

The Volunteer

JOURNAL OF THE VETERANS OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

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

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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Lincoln vet Dave Smith (right) and Lt. Col. Fred Seamon march with the Veterans for Peace in San Francisco to protest the Iraq war. See page 13. The Veterans for Peace will be honored at the VALB Bay Area reunion in March 2006. See back page for details. Photo by Loren Sterling.

Letter From the Editor

The enthusiastic response to our previous special issue, "The Cultural Legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade," has been gratifying. The success of the related exhibition and lecture series at NYU's King Juan Carlos I Center (see page 1) is equally appreciated. These programs represent ALBA's maturing presence on the New York scene, part of our long-term project of presenting significant cultural issues to the public.

We are already planning our annual tribute to the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade for September 27, 2006. It will feature an original musical performance, led by the acclaimed singer Barbara Dane and members of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, that will honor the Veterans For Peace. Soon afterward, New York University Press expects to publish a new ALBA book, *The Good Fight Continues: World War II Letters from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, edited by Peter N. Carroll, Michael Nash, and Melvin Small. Just a little further down the road, we are preparing a major exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York for the spring of 2007.

This issue of *The Volunteer* showcases some of our recent projects: Antonio Muñoz Molina's "Memories of a Distant War," presented last April as the 2005 ALBA-Bill Susman Lecture; the winning essay of the George Watt Memorial student essay contest, "'A Lyrical War': Songs of the Spanish Civil War," by Laurence Birdsey, an honors student at Davidson College; ALBA's new website teaching materials on Spanish Civil War Posters by Cary Nelson and Children's Art in Wartime by Tony Geist and Peter N. Carroll. We're also printing a laudatory review of ALBA Board member Peter Glazer's new book, *Radical Nostalgia*. Note, too, the on-going exploits of VALB peace advocates Abe Osheroff and David Smith, as well as the birthday boys, Moe Fishman and Milton Wolff.

The Volunteer is the successor of *The Volunteer for Liberty*, the wartime publication of the U.S. volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. It has been published continuously since 1937, and we expect to sustain its growth into the future. To do that, of course, we need your support. We encourage you to subscribe, to offer holiday subscriptions to your loved ones, to give a little more than usual this year.

—Peter N. Carroll

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Museum Seeks Artifacts

The Museum of the City of New York seeks to borrow objects, photographs, documents, and ephemera for an exhibition, co-sponsored with ALBA, on "New York City and the Spanish Civil War." The exhibition is planned for the spring of 2007. Material related to Brigade members from New York, homefront activity, artistic or literary contributions, political debates, organizations, etc., is welcome. Please contact Sarah Henry at 212-534-1672 x3319 or shenry@mcny.org.

Advertise in the Volunteer

Beginning with the next issue, *The Volunteer* welcomes paid advertising consistent with ALBA's broad educational and cultural mission. For more information, contact Volunteer@RB68.com.



VALB poet Edwin Rolfe, one of the artists featured in the exhibit.

With “The Cultural Legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade” on the walls of NYU’s King Juan Carlos I Center, a series of lectures, panels, and film screenings have drawn enthusiastic audiences to the exhibition. At the launch party in September, co-curators James Fernandez and Elizabeth Compa described the diversity of the show, calling attention to the serendipitous discovery of hidden art in the ALBA collection.

Among the gems Compa cited were three sketch books containing notes and pencil drawings of wartime Spain. The artist was a little-known member of the New York Artists Union, Meredith Sydnor Graham, an African-American volunteer who was killed at Brunete in 1937. Fernandez linked the exhibit to the progressive “Cultural Front” of the 1930s that inspired artistic creativity and political awareness.

The second lecture, “Gotham and the Spanish Civil War,” was presented on October 7 by Mike Wallace, co-author of *Gotham*, the extensive history of New York City. Wallace’s lecture focused primarily on ways that the various ethnic communities in New York responded to the rise of fascism in Europe and the outbreak of the

PUBLIC PROGRAMS ENRICH ALBA EXHIBIT

Spanish Civil War, particularly the massive anti-Nazi mobilization among the Jewish community, in contrast to the less emphatic response of the city’s German community. He observed that Italian enclaves in the city were largely supportive of Mussolini, though strong anti-fascist sentiment ran among Italian trade unionists. In the African-American community, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia galvanized a critical response, though the protest movement there was limited.

