

The Volunteer

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

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

JOURNAL OF THE VETERANS OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

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The Vets take the stage while the band plays songs of struggle and protest at the New York annual reunion, April 27, 2003. See page 3 for story.

Photos by Richard Bermack



ALBA board member Burt Cohen congratulates John Brademas, President Emeritus of New York University and President of the King Juan Carlos Center and Michael Nash head of the Tamiment Library on receiving the NEH grant.

NEH Funds Archives

The National Endowment for the Humanities has awarded a two-year \$262,662 grant to New York University's Tamiment Library to process to and preserve the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives—the most important historical collection in the United States documenting American participation in the Spanish Civil War. The grant will make it possible for the Library to preserve the archive and provide access to it.

The project will arrange, describe, and conserve 333 linear feet of manuscript and printed material, more than 100 reels of microfilm, 5,000 photographs, 475 audio cassettes, 89 reel-to-reel tapes, 150 hours of film and video tape, 120 posters, 6 paintings and oversized documents, and a large collection of regalia including buttons, badges, medals, uniforms, banners, and flags.

After this work is finished New York University Libraries will mount a Web-based exhibit describing the history of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the ALBA collection. This will be followed by a schedule of regular exhibits and an annual lecture series hosted by New York University's King Juan Carlos Center. The expectation is that once the ALBA Archive is fully accessible, students and scholars from all over the world will come to the Tamiment Library to use it.

Lincoln vets and their families are invited to help continue to build this important collection. This winter the Archie Brown Papers were added to the Archive and the Robert Colodny Papers will be coming soon.

For information about making donations to the ALBA Collection, please contact Julia Newman, Executive Director, ALBA, 799 Broadway, Rm 227, New York, NY 10003. Phone 212-674-5398; or email: exemplaryone@aol.com.

Letters

Dear Editor,

I met Harry Fisher in Madrigueras. A kind, gentle, sweet, strong, very determined comrade. He told the municipal authorities about his stay in their town. Said he: "The first time in my life I felt that I had a family."

There were tears and abrazos.

I salute Harry posthumously for the last time. Un abrazo fuerte.

Gino Baumann

Costa Rica

Dear Volunteer,

I meet Bill Susman at the exhibit "Shouts from the Wall". I talked with him about what it was like to be a soldier and about his experience in the Spanish Civil War and World War II. He was very nice and he roughhoused with me. He seemed really cool. I liked him a lot.

Malcolm Lee, age 11.

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The Volunteer

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End of An Era

Bill Susman

1915-2003

By Cary Nelson

Photos by Richard Bermack

There really were only two options—getting wounded or getting killed. This a young lieutenant in the Lincoln Battalion realized as he started up a steep hill in the Ebro valley near Gandesa. The Americans and their Spanish comrades were caught in a crossfire between two machine gun emplacements above them. The idea that you could pass through that ricocheting rain of bullets unscathed was not worth entertaining. But the Republic needed the high ground. The effort had to be made whether or not it was realistic.

As Bill Susman would learn over and over again in Spain, occupying the high ground morally did not guarantee possession of the equivalent geographical or political terrain. Like so many of his lifetime comrades on the Left, he would learn the lesson repeatedly in the years to come. But he did indeed live to scale other mountains. On that day in 1938 he was wounded in the elbow and crawled behind a terrace to avoid being shot again. Carried out of action, he would live to win and lose many future battles, bearing with him at once the knowledge that you are never wholly in control of your own fate and that the only compensatory leverage you have is never to exercise less than a maximum effort.

Those of us who worked with Bill over the years would come to feel a certain awe at what a maximum effort meant for him. When you were in the crossfire between his will and his affection you were not likely to forget the experience.

He began life as a red diaper baby, born Samuel Susman to Charles and Anna Susman in New Haven, Connecticut, on September 25, 1915. They returned to their home in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where

Bill spent his first years. The household was a transit point for radicals passing through the area. Both parents worked in clothing factories. Anna was active in the ILGWU, as was Bill's great aunt Sarah, who lived for some time in the household. Charles was a Socialist Party member when his son was born, and he became a charter member of the new Communist Party. The marriage collapsed when Bill was about six years old; in 1929 Bill and his father moved to the Bronx. Bill was an honors student in high school, but nonetheless felt restless.

Susman entered the party's junior Groups of America at age ten, then became a Young Pioneer. They sent him to Chicago to attend the first national Unemployment Councils convention; immediately after that he graduated into the Young Communist League. By that time, in a Bronx high school, he was simultaneously taking courses at the Party's Worker School. He was eager for adventure, for travel, and Left politics had become central to his life. He undertook some special work under the name William Dorno. The new first name stuck, and he became William Susman. He dropped out of school and in 1934 was assigned to help the striking Maritime Workers Industrial Union. When the strike ended, he decided to go to sea.

On the New York docks he showed a skill he would employ successfully the rest of his life—choosing just the right words to tip an interaction his way. From on board ship they called out to the men below looking for work to say they needed a chef's assistant. Never skipping a beat then or thereafter, Bill proclaimed himself well seasoned. "Where have you worked?" "The Hotel Edison, the Roosevelt, the Waldorf." It was the third claim, the topper, that got him in trouble a few days out to sea, when the captain



called down for a Waldorf salad. Bill hadn't a clue. In recompense they kept him at the job without quarter.

He never quite got out of his clothes, but when the captain came down for a visit a few days later he took a liking to the ship's young scullery scoundrel and invited him on deck to learn something about being a sailor. He had a steering lesson and adapted obliquely to another task. Directed by a seaman with a heavy Brooklyn accent to call out "The lights are bright, sir," when eight bells rang, thereby assuring all that the running lights were on, Bill heard the command through his Yiddish ears and for a time bellowed "Litza Britza."

After passing through the Panama Canal and disembarking on shore leave at San Francisco, he was ready to become involved in a West Coast strike by way of the waterfront YCL. Back in New York in 1936, he went to sea again, joining the east coast strike when the ship docked in Baltimore. By then, a young CP member, he was ready for a still

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Fighting for Peace

Legacy of the Lincoln Brigade

By Mark Jenkins

Until the middle of February, the large urban campus of the University of Washington in Seattle was quiet as a mouse. The 35,000 students and nearly 3,000 faculty members seemed to be asleep as far as the looming war in Iraq was concerned.

A few miles north of the campus, 87 year-old Brigade vet, Abe Osheroff, heard the snoring. He became very upset. While in the midst of excruciating pain from a herniated spinal disc, followed by delicate and dangerous surgery to repair his spine, and a challenging recovery period, he doggedly continued—even escalated his activism—serving as the catalyst, mentor, strategist, and taskmaster for what has become one of the largest anti-war efforts on any college campus in the nation.

Osheroff brought together professors, students and staff he knows from the university. He admonished them. He cajoled them. Sometimes he scolded them. When friends came to offer comfort during his health ordeal, he turned the conversations to the impending war in Iraq, challenging them to “get something going on campus.” He asked tough questions, he openly despaired about the silence on campus due to the nearly total lack of activism and leadership from faculty.

Within a few weeks his determination paid off. He inspired and, when necessary, shamed his UW friends into taking action. First a small group met at his home to form an action plan. Soon more people from the university showed up in his living room. (He was confined to sitting upright in a chair 24 hours a day

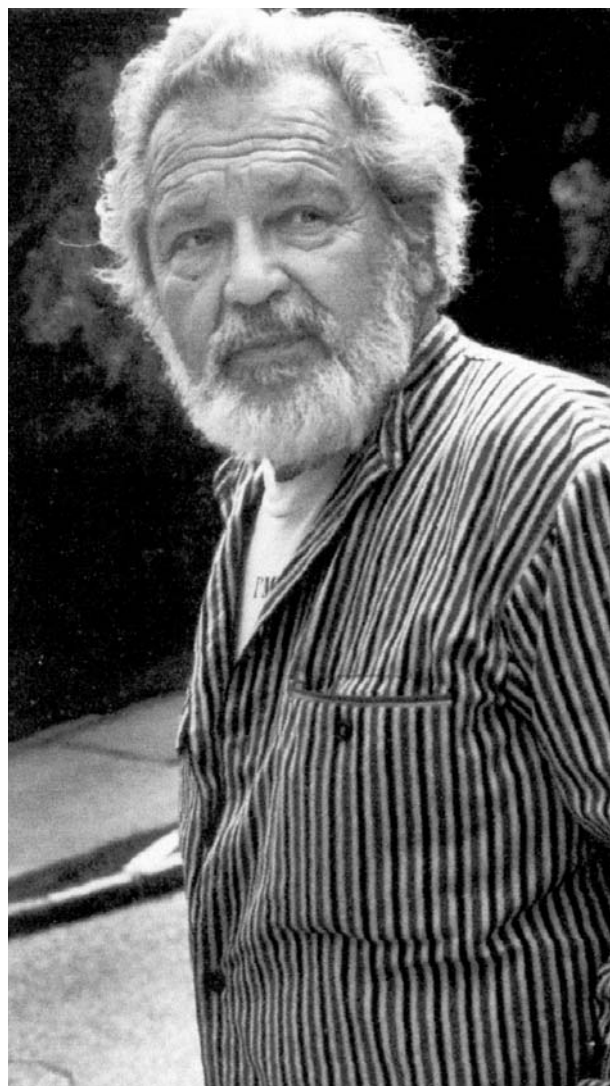
at that time, still recovering from surgery). Before long there was a second meeting with over a hundred people on campus.

