like to be afraid of something and I want to see how other people react to danger.

Because there may be a chance to do some reading and I won't have to wear a necktie.

Because I should like once more to get in good physical condition.

The first four reasons and the ninth, especially the first, are the most important ones in my opinion, but you may decide for yourself. I have also considered a few reasons why I should not join the army, such as that I might get seriously wounded or killed and that I shall cause you many weeks of worry. I am sorry for your sake that they are not enough to dissuade me. If it is any comfort to you at all, I still hate violence and cruelty and suffering and if I survive this war do not expect to take any dangerous part in the next.

If you still consider me one of your sons, you can send me an occasional letter and possibly a package now and then. My address here, I think, will be in care of the Brigadas Internacionales, but for a while I think it will be simpler to communicate through the Sheeans. Anything edible would be appreciated, milk chocolate or raisins, or anything in cans that does not require preparation.

Love,

*Jim*