Within New York’s Irish community, Wallace said, the Catholic Church dominated public responses to the war in Spain. The church hierarchy supported the nationalist cause and decried the godlessness of the Spanish Republic, though the Catholic laity was much more divided in its response.

According to Wallace, the considerable pro-fascist sentiment and action around the city was countered by far less ethnically definable groups. For instance, the Communist Party led domestic efforts to support the Republic. Of course, the young men and women who volunteered to fight for the Spanish Republic proved the extent to which the war and its ramifications reached the general population and spurred citizens to act.

A third round of panel discussions, on October 28, focused on the U.S. film industry’s depictions of the Spanish Civil War. Art Simon, a professor of English and Film Studies at Montclair State University, and Peter N. Carroll, who teaches film and history at Stanford University, addressed the relationship between U.S. wartime policy and the release of such films as *Blockade*, *Casablanca*, and *The Fallen Sparrow*. They also linked these movies to the postwar anti-communist campaign in the film industry and the Hollywood blacklist that affected such Lincoln veterans as Alvah Bessie and Edwin Rolfe.

Other programs included Peter Glazer’s “The Skin of the World: Spanish Civil War, Image/Music/Text” and Paul D’Ambrosio’s lecture on the life and work of Lincoln vet and painter Ralph Fasanella. ■

ALBA in the Classroom: New Website Resources

By Fraser Ottanelli

While fighting for its survival, the Spanish Republican government devoted considerable energy and resources to the physical and psychological well-being of children, as well to the education of a population with a high rate of illiteracy. As part of the educational series "For Your Liberty and Ours," ALBA is proud to announce the release of two new multimedia programs that deal with these important aspects of the Spanish people's struggle against fascism: "They Still Draw Pictures: Children's Drawings during the Spanish Civil War," <http://www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=7>, and "The Spanish Civil War Poster: Art in Politics in the Struggle for Democracy," <http://www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=6>

Far from the war's violence, the Republic established Children's Colonies, staffed by teachers, medical personnel, and social workers, to provide comfort and security to over 200,000 refugee children. To help deal with the trauma of war and separation from their families, children were encouraged to draw pictures of their experiences. This first-known systematic use of art as therapy for children in wartime resulted in thousands of drawings, some of which found their way to the United States to help raise money for the colonies during the war. These drawings form the core of the program "They Still Draw Pictures." Using archival material from the Mandeville Special Collections Library of the University of California

at San Diego and from Columbia University's Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, curators Tony Geist and Peter Carroll illustrate the trauma of modern warfare as seen through the eyes of children, the main victims of war and violence.

For centuries, under the control of the Catholic Church, Spain's educational system did not believe in the need for either peasants or women to read. One of the main accomplishments of the Republic was to reverse that pattern by developing a modern and democratic educational system. Similarly, an impressive production of full-color posters that combined strong graphics with brief slogans made it possible to communicate basic messages and build support among a population with a high rate of illiteracy. Cary Nelson's "The Spanish War Poster" presents a detailed analysis of the content and the evolution of this form of public art, which combined free artistic expression with democratic values.

These multi-media educational programs were made possible by the generous support of The

Puffin Foundation, Ltd, and the Program for Cultural Cooperation Between Spain's Ministry of Culture and U.S. Universities.

The new programs are part of ALBA's continuing activities to bring the history of the antifascist struggle into our nation's classrooms. ■

Fraser Ottanelli is the Vice-Chair of ALBA.

The following multi-media educational programs are available at no cost:

"The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939: An Overview for Students and Educators"

www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=5

"Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War"

www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=1

"African Americans in the Spanish Civil War"

www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=2

"Tools for Teachers and Educators"

www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=4

"They Still Draw Pictures: Teaching Materials"

www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=3

"They Still Draw Pictures: Children's Drawings during the Spanish Civil War"

www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=7

"The Spanish Civil War Poster: Art in Politics in the Struggle for Democracy"

www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=6

www.alba-valb.org



By Antonio Muñoz Molina

Editor's note: On April 29, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Spain's most celebrated contemporary novelist and Director of the Cervantes Institute in New York, presented the following essay as the 7th annual ALBA-Bill Susman Lecture at NYU's King Juan Carlos I Center.