The next week a cold but very successful rally took over “Red Square,” the largest open space on the UW campus. Twelve hundred people, mostly university personnel, gathered in the wind and rain. Representatives from faculty, students, and staff declared they were “breaking the silence” and began speaking out against the war. A small Cessna plane towed a banner declaring “Campus4Peace.net.”

Guess who arranged for that? Abe Osheroff, a man who, back in the 1930s, once raised money to hire a horse and wagon to parade through Brownsville in Brooklyn to call attention to a rally earlier in his career.

On this most recent, cold day in early March, Abe, still barely able to walk, climbed the seven steps to the microphone and spoke to the crowd for five minutes, personally “declaring war” on a tyrannical administration determined to be the world’s policemen and challenging all those present to “make a difference.”

The immediate purpose of the rally was to demand that the UW administration respond to the coming war in Iraq by declaring a day devoted to examining the present



Abe Osheroff, photo by Jose Moreno.

world crisis for students, faculty, staff, and the wider community. The next day the Provost met with the UW organizers and agreed to call for such a day and further, to provide ongoing discussions, panels, and debates to take place throughout the spring term. The following day the Faculty Senate passed a resolution calling for a “Time of Reflection: The War in Iraq.” A new group called Campus For Peace was formed to keep these efforts going.

Abe Osheroff is definitely back on his feet, proving once again that one person can make a difference. This is the legacy of the XV brigade: looking forward: *Viva la Brigada Lincoln!* ▲

Mark Jenkins teaches in the School of Drama at the University of Washington

NYC Honors the Brigade

By Anne Taibleson

Photos by Richard Bermack

At midday on Sunday, April 27 the skies were sunny, the breezes warm. It was a beautiful day to honor the Lincoln Brigade at the 67th Reunion held at the Tribeca Performing Art Center of the Borough of Manhattan Community College in downtown New York City. It was great to be back "home" again, and though hearts are heavy this year, we had much to celebrate.

Henry Foner, for the 27th year, played an important part in the reunion as emcee and good will ambassador. His participation was acknowledged in a surprise tribute. ALBA Chair Peter Carroll and Lincoln vet Moe Fishman presented Henry with a beautiful engraved plaque, honoring his "unfailing service to the cause." Henry was quite moved, but did not miss a beat, and continued his emcee responsibilities with grace.

Moe Fishman was in especially fine form. He told the audience, numbering 800-plus that he and vets Len Levenson and Harry Fisher were

"In the neighborhood I grew up in, you either went to Spain or you had a good excuse."

Richard Dreyfuss

Richard Dreyfuss

amazed by the reception they received from young activists during the anti-war demonstration held in

New York in March. With the *Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* banner flying high, the cheers and hugs and kisses bestowed upon them by hundreds of young people passing by was unbelievable. "It looks like the ALBA website (www.alba-valb.org) is catching on," he said.

Fifteen vets graced the stage this year, and each had something to say, whether about the present outrage in the Middle East or their own life-changing experiences fighting against fascism in Spain. Every veteran there, in some way, saved all our weary souls, rallying against U.S. aggression overseas.

Fredda Weiss, ALBA Executive Committee member, introduced the keynote speaker—actor, activist, and red-diaper baby, Richard Dreyfuss. Born in Bayside, NY and son of a mother proud never to have voted Democrat, this highly talented and

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Moe Fishman and Peter Carroll present a plaque to Henry Foner

NYC Honors Brigade

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modest gentleman told stories about passionate activism in his family that began in 19th century Russia; about his grandmother who was private secretary to Eugene V. Debs; about



Saul Wellman and Sylvia Thompson

coming of age on 218th Street, Queens, with stories of what the Lincolns accomplished and how they knew the truth before the rest of the world did, and how they set the standard for activism and commitment.

The songs of resistance and protest, put together by Bruce Barthol, musical director of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, closed the program. Developed by Bruce and ALBA's Peter Glazer, the program's rendition of the *Wobbly doxology* was hilarious and protest songs from the likes of Country Joe and the Fish brought back lots of memories.

It was another happy and emotional tribute to the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. As Richard



Harry Randall

Dreyfuss said, "As long as we remember what the men and women of the Lincoln Brigade stand for, we can work through this present and future chaos." No truer words ▀

Anne Taibleson is a member of the ALBA Board of Governors.

ALBA's April Events in NYC



Documentary film producer C M Hardt (left) screened her moving film *Death in El Valle*, about her investigation of the murder of her grandfather. ALBA Chair Peter Carroll and Moe Fishman honor Spain's Consul General of New York, Emilio Casaniello at the King Juan Carlos Center for his support of ALBA's work.

Songs and Letters of the Spanish Civil War

By Dan Lynn Watt with Molly Lynn Watt

This is May 21st and excellent fighting weather. Cold wind and hot sun. By the time you get this the newspapers will probably be reporting great victories for Loyalist Spain. Almost two years of war and still the spirit is the same – even higher. All of Spain is singing songs of struggle and victory. Just listen to us.

(Excerpt from a post card written on May 21, 1938 by George Watt, Political Commissar of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, to his wife, Ruth Rosenthal Watt in New York.)

New England audiences have been singing along with those spirited songs from Spain, and listening to excerpts of letters exchanged between George and Ruth Watt, as part of a program called “Songs and Letters of the Spanish Civil War.” Folksinger Tony Saletan performs the songs with banjo, guitar, and piano, accompanied by Sylvia Miskoe on accordion. I read my father’s letters, while my wife Molly reads Ruth’s. The show attracts audiences that include Spanish Civil War aficionados as well as folks who know little about it.

We introduced “Songs and Letters” as a one-hour presentation to liven up a daylong conference on the Spanish Civil War held in Concord, New Hampshire in February 2002. When George Watt died in 1994 at age 80, he left behind a collection of letters he had written to his first wife, Ruth. She kept them in a scrapbook with post cards, photos, leaflets and memorabilia George sent home from Spain.

Three weeks before the New Hampshire conference, Molly and I made an astounding discovery when we opened a box containing my father’s letters that had been stored in my parents’ basement. In the box



Sylvia Miskoe, Tony Saletan, Molly Lynn Watt and Dan Lynn Watt perform “Songs and Letters of the Spanish Civil War.”

was a two-inch stack of yellowed typewritten pages, carbon copies of letters written by Ruth in New York to George in Spain. Ruth died in April 1940, 15 months after George returned from Spain and five weeks after I was born. (In June 1941 George married Margie Wechsler, his wife of 53 years, my dearly beloved stepmother, and mother to my brother Steve.) Ruth’s belongings were put into a box that was never opened until we found it last year.

Except for a few photos, the letters are the only personal effects I have ever had to tell me about the person my mother was, and my parents’ love for each other. This wonderful treasure—the nearly complete set of letters exchanged between George and Ruth giving us two sides of an extraordinary conversation—became the basis for “Songs and Letters of the Spanish Civil War.”

The program opens with *Los Cuatro Generales* and closes with *Jarama*. In between, we weave many songs from and about Spain with excerpts we’ve selected and edited from the letters. They tell the story of these two young lovers, idealists and political activists, separated by war. Set against the backdrop of international efforts to prevent a World War in 1937 and 1938, the story evokes parallels with today’s international tragedy:

George wrote about learning to be a soldier, operating a machine gun, dodging bullets—and getting wounded, about the horrors of war and its effects, and about the internationalism he experienced in Spain. Ruth wrote about her political work organizing a boycott of silk stockings imported from Japan, seeing the movies *Blockade*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and Paul Muni in *Zola*,

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George writes to Ruth, September 16, 1937

Dear Muchachkele, At long last I got your letter. I had grapes, lemonade and your letter for dessert. I had lamb stew, French fried potatoes and your letter for my main dish. Well there's hardly any need to say what difference your letter made. It's much easier now facing artillery and machine guns than it was before. I was really worried that I wouldn't hear from you before we went into action. Well, I'm happy, that's all, very, very happy. You write about my new vitality and depth of experience. Well, my new vitality consists in infiltration (running and flopping towards the enemy – usually done on very thorny, rocky ground) and my depth of experience comes from digging foxholes.