As a Spanish writer and citizen, as a left-wing person, and also as the grandson of two men who fought on the Loyalist side during the Spanish Civil War, and who suffered all throughout their lives the consequences of the defeat of the Second Republic, I am deeply honored and moved by being here tonight, paying tribute to the generosity and the heroism of so many Americans who overcame all kinds of difficulties to travel to a distant country with the purpose of joining the fight against Fascism and against social injustice. It is easy to judge historical events with the benefit of hindsight, from the comfortable distance of time, and to see in perspective

the pros and cons of a remote political choice: but it is quite different to be courageous enough to throw oneself into the strife and the turmoil of the times one is living, where almost

everything may seem uncertain and shady, but where what are at stake are the most pressing issues and challenges any decent person should confront, namely, freedom and justice.

This talk is not meant to be a lecture about the historical significance of the Spanish Civil War. I am not a historian, but a writer of fictions, so I would rather limit the scope of this talk to my own experiences as a Spaniard born 20 years exactly after

the outbreak of the war, and to the different ways in which it still casts its long shadow at the time of my childhood and had a formative effect on my imagination, nurturing it with stories that many years later would turn into the very stuff some of my novels would be made of. A great Spanish actor, playwright and novelist, Fernando Fernán-Gómez, who spent his teenage years in wartime Madrid, has written in his memoirs that when he first traveled abroad in the early fifties, to act in films in France and Italy, he found out that in these two countries the scars of the war were everywhere in sight. But there was a difference with the situation in Spain: in our country, in the fifties, the wounds from the war were still open and bleeding.

Not that I was aware of that at the time: there were no ruins to be seen at my hometown, because it was located far from the fronts and it held no strategic importance whatsoever. The wounds or scars of war could be perceived in an indirect way, behind

WAR MEMORIES OF A DISTANT

a thick fog of silence and fear, or as peculiar signs scattered all over our daily lives: middle-age men lacking an arm or a leg, clumsily walking on crutches; mysterious letters or acronyms showing beneath a fading spot of whitewash on the façade of a building; people your father or grandfather pointed at discreetly in the street, lowering their voices to say to you, "This was a man of

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ideas and that's why they sent him to jail." "This man's son, or father, was shot when the Nationals came into town at the end of the war." I was a very curious boy, always overhearing the hushed conversations of adults.

Signs and revolutionary messages written on the walls of our town had been painted over long before I was born, but with the passing of time the deleted words and names were back in view, as the overpaint faded. CNT, FAI, LOOR A DURRUTI. Nobody but me seemed to pay much attention to these neglected remains. Nobody cared to paint them over again. I asked what those reddish letters meant, who was Durruti, or what was it like to be a man of ideas, "un hombre de ideas," but seldom I got a straightforward answer, so mysteries grew bigger instead of being dispelled, and the blank spaces of ignorance and silence were ready to be filled with the flights of imagination.

One of my oldest memories runs like this: grabbing my father's huge peasant hand, I walk across the central square in my hometown, a square with a medieval tower and a clock, with a small garden and a statue right in the center. The statue lurks over me from a pedestal with bas reliefs of warriors and barebreasted ladies or winged angels, so overwhelming in its size--at least by comparison to my tiny height--that it seems on the brink of collapsing right on my head as I strain my neck to stare up to it. It looks as frightening as some monster in a movie, as Boris Karloff in "Frankenstein." I see first the riding boots with spurs, and then the pants, the tunic, and the cape of a military man, who handles a pair of binoculars hanging from his neck, over his broad,

bronze chest covered with medals. But the most frightening things about this giant are some black and round holes scattered all over his chest, face and neck, even on the socket of one of his eyes, as if a bird had picked at it. The metal monster looks thick and massive, but through all these holes you find that it is actually hollow. And then my father tells me a story that I will hear once and again along my childhood years, and that will sometime make its way into my first novel.

The military man was General Saro, my father would explain to me, the richest landowner in our province, who had distinguished himself in the colonial wars Spain had been waging for years against the restless natives in Northern Morocco in the first two decades of the 20th century. When the civil war broke out, General Saro had been long dead, but, maybe because he embodied the military caste and the reactionary class of idle landowners, some Anarchist committee had decided to visit upon his statue the punishment they thought he would have deserved. A firing squad of men dressed in ill-fitting uniforms and black and red scarves had solemnly lined up in front of the statue, sometime in late July 1936, in the first bloody and confused weeks of the war, and after aiming at the lofty general, they had shot him as summarily as if he had been one of the disloyal officers who had joined the uprising against the Republican government. After the shooting, someone from the firing squad had thrown a hangman noose around its neck, and then they all pulled it down and dragged it across town in a triumphant parade, until they got tired and dumped it in some ravine.