Yesterday our entire section was transferred into a Spanish company. This was done to strengthen the Spanish group. This is just the chance that most of us have been waiting for. Now we are doing the job the International Brigade was really meant to do. That is to teach.

Letters

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and the support at home for the Lincolns. She canvassed friends to write and send packages of necessities—coffee, cigarettes, gum, tinned salmon and warm sweaters—to the boys in Spain.

Many of the songs woven among the letters are familiar to readers of *The Volunteer: The Internationale, Freiheit, Peat Bog Soldiers, Viva La Quince Brigada, Venga Jaleo*, and others recorded during or shortly after the war and popularized later by Paul Robeson, Pete Seeger, Ronnie Gilbert and The Weavers among others. Tony Saletan has also found lesser-known songs of the time. Woody Guthrie's *Mr. Tom Mooney* is *Free* complements Ruth's letter about a "Free Tom Mooney" rally at which Fiorello LaGuardia and

Heywood Broun were among the speakers. *Don't Buy Anything Japanese* was a topical song, sung to the tune of *Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn*, and connects with Ruth's boycott of silk stockings. Tony found verses in Yiddish to *Viva La Quince Brigada* and the *Song of the United Front*, and two songs by Lewis Allan about the Spanish Civil War, *Abraham Lincoln Walks Again* and *Beloved Comrade*, widely sung at the time.

Our program has evolved from a one-hour performance to an evening with two acts and an intermission. By July 2003 we will have given seven performances in a variety of venues. We are working on a CD, and hope to develop a radio show and a historical presentation suitable for schools and libraries.

Eventually I plan to edit and publish a book of George and Ruth's correspondence.

For information about upcoming performances and materials, check out the ALBA web site, www.alba-valb.org. To sponsor a performance contact Dan or Molly Lynn Watt, 617-354-8242, 603 588-6734, Dwatt@edc.org or Mollywatt@attbi.com. ☐



Ruth writes to George, Nov. 26, 1937

George, Do you realize we have a celebration coming soon? Our first Anniversary! Remember? So on January 15, just imagine when you go to sleep that I say, push over, and I crawl in next to you and you say, brr you're cold, and I say, my you're lovely and warm. Later you're dying to go to sleep, but I won't let you because of the way I keep kissing the corner of your eye, and rubbing my nose in your cheek, and fiddling with your hair and murmuring silly things. And then you just turn around and go to sleep – and even then I rub my face in your back and am so happy I fall asleep, too.

Republican Memory Returns to Spain

By Helen Graham

This article is an abridged version of the 2003 Len Crome Memorial Lecture presented on March 8 at the Imperial War Museum in London, under the auspices of the International Brigade Memorial Trust. Len Crome served in Spain as a doctor and Brigade Chief Medical Officer.

In this year's memorial lecture I have chosen to focus on the return of Republican memory, since it is a subject of extraordinary importance now in Spain.

In 1989, the North American raised son of the Spanish Republican novelist, Ramón Sender, published an account of his own and his sister's search for the remains of their mother, Amparo Barayón and for the truth about her imprisonment and extra-judicial murder. She was killed at the age of thirty two, in rebel-held Zamora in northwest Spain, the Catholic heartland of Old Castile, in the early months of Spain's civil war.

The book, called simply *A Death in Zamora*, charts an extraordinary odyssey in time, space and memory. On his return to Spain, in the 1980s, the son, also called Ramón, discovers he has a whole extended Spanish family, which emerges like a lost continent, bearing with it the history, the traces, the unquiet ghost of his mother Amparo. He meets Amparo's niece, Magdalena Maes, who in 1942 at the age of 17 had in an act of tremendous courage, physically with her own hands removed her beloved aunt's remains from the common grave where they lay, reburying them in the family tomb. "The bad thing [Magdalena tells Ramón] was that they [had] put quicklime in with her. There was no coffin or anything, just the body and the quicklime." For this act of temerity, even though Amparo's niece had sought and received the requisite official authorization, she



Ramón J. Sender and Amparo Barayón

and her family received anonymous death threats.

I've begun with this snapshot from *A Death in Zamora* because it is an extraordinary book that deserves to be more widely known and read. And it does so precisely because it tells in microcosm almost every profound thing one could want to say about the civil war in Spain, as a *civil* war; its complex social and cultural causes and its tremendous costs in the long aftermath of uncivil peace, up to and well beyond the death of Franco in 1975. Above all its narrative paves the way for the long, slow,

and painful recuperation of Republican memory, the memory of the defeated, which is only now exploding in Spain. The most well known examples are probably the campaign to open common graves to identify the remains of those extra-judicially murdered by the Francoist forces both during and after the war; the campaign for recognition and compensation by those used as forced labor by the regime; and most recently as documented by the recent television documentary about the lost children of Francoism, those

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Memory

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who were notoriously taken from their mothers, Republican women prisoners, and forcibly adopted by Francoist families—which for us now immediately recalls the shades of later violations—in Videla’s Argentina or Pinochet’s Chile.

In the title of this memoir, *A Death in Zamora*, one death stands for the many. For the tens of thousands of people killed in the Francoist repression had one thing overwhelmingly in common with each other: they had benefited in some way from the redistribution of power under the Republic. Local studies of the repression demonstrate quite clearly that those who targeted the length and breadth of rebel Spain were precisely those constituencies on whom the Republic’s reforming legislation had conferred social and political rights for the first time in their lives. Conversely, the many who supported Spain’s military rebels (whether we take this “many” as individuals or as entire social constituencies) had in common a fear of where change was leading—whether their fears were of material or psychological loss (wealth, professional status, established social and political hierarchies, religious or sexual, i.e. gendered, certainties) or a mixture of these things.

The assuaging of this overwhelming sense of fear was a very important element driving the Francoist repression. Why do I say this? Well, because horrifying repression took place *everywhere* in rebel-held territory. That is to say, it took place in many places—of which Zamora was one—where the military rebels were in control from the outset, where there was no military or armed resistance, no political resistance to speak of either, in short, where one would be hard-pressed to find a “war-situation” at all (at least according to a conventional definition of war). Nor is it feasible to argue that the initial violence

stemmed, as it did in the Republican zone, from “uncontrollable” groups. In Republican Spain the military coup provoked the total collapse of the state apparatus. But in the rebel zone there was no collapse of public order. The fascist Falangist or clerical Carlist militia and other volunteers of the right, could at any time have been disciplined by the military authorities that underwrote public order from the beginning. Not only did this not happen, but instead, as the research of the past decade has made clear, the military actively recruited thousands of civilian vigilantes to carry out a dirty war. Thus military and civilian-instigated



Amparo, approximately 16 year old

repression existed in a complementary relationship. This was the beginning of the “fellowship of blood,” of the complicity of whole sectors of Spanish society, ordinary Spaniards who became enmeshed in the murder of their compatriots.

Who was targeted by this repression? Well, as I’ve already suggested, all sorts of people—whether or not they were active combatants—the rural landless, but also many rural small holders and above all lease-

holding farmers who had achieved new tenancy rights under the Republic; urban workers, progressive teachers, trade unionists; “the new woman.” The military rebels and their civilian supporters were thus redefining “the enemy” as entire sectors of society that were perceived as out of control because they were beyond the control of traditional forms of discipline and order.

And I mention here “the new woman” because a pathological fear and loathing of emancipated women was a very powerful motive force among the rebels. Amparo Barayón wasn’t just killed in lieu of her husband the famous Republican writer, Ramón Sender, as many commentators have previously claimed. No, she was killed, as it were, *in her own right*. For Amparo was a modern woman. In 1930, as Spain’s monarchs crumbled, Amparo had, aged 26, left the conservative provincial backwater of Zamora and gone to Madrid, the “big city”, to become independent. She found work as a telephone switchboard operator—a new employment opportunity that was itself an indicator of Spain’s burgeoning modernity. In Madrid she supported herself, lived independently, educating herself both politically and culturally, and she met Ramón Sender and began living with him—which was quite something for those times, even in urban metropolitan Spain—for Madrid was not Berlin or Paris.

Although back in Zamora they wouldn’t have known about Sender, nevertheless the very fact that Amparo had spread her wings inspired horror among the pillars of provincial society and also among conservative members of her own family who saw her as on the road to damnation. And it would be some of these family members, determined to ensure the fulfillment of their own bigotry masquerading as prophecy, who were responsible for denouncing her to the military authorities in Zamora. This happened in the late

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summer of 1936, after Amparo had fled back to her hometown with her two young children in the aftermath of the military rising. She did this with the mistaken assumption that home would mean safety—a mistake she shared with the poet Federico Garcia Lorca and also with many thousands and thousands of anonymous victims of the repression.