I guess I detected a strain of sad or dry irony in my father's voice every time he repeated that story: so much effort, all those many precious bullets, so badly needed in the real fight, wasted in a show of phony bravery.

In July 1936, my late father was eight years old. He was the eldest son of a small farm owner in our midsize town in the northern part of Andalusia. I must make myself as clear as possible, as you may need to know where I stand in order to weigh the value of my personal testimony, the sources of my narrative. My grandfather's farm could be better called a vegetable and fruit orchard, one of the many fertile huertas which surrounded the outskirts of town, irrigated by a centuries old system of reservoir and ditches dating from the times of the Arab civilization in Spain. The vegetables and fruit they so expertly grew were sold at the stalls they kept at the central market. They were hardworking and highly skilled peasants, although their economy never went beyond the level of struggling subsistence, as is often the case with small farmers in rural societies. However, they owned their land and were proud of it, and the highly specialized work they did was closer to gardening than to farming and gave them a profound instinct of individualism. They completed their income and the family diet by keeping some pigs, cows or goats. There were no tractors or complex mechanical tools to plough the land or vans to carry the crops to the city market. All traction was animal, and all harvesting was done by hand. Male children were supposed to leave school at nine or 10 and join their fathers in the

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fields or add some income to the family economy working for a salary.

This world was almost intact until the early 1970s, and therefore I have memories that seem to belong to someone much older than me. But things might have started to change long before had it not been for the calamity of the war. I only talk about what I know first hand: the unlucky generation into which my father was born saw its future stolen by the military uprising of 1936, and most of them never got back what they had lost in those three years.

The Spanish Republic, established in 1931, had immediately devised a program of public school building and teacher training and hiring. In only the first couple of years, the number of elementary schools and students was doubled. Most of them were working-class or peasant children, both male and female, because education was declared free and compulsory for boys and girls, who shared the same classroom for the first time in Spain. In 1936 my father was eight, my mother six. The Catholic Church held no longer the control of education, much to the outrage of the Vatican and the religious right, both of which immediately set out to conspire to bring about the downfall of the new regime.

Most of you are probably familiar with all this information. But it is real people's stories I am concerned with. Those must always be told, for otherwise they will soon fade into oblivion.

My father was a promising student who, every day after school, had to rush to the family orchard to help his dad. But 1936 was the last school year for him, for after the summer holidays he stayed on working the land: his father had been drafted into

the Republican Army, and this boy of eight saw himself suddenly earning his living as an adult and working from sunrise till dark to help support his mother and his younger brother and sister. He and his elderly grandfather kept running the family farm, and that was that. As for so many children of his generation, the war and the defeat of the Republic meant the end of school for my father, the loss of his future rights as a working man and as a citizen, and the closing of any chance of improving his life through education. My mother was even younger when the school gates closed forever on her, but she always recalls how she loved her reading and writing, how she regretted not to have had the chance to study and become something other than a housewife.

I remember my paternal grandfather as a quiet-tempered and mostly silent man, with a sunburnt face and thin white hair. He went silently about his work at the farm, rolled his own cigarettes, and almost never mentioned his years as an infantry rifleman in the loyalist army. Whatever he recalled he kept to himself. All but one thing, a kind of confession: "Every time I had to aim my rifle at the front," he would say, "I closed my eyes tight before pulling the trigger, to make sure I wouldn't kill or wound on purpose someone on the other side. These were people I had never met, so how could I wish to harm any of them?"

Peasants are usually skeptical and rather suspicious people, wary of strangers and uncomfortable with novelty and sudden change, and they don't give much credit to preachers of any kind or let themselves be carried away by ideological enthusiasm. Working with their own hands and

living so close to the land, peasants stick to the hard facts and very easily dismiss as empty talk the lofty statements of militants or politicians. In any war, they are drafted into the rank and file of the infantry and provide the cheap cannon fodder for battle. An old man with whom I used to work side by side at my father's farm when I was in my early teens explained to me his military experience as follows: "The captain would come up to us and say, 'Let's go ahead, we have to take that hill over there from the enemy.' But even if we had defeated those on the other side, would we be able to actually take that hill with us somewhere else? What was the point of killing or getting killed, if the damned hill was going to stay unmoved on the same spot."