As a result of the denunciation, Amparo was imprisoned in late August 1936. What happened to her then takes us to the heart of what the rebel repression sought to achieve. She was interrogated with the express intention of making her “recant.”

In her case the objective was that she make a formal denunciation of her husband, Ramón Sender (her husband by a Republican *civil* marriage ceremony, even though Amparo herself was a practicing Catholic). She was subjected to extraordinary pressure by a priest, who subjected her to a torrent of abuse and, after she made her final confession, refused her absolution.

In other words Amparo Barayón was subject to a form of sustained psychological torture, the objective of which was to humiliate her. So even though she had avoided the public forms of violent humiliation commonly visited upon Republican women in the length and breadth of rebel-held Spain—the head shaving, the purging with castor oil and public parading; and though Amparo Barayón was not physically tortured and raped, as many other female Republican prisoners were in the course of police interrogations—the object was the same: to break her.

Then one day her name appeared on a list of those that the death squads came by night to take out of jail in the deadly *sacas*. On 11 October 1936, nearly 3 months after the military coup against the Republic, Amparo Barayón was taken from the town jail to the cemetery. There, by lantern light, they shot her and buried her, where she fell, in a common grave.

We know of Amparo’s fate from several specific sources, including

the priest in question who gave an account to members of her family days after she had been killed. But most notably, in the 1980s Amparo’s son Ramón tracked down two of the women who were jailed with his mother. One of them, Pilar Fidalgo, who was saved from execution by a prisoner exchange, wrote her own contemporary account of her imprisonment which was published in 1939, outside Spain.

Before the exchange could happen, however, Pilar Fidalgo’s own baby, who had been imprisoned with her, had succumbed to illness and died. As many Republican women were imprisoned with their babies or young children during and after the war in massively overcrowded and unsanitary conditions such deaths were not an unusual occurrence (whether inside jails or in the transportation to or between jails). Indeed this seems to have been part of the punishment for their gender transgression.

One prison official remarked to Fidalgo that “red” women had forfeited their right to nourish their young. There are many accounts of police interrogators remarking that red women should have had more sense than to have had children because “reds are without rights.”

There were also cases of women imprisoned in an advanced state of pregnancy whose executions were delayed until after their confinement. For the older child survivors too, the price of nourishment (via Francoist social welfare organizations) often involved what Fidalgo herself described (in the 1939 memoir) as “moral suffering: obliging orphans to sing the songs of the murderers of their father; to wear the uniform of those who have executed him; and to curse the dead and blaspheme his memory.”

If we can think past the sheer horror of these events, as historians, eventually, always have to do, we must ask what was going on here, what did these things mean? To answer that question we clearly need to focus on the purpose of the habit-

ual physical and psychological torture. Why was there such a need to humiliate or to break the enemy, publicly or otherwise?

Well, all these forms of violence (in which I include the humiliation and moral suffering inflicted on Republican children who came under the tutelage of the Francoist state) were functioning as rituals through which social and political control could be re-enacted. And significant here too is the *manner* in which the “enemy” so often met his or her death at rebel hands: at the start of the civil war, the mass public executions were followed by the exhibition of corpses in the streets; the mass burning of bodies, the quasi *auto da fe* of a socialist deputy in the Plaza Mayor of Salamanca in July 1936, or the fact that executions in the center-north of the rebel zone often took place on established saints and feast days; or the uncanny mixture of terror and fiesta (executions followed by village fêtes and dances, both of which the local population was obliged to attend).

This violence served to exorcise the underlying fear of loss of control which was the subconscious link uniting the military rebels with their various groups of civilian supporters. When they murder the “enemy,” they’re murdering change, or the threat of change. And there was an assumption, again which united the various civilian and military components of the rising, that Spain could only be reborn through a blood sacrifice. In the same way, the widespread complicity of priests throughout Spain in the mass process of denunciation, killing and torture of those deemed opponents has to be understood in these terms, as a reassertion of control, rather than solely as an avenging response to the phenomenon of popular anticlerical violence in Republican territory. ■

Helen Graham teaches history at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is the author of *The Spanish Republic at War* (Cambridge).



Spain at War

The Spanish Republic at War, 1936-1939. By Helen Graham, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

By Pamela Radcliff

Helen Graham frames her new synthesis of the Spanish Civil War around the much-debated question of why the Republic lost the war. Far from re-hashing old territory, the book provides a fresh and provocative reading on the tragedy of the Second Republic that will in turn stimulate a new generation of debates, both within academic circles and among the broader public.

Graham's basic contention is that the blame for defeat can be laid squarely at the feet of the Non-Intervention Pact and its consequences on the Republican war effort. What the pact meant in military terms is that the Republic was never able to mount an effective offensive campaign, even from the outset, while its defensive actions were increasingly restricted.

Equally important was non-intervention's indirect impact on the home front. The need to pour vital resources into the procurement of arms from pricey black-market sources forced the Republic to neglect civilian needs and made it impossible for them to provide social welfare programs that might have helped close the gap between the liberal and revolutionary left.

The book makes the parallel point that the Francoists could not have won without the extensive Germany and Italy aid, from the planes which saved a floundering coup in July 1936 by airlifting 10,000 troops to the mainland, to the stalemate broken after the March 1937 Republican victory at Guadalajara by

the massive escalation in foreign aid to the rebels. The centrality of international aid (or the lack of it) is not a new claim, although Graham's book demonstrates the impact of non-intervention in concrete terms and the way in which the war itself, as she puts it, was central to the deteriorating legitimacy of the Republic.

Following from her central claim, Graham argues that the Republic did not auto-destruct through the force of its own ideological tensions; that is, the revolutionaries vs. the liberals, or the debate over "revolution" vs. "war." While not ignoring these divisions (the book spends a lot of time reviewing party infighting), Graham argues that these divisions only became unmanageable as a result of the tensions caused by the war and the deteriorating conditions it brought. As she says, "Precisely because of the overwhelming material lack of everything in Republican Spain by 1938 it is deeply problematic even to pose further questions about how far its political shortcomings 'explain' its collapse." Instead of viewing the Republic as a mass of contradictions waiting to collapse, Graham argues that it started out the war with a viable political project that could have developed into a stable basis for a democratic Republic.

The most polemical and therefore stimulating part of Graham's contention is that the group that articulated and pursued this project most effectively was the Communist party. As the only loyalist party with a vision of an interclass, national mobilization in defense of the Republic (through the framework of the Popular Front), the PCE offered both a strategy for victory and a new kind of politics that could transcend the limitations of the peacetime

Republic. With this claim, the book offers a wholly revisionist interpretation of the role of the PCE, which stands in direct contrast to the classic anti-communist reading of Bolloren and other critics, who have blamed the party for destabilizing the Republic through its Stalinist-directed power politics.

Graham argues that the PCE operated with much greater independence than has been assumed. Thus, the much-vilified Soviet military advisers, she says, were all put in subordinate, usually technical positions. Key decisions, like the destitution of Largo Caballero, the Socialist Prime Minister, were against the wishes of Stalin, who wanted to see the Popular Front coalition afloat.

When Soviet "orders" were implemented, she argues, they often agreed with the judgments of the major Spanish parties, as in the campaign against the POUM, in which case they were not a good test of Soviet influence. All in all, communication was too slow and irregular to have sustained the kind of control the Comintern allegedly had. She draws on the work of scholars using the newly opened Soviet archives (She doesn't engage directly with the polemical collection of documents edited by Ronald Radosh, which draws the opposite conclusion).

From a position of relative independence, the Spanish communist party embarked on a strategy that was, as Graham argues, the best one suited for the defense of the Republic. The party's clear-headed analysis, combined with its unique combination of mobilizing skills and cross-class rhetoric explain its immense appeal. It was this force of attraction, rather than a Machiavellian conspiracy, that accounts for the dramatic rise in the PC's profile. While she doesn't deny

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that party ambitions played a role, she tries to normalize this ambition as part of the jockeying for position within the Republican camp that was more organizational than ideological. What torpedoed the Popular Front was not its overbearing ambition but progressive defeats of 1938 that pulled it apart.

The vilification of the PC in Civil War historiography is rooted less in the real actions and behavior of the party than in a post-hoc Cold War reading of them, which infected not only historians like Bolloten but also memoirs taken to be “primary” sources. The real anti-communism “on the ground,” which developed within Republican territory after the spring of 1938, was more the expression of frustration and war weariness than a reflection of ideological warfare.

The book begins with the background necessary to understand why the political space filled by the PC was not occupied by other parties. The context in which the PC emerged as the strongest proponent of the liberal nation reflected the fragmentation of social groups that prevented a coherent bourgeois national project from taking root in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Republicans are dismissed as rooted in an old elitist political culture that made them irrelevant to the challenges of the new democratic nation. Drawing on her earlier monograph of the Socialist party, Graham presents a critical view of its internal divisions. She is especially critical of left socialists, the Caballeristas, who were powerful enough to stir up the party’s constituency with revolutionary rhetoric but who lacked a viable plan of mobilization. Graham also dismisses the CNT, despite its mobilizing powers, because its rejection of parliamentary politics limited a

coherent political project. In her telling, the story of the May 1937 events in Barcelona, when the CNT’s control of the “streets” was curbed, revealed more about the hollowness of CNT power than it did about a dubious Communist conspiracy.

The failure of national republican mobilization was demonstrated not only by the 1936 coup but also by the variety of local responses to it. In one of the most interesting chapters in the book, Graham draws on existing local studies to sketch out a heterogeneous republican landscape in the summer of 1936, where the combination of pre-war political cultures and the proximity of the front created “islands” of resistance. She contrasts this republican hybridity with what she describes as the totalizing project of the Francoist army, that embarked, as she argues forcefully, on a war of internal colonization to purge the nation of its diseased elements and to reinstate social and political order. She makes a clear distinction between republican and nationalist violence, the former arises as a result of the collapse of state power, the latter formed a coherent part of the new state. Such a distinction reinforces her broader point, the need for re-building Republican state authority as the only viable home front strategy, given the overwhelming military odds.

In hammering this point home, the book sets out to demystify the Civil War, to strip it of the romanticism typified in Ken Loach’s film “Land and Freedom,” that was based on Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*. The Republic was not swept away by grand passions but by military realities. And those realities were grim enough that they required the cold, calculating, unflinching policies associated with the PCE, even if they make comfortable armchair liberals squeamish. For example, she tries to

put the harsh military and home front discipline imposed in the last months of the war in the context of a desperate situation which required tough measures to control fifth column activity, rather than as the result of a Soviet-style reign of terror. She cites in skeptical terms recent International Brigade memoirs that assert that the Brigades were subject to such terror from the moment they arrived in Spain. While there may have been terror in the last chaotic months, most of it was unofficial, she says, while Negrin tried to channel the militarized justice through the courts.

Much of this realpolitik reading of the Civil War is persuasive. Graham’s effort to “bring the war back in,” the defense of centralization and militarization, the impact of Non-Intervention, and even the demotion of the Comintern, are points not simply asserted but prodigiously documented with an unusual number of footnotes for a narrative synthesis. There is some tension between the effort to provide a narrative overview of the war and the focus on making specific arguments about why the Republic was defeated. Such a tension may intimidate readers unable to follow the intricacies of inter-party struggles, but others will welcome the passion of the polemical argumentation which makes for an excellent read.

The book will also incite a polemical response, in terms of its highly positive evaluation of the PCE’s role in the war and its claims for the PCE’s potential to mobilize the nation. While debunking some of the Cold War myths is a good corrective, it has perhaps gone too far in the other direction of accepting the party’s own realpolitik logic that the ends justified the means. ■

Pamela Radcliff teaches Spanish Civil War history at the University of California, San Diego.



The Second War Against Fascism

Fighting Fascism in Europe: The World War II Letters of an American Veteran of the Spanish Civil War, by Lawrence Cane, Ed. by David E. Cane, Judy Barrett Litoff, and David C. Smith. Fordham University Press, 2003.

By Michael Nash

Of the 400 Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans who fought during World War II, Lawrence Cane was the only one to participate in the D-Day Normandy invasion. This book is a collection of his letters to his wife Grace Singer Cane describing his wartime experiences from the time he began basic training on August 28, 1942, until he returned home on October 29, 1945.

The letters are moving, well written, and historically significant. They capture Cane's political commitment, and his determination to fight fascism and create a better world. While many of the Lincoln veterans were labeled premature anti-fascists and were denied commissions, promotions, and assigned to noncombatant duties during World War II, Cane appears to have escaped such discrimination. He was promoted to 2nd lieutenant, volunteered for combat duty, and became part of an engineering unit that participated in the D-Day assault on Utah Beach. He was awarded a Silver Star for bravery.

As one reads Cane's letters it appears that in several cases his superior officers viewed his Spanish Civil War experience as an asset and relied on his military expertise in the training of other soldiers. This may be an exceptional story as the letters from other World War II veterans in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives present a very different pic-

ture, one of discrimination, promotions and opportunities for combat denied. Assessing this situation in all its complexities will clearly require further research.

Whether or not Cane's experiences were typical, his letters are moving and informative. His descriptions of the Normandy invasion provide a rare view of D-Day from the perspective of a front line soldier. As late as November 26, 1944 Cane would write: "the Krauts are fighting for every foot viciously, desperately—but the American powerhouse shoves on."

Cane's idealism comes through loud and clear in the letters. On January 27, 1945 writing from "Somewhere in Belgium," at a time when American policy makers were seriously considering destroying all German industry, Cane declared "I want to see Germany handled so that some day—not tomorrow or maybe even ten years but, certainly in a generation—Germany will be able to take her place in the family of nations. Her position not one of sword-rattler, but a country in which a man's fundamental dignity is recognized, and which has passed from the category of criminal to reformed member of society."

There are many other moving passages in this book. One that makes a particular impression is Cane's description of his meeting with "two former functionaries of the German Communist Party," who spent twelve years in "the infamous concentration camp for politicals at Buchenwald." Cane was surprised to find that "they were still sane, in fair physical condition. And most important of all—the fire still burned bright within them." There is much more in this book that will reward

the reader. Of particular interest is Cane's reaction to the explosion of the first atomic bomb, his interest in the Jacques Duclos letter that many historians believe signaled the beginning of the Cold War, descriptions of race relations in the Army, and Cane's efforts to fight racial discrimination. Finally, there is the human dimension, a young husband and father committed to fighting fascism, but yearning to return home to his wife and child. ■

Michael Nash is Director of the Tamiment Library, New York University.

Red Bessie *A Radical Odyssey*

**A new play with songs
by Jack Gilhooley and
Daniel Czitrom**

Presented by the Edinburgh
Fringe Festival, August 1-
August 25, 1:15pm daily
At the Gilded Balloon, Cave 1
(S. Niddry St, off Cowgate)
Edinburgh SCOTLAND
www.gildedballoon.co.uk

Loosely based on the letters, family, and experiences of Lincoln vets Joe and Leo Gordon, "Red Bessie" tells the story of two troubadours who bravely battled fascism from the Spanish Civil War through the Cold War.

*"Red Bessie" is partially funded
by the Puffin Foundation*



Spanish Exiles in Mexico

Exile and Cultural Hegemony: Spanish Intellectuals in Mexico, 1939-1975. By Sebastiaan Faber, Vanderbilt University Press, \$39.95.

By Hugo Hiriart
(Translated by Christopher Winks)

I encountered Spanish exiles very early in life. Before I was three, my best friend in kindergarten was Marcelo Estrada, the son of Lolita and Colonel Estrada of the Spanish Republican Army.

The Colonel, whom I met in short order, was a mild-mannered, ironical, intelligent man, not at all imperious and short-tempered, as my childish mind had imagined a colonel to be. However, the Spanish poet scared me: he was tall and vociferous, and wore spectacles of the kind that made his already intense eyes seem even larger. I saw him from a distance in a café I used to go to with my grandfather. His name was León Felipe.

The Spanish exodus to Mexico involved an enormous variety of intellectuals in all fields: lawyers, painters, chemists, biologists, doctors, philosophers, historians, poets, writers and critics, musicians, physicists, economists, and theologians. Don Pedro Urbino González de la Calle, who taught Sanskrit at the University, was a Spaniard. This exile lacked nothing! These Spanish embodiments of universal culture generously applied themselves to move Mexican culture forward, freeing it from the backwardness and vacillation still in evidence. Since liberation is the opposite of conquest, this enthusiastic action was the complete antithesis of Cortés' military conquest which, centuries earlier, had

shaken these same lands.

I grew up immersed in the culture of the Spanish exile community: my friends from childhood and youth, my first girlfriends, and many of my teachers at the university—Gallegos Rocafull, Gaos, Nicol, Rocés, Sánchez Vázquez, among others—were native Spaniards. And very early on, I began to understand the paradox of exile: there in the distance was luminous Spain, that bloodthirsty Medea who killed her children, but which at the same time was worthy of great love.

Exile is a well of nostalgia: its rightful home is memory, and painful memory at that. Attitudes towards this drama among the wide range of exiles I knew varied greatly: from my friend Rafa Cordero, whose father was Isaac Cordero, a distinguished pathologist, adapted quickly, became a Mexican citizen, and raised his children as Mexicans,

to those who clung to the hope of returning to Spain sooner or later, and who never managed to adapt in the slightest to the new and often quite adverse reality.

This variegated catalogue of possible attitudes, reflecting the great diversity of the intellectual exile community, is what makes it so difficult, if not impossible, to formulate any kind of general theory on the experience of exile.