The war had turned their lives upside down, and its terrible degree of cruelty and destruction had brought about long-lasting poverty, fear, uncertainty, and hunger. But most of them—I talk about the peasants and farmers I grew up among—saw it not in its wider political terms, as a struggle between right and left, or between democracy and fascism, but as the worst possible natural catastrophe, a period of collective madness and pointless bloodshed during which the darkest impulses of evil men had been let loose, whereas the crops had been left to rot and the fields left untilled. They had experienced some of the turmoils of 20th century history through an almost medieval mindset, and the world they had to face when they came back from the war was as barren as a European landscape in the aftermath of the Great Plague.

We children would often overhear

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fragments of frightening stories, and their very incompleteness made them even more poignant, as outbursts of violence in a film you catch in the middle. One summer morning, looking through a window out of sheer boredom, because his mother would not allow him to go out to play, my father saw a barefoot man running down the street, some neighbor he was not acquainted with. The man wore a white shirt and looked as if he had jumped from bed in a hurry. Suddenly there was a cracking noise as of fireworks--these were the early days of the war, and my father was not yet familiar with the sound of gunfire--and the man staggered and then fell down on the corner. Another neighbor, someone who had been never involved in politics, had been chased as a dog a few days after the victory of the Francoist Army, and nobody could understand what was his guilt. Being a butcher, very often he went home after work wearing an apron stained with blood. But one day, after some right-wing prisoners had been executed at the local jail, this man had been seen with blood on his clothes by some other neighbor, who had kept this memory until the end of the war and had informed on him to the victors. There was no heroism or purpose in most of the stories our parents and grandparents told, only random violence, revenge, and sheer bad luck.

I remember a man who frightened me because he lacked both arms. He managed to lift weights using his scary stumps, drove a team of donkeys, made his living carrying construction materials on the backs of a team of donkeys. He had been a school buddy of my father, who told me his story: a bunch

of kids were playing soccer on an empty lot where some barracks had stood, right after the end of the war. They found a cache of hand grenades, fighting immediately over them to grab some to play with. One of the grenades went off, and this man had been the only survivor.

But the bigger mystery was hidden into some isolated words, in objects I sometimes found at home, words and names always repeated in low voice, whose meaning you almost never could fully grasp. "War" itself, in the first place, being such a household term, had nonetheless an ever obscure ring to it: it named a time altogether different from the one we lived in, remote and yet real and present. It was a period, but also a state of disruption, excitement and fear, a boundary which separated two ages of the world. Things that had happened "way before the war" belonged to an epoch of unfathomable remoteness. You said "before the war" or "after the war" the same way as a historian of antiquity sets an event "b.c." or "a.d." In my childhood, peasants still held an idea of time which was cyclical, not lineal: the sole years they referred to by date were "36" and "45": the year of the war, and then the worst year of hunger, 1945, when a terrible drought had destroyed the crops of cereal, olives and grapes, adding further damage to all the remaining devastation of war.

The very sound of the word "war" had the effect of placing things in a territory of fiction. According to the black and white films we saw in our local theaters--all of them American--war had to do with adventures, with foreign lands, with Hollywood actors, with the whole exciting yet

unreal world of cinema. But this particular war our parents were so often, albeit so cautiously and indirectly, talking about, had taken place in the same country we lived in, and the people who had fought it had been not the likes of Gary Cooper or Errol Flynn, but our grandparents and their friends. Even our parents had first-hand memories of shootings and explosions, of columns of soldiers marching into town.

Some other words and phrases were both familiar and intriguing to us kids, specially those related to the adjective "Red." You have to bear in mind that in the popular speech of my native province, the word "red" was not used to designate the color. We said instead "colorado." A tomato was not red, for example: it was "un tomate colorado." So red had for me an almost exclusively metaphorical sense, although it kept a bright hue of danger, or of a kind of epic. People talked about the Reds: the Red Army, the Red Government, the Red Zone, in which our hometown had stood all through the war. At school we were indoctrinated about the evils of the Reds, defeated in the glorious Crusade of Liberation by the Unvanquished Caudillo, who had saved Spain from their tyranny. But then our grandparents had fought in the so-called Red Army, and they didn't seem particularly monstrous or bloodthirsty to us. Not that they seemed heroes either, just common folks you could barely imagine wearing uniforms or fighting the enemy as the Americans did in their war films.

But now I must mention a uniform, a dark blue tunic with golden buttons and a leather belt with an

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MUSICAL PROPAGANDA: Shaping Culture During the Spanish Civil War

By Laurence Birdsey

This year's winner of the George Watt Memorial essay contest is Laurence Birdsey. His essay, "A Lyrical War': Songs of the Spanish Civil War," was written as an honors thesis at Davidson College in North Carolina.