Faber's book, however, explores this possibility. Its merit lies in its broad historical sweep and its detailed analysis of a large number of individual examples, which can be read with profit. Its weakness lies, perhaps, in its partiality: it deals above all with the reactions of writers who have left testimonials behind, and is less concerned with, for example, scientists, technicians, engineers, economists, and businessmen, of whom there were many, and quite successful ones. ■

Hugo Hiriart is Director of the Mexican Cultural Institute in New York.

A Canadian in the Lincolns

A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War: An Armenian-Canadian in the Lincoln Battalion. By D.P. (Pat) Stephens. Ed. by Rick Rennie. St. John's Newfoundland: Canadian Committee on Labour History

By Larry Hannant

Pat Stephens' memoir is a luminous cameo portrait of the lives of volunteers from Canada and the United States who fought as anti-fascists in the Spanish Civil War. By turns caustic, tender, emotional, matter-of-fact, frank and coy, the memoir was dictated to his wife, Phyllis, just a few

years before his death in 1987.

In many ways, Stephens' pre-war situation was typical of the approximately 1400 volunteers from Canada—young, unemployed or semi-employed, often born outside of Canada, politically left wing. His experience was slightly different in that he was active with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the social democratic party of Canada, even though he did work jointly with the Young Communist League in strikes and demonstrations.

While his experience in Spain was also typical of other volunteers, his intelligence and range of experi-

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Added to Memory's Roster



PHOTO BY EMILIA ITHEN

Harry Fisher (1911-2003)

Harry Fisher, 92, soldier, pacifist, writer, and lifelong activist, died on March 22, after participating in an antiwar demonstration in New York City.

After a childhood in the Hebrew National Orphan Home and a youth spent as a labor activist and merchant marine, he volunteered to fight fascism in Spain with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. During World War II, he served as a B-26 bomber turret gunner in Europe. Married to Ruth Goldstein in 1939, they worked together for nearly 50 years at the Soviet News Agency Tass, he in telecommunications, she as a research librarian and office manager. They shared an office, a daily walk to work, and a passion for life. They dedicated their lives to each other, their children and grandchil-

dren, and to making the world a better place. Ruth died in 1993 after convincing Harry to write a book about his experiences in the Spanish Civil War and helping get the project started. Published in 1998, his memoir *Comrades* led to speaking tours in the U.S., as well as Spain and Germany. The enthusiastic response to the book prompted the publication of Spanish and German editions of the book. Just a week before his death, Harry finished the manuscript for his second book, *Legacy*, to be released in Germany this June. Negotiations are under way for the U.S. edition. He is survived by his son, John, and daughter, Wendy, and their families, including three grandchildren, and a still-growing number of fellow activists and loving comrades.

After collapsing at the antiwar demonstration Saturday, he was taken to St. Vincent's Hospital, where he briefly regained consciousness and recalled being in the same hospital 70 years earlier to receive stitches after being beaten by police on a union picket line.

Harry was truly an inspiration to everyone he met. He will be sorely missed by his family and the incredible number of people he touched in his short 92 years.

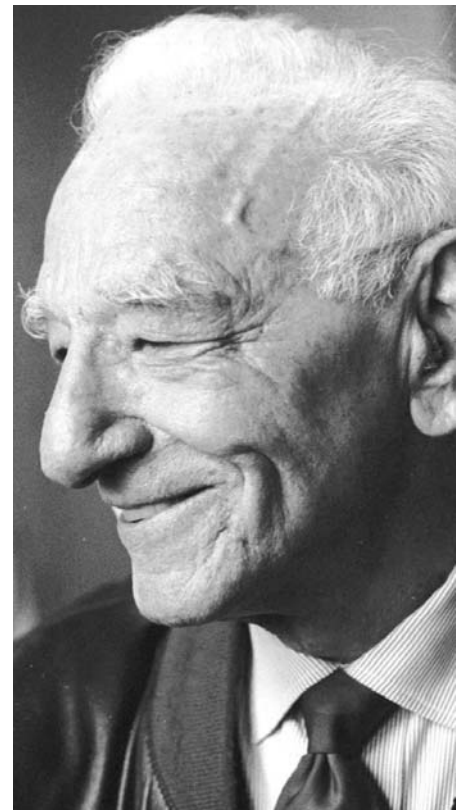
—Fraser Ottanelli

William Sennett (1914-2003)

William Sennett, an early member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives and former CEO of two major American trucking companies, died of complications of Alzheimer's disease on March 30 in San Francisco at age 88.

The story of his life from Communist functionary to corporate executive is told in detail in his oral history on file in the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley.

Born in Chicago of Russian immigrant parents, Sennett's early life was one of poverty. His first language was Yiddish, but he quickly learned English in Chicago grammar schools. Growing up during the



Great Depression, he developed a lifelong dedication to the needs of poor people. Although his formal schooling stopped at ninth grade, he was well-read, and had a lifelong passion for learning.

As a youth he was outraged when he saw families who couldn't pay rent forced from their homes, the doors padlocked, and their furniture moved onto the sidewalk. He discovered that the Communist Party had a strategy to help them. Young Communists would break the pad-



Added to Memory's Roster



locks and move the furniture back into the houses before the police arrived. Under the law the landlord had to go back to court and file for another eviction notice. In the interim, the Communists would get the tenants on welfare. Impressed, Sennett joined the Young Communist League, and later the Communist Party.

In 1937 he volunteered to go to Spain to fight in the International Brigades. He arrived just as the Republic received new trucks, and was assigned as a driver. For the remainder of the war he worked in transportation, moving supplies to the front.

After Spain, Sennett married, had a child, and went to work in the defense industry. This gave him a draft deferment. But he volunteered for military service in 1943 and was assigned to the Army Air Corps at Keesler Field, Mississippi. He was slated for advanced training when the FBI advised his commanding officer of his Communist background. He was then put in charge of teaching illiterates reading, writing and mathematics.

After the war, the McCarran Act ushered in a period of repression of Communists, and Sennett went underground. He was already becoming disillusioned with Communism when Khrushchev made his famous anti-Stalin speech 1956. Sennett left the party, and sought a new life. He found it in the transportation industry.

His administrative and negotiating skills led him to a job with the Strick company, at that time a part of Fruehauf Corporation. The company manufactured and leased truck trailers for heavy freight. Through many company mergers, Sennett rose in the corporate hierarchy. Eventually he became the president of Transport International Pool (TIP). He built the company into a multi-million-dollar corporation headquartered in San

Francisco with 66 branches nationwide and 26 in ten foreign countries.

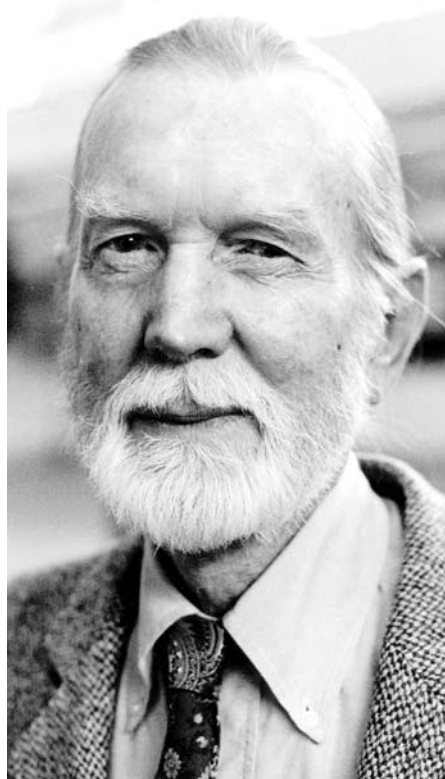
Convinced that socialism was possible if it was strictly democratic, he became publisher of the Chicago-based, left-leaning weekly *In These Times*. He also supported many organizations dedicated to the elimination of poverty and racism. He helped organize the San Francisco tenants organizations and the passage of rent control legislation.

Sennett is survived by his wife of 28 years, Rosalie, and from an earlier marriage two daughters, Barbara Gilkey and Sara Sennett.

—Marshall Windmiller

George Cullinen (1912-2003)

George Cullinen, Lincoln vet, anti-nuclear activist, and founder of the Vermont Film Festival died on March 3 while vacationing in Florida. He was 88.



Born in San Francisco, George became a maritime captain and had a lifelong interest in sailing. Together with his wife Sonia, they operated a progressive elementary school in Queens, N.Y. After retiring to Vermont, they collaborated in founding the annual film festival in Burlington. George made a few documentary films, including *Washington to Moscow* about the nuclear freeze protests of the early 1980s. The film won the UNESCO Prize at a peace film festival in Hiroshima, Japan.

Sidney Linn (1913-2003)

Our father Sidney Linn died on January 27. He was 89 and, aside from his family, he was most proud of having fought in Spain. Sid volunteered to be an ambulance driver and



spent 18 months on the southern front. Upon his return home to

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Added to Memory's Roster



Susman

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more specific role. He jumped ship in Puerto Rico to become a Party organizer. There he learned Spanish, organized a Puerto Rican students union, and helped form a union on a pine plantation in the center of the island.

Then history intervened in the form of a civil war in Spain. His Spanish was about to become still more useful. He began to recruit Puerto Ricans for the International

Puerto Rican volunteers.

After a little over three months in Paris, Susman was delayed yet a bit longer in his effort to cross the border into Spain. He was asked to make a small purchase first. A German civilian aircraft had landed in Paris and was up for sale. Bill was given \$50,000 in cash, along with an ancient and utterly unreliable revolver for self-protection, and sent off to the airport to close the deal. The plane would be especially useful in Spain, since its German markings reduced the chance it would be fired upon by fascist troops.

wrote in the *Volunteer*, he sat silently on a bench in the Plaza de Cataluna in Barcelona in 1977 and "wept without knowing why."

There would be many reasons to weep over the years. Among them would be the stupidity of the American military when he enlisted in the army shortly after Pearl Harbor. Repeatedly refused promotion and denied formal officer training, he found himself an instructor in hand-to-hand combat, setting mines, and defusing booby traps, skills he had acquired in an earlier life. Every officer who recommended Bill for promotion would himself be transferred out. When he finally got a chance to see his file he found it marked "Promotion Denied—fought with Reds in Spain." Meanwhile, anticipating a week's furlough from Fort Bragg, he wrote to his girlfriend (and native New Yorker) Helene Shemel: "Take your Wassermann test. I'm coming up." That was his proposal; they were married on April 17, 1942. Then he did get to the European theater, where other ironies abounded: Bill discovered the only way he could question German prisoners was to use his Yiddish.

When the war in Europe ended, Sergeant Susman was shipped off to the Philippines. His outfit was assigned to block any effort by the Philippine liberation fighters, who had long fought the Japanese, to take their rightful place in national politics. His fellow soldiers had their eyes opened after they broke the rules and fraternized with the Huk. Conversations about equality, democracy, and freedom ensued, conversations Bill had once engaged in under the dappled shade of olive trees. The Huk would subsequently mount a Communist-led peasant rebellion (1946-54), but were defeated with the help of U.S. supplied arms.

Bill was back home early in 1946;

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Bill Susman on Commitment

"When I speak to younger people they cannot grasp why 2800 Americans would leave home and go to fight in another country. All their questions are about commitment. History doesn't move them, but they are enthralled by commitment. I was at a party hosted by the Spanish Ambassador—this was after Franco's death—and a young couple approached me. 'We just wanted to meet the man who gave the speech that changed our daughter's life,' they said to me. Their daughter was a freshman and she told her parents that she was going to change her life, making it a life of meaning and commitment. They had to look up the Spanish Civil War to find out what she was talking about.

"Young people are amazed that you can have a group of people who were involved in a struggle of life and death 65 years ago, with people dying all around them. And we were fighting under the most difficult conditions, not like where you are clothed and fed like we were in the American army in World War II. I know, having fought in the infantry in both wars. We must have had casualties of 150 percent in Spain, because people would get wounded and then return to get wounded again. Yet that struggle still resonates.

"To keep the legacy alive we formed the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives so that we could recruit young people to take over the organization, people who could continue to tell the story." Bill Susman, Interview with Richard Bermack, September 1998.

Brigades. Assigned to help set up arrangements in Paris for Latin American volunteers, he returned to New York and sailed for Europe in service of Spain in 1937. This time he traveled as William Robert Ellis. On board with him were a score of his

Then, at last, Bill did cross the Spanish border. Thereafter he remembered more vividly the time in trenches, the time with comrades. All that flooded over him forty years later, after Franco had died, when he finally returned to Spain. As he



Added to Memory's Roster



Susman

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the following year his daughter Susan was born. Meanwhile, an army buddy had called to ask what he knew about broilers. "What's to know?" Bill replied, "a chicken's a chicken." But the friend had a different broiler in mind, than the countertop appliance. Signed on to manage a Manhattan factory assembling kitchen broilers, he did so until a return stint to Puerto Rico. There were tax incentives to manufacturing on the island, so Bill found himself commuting to manage a women's glove factory. The enterprise floundered after the boss was caught embezzling from the firm. Then Bill began representing other mainland manufacturers. Plexiglas. B.V.D.s. He hated selling, disliked the traveling, and found work under capitalism inherently contradictory as a progressive. But he had a family to support, a family that moved to Fresh Meadows, Queens in 1951 and finally to Great Neck in 1959. In Queens Bill was elected a Democratic Assemblyman. His son Paul was born in 1950.

Then the shadow of McCarthyism fell over the land. Like so many Spanish vets, Susman found employment still more fragile. The FBI kept calling employers, and every time he was out of a job. Ironically, the FBI assault occurred just as Susman had drifted away from the Party. The final psychological break would come with the Khrushchev revelations of 1956, but Bill was already disengaged before then. For one thing neither his recent nor his future employment left much time for work in mass organizations.

The job scene changed dramatically when a break came in the mid-1950s. There was an opening at MPO, a New York film production



Academy Award winning filmmaker Barbara Kopple speaking at Bill Susman's memorial.

house with nine stages and an office in L.A. They were doing industrial and educational shorts. When television took off, they became one of the country's largest producers of commercials. Marvin Rothenberg, a progressive member of the MPO Board, had helped get Bill a job. It was, as they say, an opening at the bottom. Bill started by delivering coffee and carrying cans of film. But he studied to become an assistant director, passed an exam, moved up to stage manager, and ended as Executive Vice President.

Suddenly capitalism and Left politics coalesced, at least in Bill's own practice. He successfully hired Black workers when other firms would not, and he and Marvin helped them form their own union. Confronted with that fait accompli, the main union was then compelled to accept Black members. Bill also built relationships with political filmmakers from Algeria, Argentina, and Mexico. He was able to get them

film, and he was able to get their film developed. He assisted distributors of political films.

The closest relationship was with Raymundo Gleyzer, the Argentinean director whose films included *The Frozen Revolution* (1971), made after students were slaughtered in Mexico in 1968 and which Bill produced. A photograph by Gleyzer hangs in their living room. Their son Paul went to Argentina in the fall of 1972 to work as an assistant cameraman on Gleyzer's *The Traitors*, also produced by Bill.

The following year night fell again. Back in the U.S., Gleyzer was about to board a plane to Argentina when word came warning him not to return. The Susman argued with him, but he decided to take the risk. He was never heard from again. Bill helped organize a huge worldwide effort to save Raymundo and other Latin American filmmakers, but it was to no avail. Swept up in the gen-

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Added to Memory's Roster



Linn

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Detroit he continued his dedication to social justice, working for civil rights, and union organizing in the late 1940s and '50s. He met his wife-to-be, our mother Anne, who was also an activist, when he was speaking about Spain at a fundraising event in 1938.

When World War II began he tried enlisting in every branch of the service, but a bad arm and health problems exacerbated by his time in Spain kept him out. He worked as a civilian for the army. As the story goes, when his commanding officer received a letter from J. Edgar Hoover informing him that Sid was a Communist and should be fired, the commander erupted, "If Sid Linn is a Communist we need more damn Commies in this army and maybe we'd win the war faster!"

After the war, Sid worked in the home improvement industry and at his funeral a longtime colleague said, "Your dad was a straight shooter. In a tough business he was an honest guy."

Our father had a difficult childhood—no childhood at all, really. He was orphaned at an early age and learned survival skills on the streets of New York. He and our mother raised us to value integrity, honesty, peace, and justice. He wasn't always an easy guy to live with, but we're proud to be his daughters.

—Nancy Pearl and Susan Linn

Sana Goldblatt (1915-2003)

After living a full, exciting, and independent life, Sana Goldblatt passed away peacefully at her home in San Francisco. A volunteer nurse during the Spanish Civil War, she was also a founder of the Bay Area

Post of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

Throughout her life, Sana was an advocate for peace and justice. Born and raised in New York, she put herself through college and Beth Israel



Nursing School. At age 21, she volunteered to serve as a nurse in Spain, where she was stationed at Villa Paz, Alcorisa, and Cordoba.

Sana returned to New York in 1939 and resumed her schooling as an occupational therapist. She and her daughter, Susan, moved to San Francisco in the late 1940s. In the early 1960s, she helped reestablish the Bay Area Post and served as its treasurer. Sana was not one to call attention to herself or her deeds; to her, she did what she did because it needed to be done. She will be greatly missed by all.

—Susan Saiz

Susman

Continued from page 17

erals' nightmare, Gleyzer was one of the disappeared, apparently killed in 1976. Juana Sapire, Raymundo's wife, fled Argentina with their two-year-old son, Diego, and took refuge in the Susman home while they established a new life.

The most enduring relationship with an American filmmaker was with the academy award winning documentarian Barbara Kopple. Susman took on the job of internationally distributing *Harlan County, USA* (1976), promoting it at the Cannes Film Festival and elsewhere. It became a family affair after Helene, who had earlier taught guitar, apprenticed at MPO and became an assistant sound editor and producer for Kopple's *American Dream* (1990). Kopple's work mixed the history of unionization with contemporary labor struggles. Gleyzer too had mixed footage of the 1910-17 Mexican Revolution with contemporary footage. It was a combination that spoke to Bill's whole life. Commemoration was part of contemporary intervention.

Memory and action, Bill Susman realized, could not be severed. They should sustain one another. A life on the Left was always a life of lessons relearned, new battles waged on old principles. Continuities, with their truths and their ironies, can sustain us, educate us, inspire us. Knowledge of the past was the foundation of a steadfast politics in the present. And so in 1979 Susman took on one last great project, the creation of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. ■

Thanks to Paul, Susan, and Helene Susman, Peter Carroll, and Fraser Ottanelli for their help.

Dear, Dear ALBA,

Harry Fisher was an idealist and yet, at the same time, utterly realist - what you can say a dreamer too active to dream too much.

Humorous and ironical and yet serious when one has to be serious. Straight, tireless, honest, utterly incorruptible and yet sensitive and gentle and haunted by the thousands images of horror which he was forced to see. I cannot call him an hero because, as his friend Edwin Rolfe put it, hero is a word for peacetime and for Harry there was not such a thing — peacetime. He fought all his life along — he fought when he was at the Jewish orphanages and when he was a young member of YCLA in the years of the Depression; when he was in Spain and during W.W.II; when he worked for Tass, and when he retired (from work, not from life). And he never, never failed to protest against arbitrariness and injustice.

There is an old Jewish dictum: "In a place where there are not human beings, fight to be a human being." Thus was Harry - a human being even in moments and times where human beings were difficult to find. A perennial searcher of justice and truth. Harry, communist "with a little c," plain soldier in Spain because he didn't accept to be upgraded before leaving for home, Harry caring and self demanding, who made in his twenties from an American flag as torn as the dresses of destitute people his own banner and never betrayed it, passed away, not surprising, demonstrating for peace.

He was my friend. I was one of the many who had this privilege.

Rajel Sperber
Hebrew University,
Jerusalem

The Canadian Lincoln

Continued from page 15

ences introduce a unique perspective. As editor Rick Rennie points out, Stephens' "Armenian heritage, the fact that he was a Canadian serving in a primarily American battalion, and the variety of posts he held in Spain, combine to give him a special insight into the war and the international brigades."

One of those insights is into the intensely partisan political conditions in Spain. Even 50 years after the war, when he was telling his story, Stephens feels compelled to sit on the fence on some matters of political controversy.

One example was his experience with Oliver Law. There's been a great deal of debate about Law's leadership. A Communist Party organizer from Chicago, Law arrived in Spain in January 1937 and the next month became the first African-American to lead a white military unit, taking over command of the Lincoln Machine Gun Company. Later that year he would become the Lincoln battalion commander before being shot and killed at Mosquito Ridge near Brunete on July 9. There's been a long-running and intense debate about Law's competence and about whether his own men celebrated at his death.

Stephens had not been centrally involved with the Communist Party before the war, and would become apolitical after returning from Spain, but he recognized how important party politics were, and this is evident in recounting his time with the machine gun company under Law's command. In one engagement, Law's instructions apparently contribute to the death of one of the machine gunners. "The boys were furious. Oliver Law was not well liked in the machine gun company, especially in my section. He was too authoritarian and incompetent." Fellow machine gunners Jim Katz

and Ray Steele suggest laying a charge of incompetence against Law. Stephens advises them to keep quiet: "Oliver Law was a strong Communist, and had powerful friends at Brigade Headquarters. I knew what the results would be... He would be absolved, and they would become targets of petty inconveniences." But Katz and Steele persist, and an inquiry is called. At it, Stephens testifies, "I did not attribute the death of Comrade Perez to the incompetence of Comrade Law. In war, I reminded them, some of us will be killed." The inquiry's result confirms his fears: "As always in the Army, the status quo prevailed. Comrade Law was exonerated, but Comrades Steele and Katz were reprimanded for laying mischievous charges, and cautioned against bad behavior in the unit."

On small details here, Stephens' memory is faulty. Law was not from Michigan and did in fact have military experience before going to Spain. But the lesson he seems to draw from the experience rings true: Keeping one's head down—bureaucratically speaking—seemed to be as important to survival in an army of international anti-fascist volunteers as it was in any state military.

Stephens' memoir also tells much about interactions between International Brigaders and Spaniards and the spirit of revolution and solidarity that infused the Spanish people. Filled with vignettes of Stephen's memoirs, this book makes for a lively and informative exploration of the personal side of the Spanish Civil War. ■

Larry Hannant is an historian at the University of Victoria and Camosun College in British Columbia and the editor of *The Politics of Passion: Norman Bethune's Writing and Art*.



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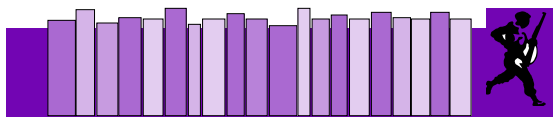
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ALBA'S TRAVELING EXHIBITION

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ALBA's photographic exhibit, *The Aura of the Cause*, has been shown at the Puffin Room in New York City, the University of California-San Diego, the Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, FL, the Fonda Del Sol Visual Center in Washington DC, and the University of Illinois. This exhibit, curated by Professor Cary Nelson of the University of Illinois, consists of hundreds of photographs of the Lincoln Brigaders, other international volunteers and their Spanish comrades, in training and at rest, among the Spanish villages and in battle.

**For further information about *The Aura of the Cause* exhibit, contact ALBA's executive secretary, Diane Fraher, 212-598-0968; Fax: 212-529-4603; e-mail amerinda@amerinda.org. The exhibit is available for museum and art gallery showings
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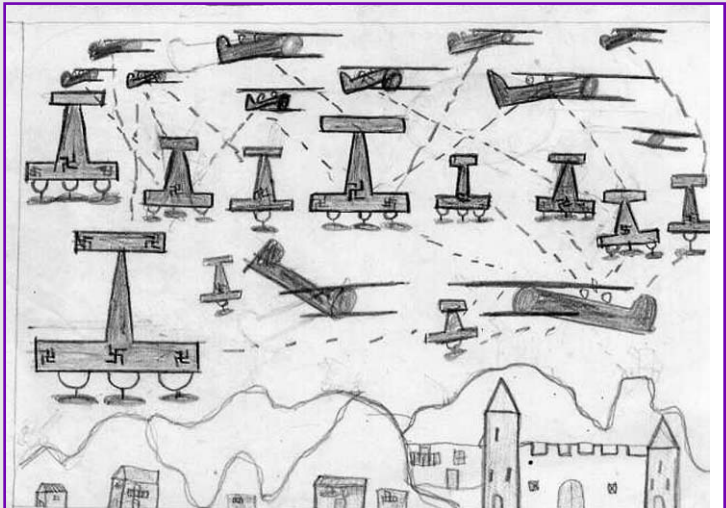
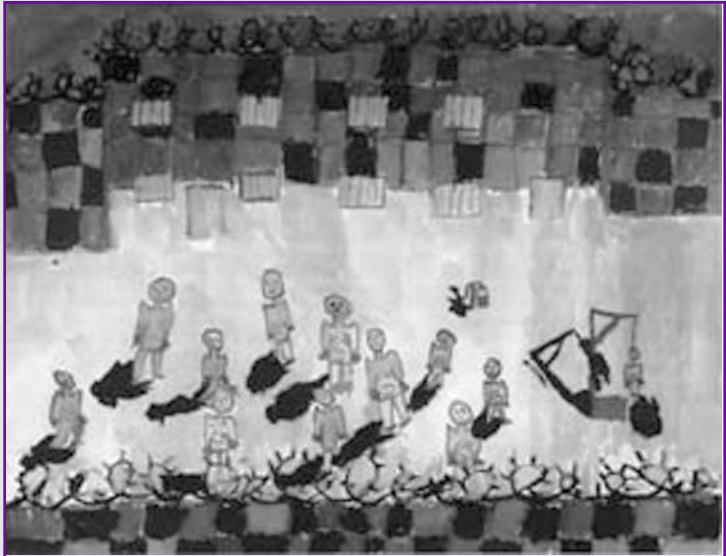
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