Laurence currently works at the Fairfield Greenwich Group, a hedge fund in midtown Manhattan. He plans to attend law school next year. Below, we offer an excerpt from his essay. The entire essay (including notes) can be read on our website: www.alba-valb.org/education/gwmec/birdsey_1_h-songs.pdf.

In *The Good Fight*, veteran Abe Osheroff recalls the stretch of time he spent in a Republican field hospital near the end of the Spanish Civil War. Often, political dignitaries came to rally wounded soldiers. Osheroff describes one such event:

Some of [the political dignitaries] had the annoying habit of using cultural forms to exhort us to greater sacrifice and heroism. Most of the guys, if they healed, were going back to the front, and they didn't need anybody to give 'em that kind of shit. I remember one – Abraham Lincoln stands up straight, with his gun, holds up a hand, 'No Pasarán.' Ridiculous bullshit. And the response of the guys who were sitting around with the casts and arms in splints was angry. I mean, pissed off.

To pay back the favor, the soldiers responded to the dignitaries in song. Osheroff sings the lyrics of one such tune—"We're a bunch of bastards, bastards are we. We'd rather fuck than fight for liberty." Upon hearing this

and other songs, the dignitaries became worried and threatened to send home any soldiers with low morale. In Osheroff's words, "They wouldn't accept the human side of us guys, we had to be fucking heroes all the time."

Osheroff's powerful anecdote is telling in the soldiers' use of song to fulminate against their superiors. They likely chose this method of communication because songs were ubiquitous during the war, especially as vehicles of propagandistic "cultural forms." Republican hymns from the war have been cataloged and reprinted in song books many times over, yet there has been little examination or commentary on how the music was produced. This essay touches upon the means by which propagandistic songs were created, their function in the larger cultural struggle against the Nationalists, and how effectively those songs promoted the Republican cause.

In September 1936, the Republican government established an umbrella group called the "National Institute of Culture," which housed "all of the cultural, scientific, artistic, educational, and research activities of our country." The *Milicias de la Cultura* and *Brigadas Volantes* were two such groups that worked directly with soldiers and citizens in an attempt to improve literacy, distribute magazines, play records, and read propagandistic literature. The *Alianza de Intelectuales para la Defensa de la Cultura* courted famous Spanish and international artists of all kinds in order to channel their talents towards the Republican cause. In this manner, distinguished composers and musicologists volunteered their creative

talents to the Republican government.

A closer look at one of these governmental organizations dedicated to music composition helps us to understand the reasons for and process by which these songs were created. *Altavoz del Frente*, a branch of the War Ministry, wrote nearly all of the Republic's radio propaganda programs. According to one newspaper, *Altavoz* "justly denounces the brutal fascists, expresses our convictions, our unbreakable purpose of defending Spain's independence." To do so, *Altavoz* was given a large budget with which to employ its very own composers, orchestra, and chorus for the recording of war song records.

For groups like *Altavoz*, music was not an end itself, but a means towards substantive cultural change. *Altavoz* and other cultural organizations did not aim simply to produce radio programs and records—they wanted to initiate a cultural renaissance. Their stated purpose was to "bring to the rearguard the heroic impulse of the front, and to carry to the front the serene and inflamed voice—the very conviction of victory—from the rearguard." Influenced heavily by reports of the Soviet Union's recent reforms, *Altavoz* and the Cultural Militias built hundreds of makeshift schools along trenches in addition "to reproducing selections of artworks from our painters and writers, copying editions of our romances and other classical and modern poetry, and making records of Spanish folk songs that we will collect and catalog." The desired result was an enlightened public that

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MUSICAL PROPAGANDA

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would embrace the Republican cause. In this ideological battle, music represented an important weapon in the Republic's vast arsenal of propaganda.

Carlos Palacio, *Altavoz's* most prolific composer, intricately details the effort and preparation that went into the production of musical propaganda in his memoirs. He describes his initial work with the agency:

I had been entrusted with the mission of putting music to all the couplets [by the Madrilénian poet Luis de Tapia] that so well encapsulated the present situation and, therefore, I had to use the collaboration and necessary help from the composers that were in the capital. And one fine day I met with them all.

During this and subsequent meetings, Palacio collaborated closely with Madrid's most popular and prestigious composers, poets, and musicologists. In his appeal for their help, Palacio told them, "'We, the composers, can be useful in this battle writing songs that raise the morale and fighting spirit of our people, and, at the same time, stimulate other poets and musicians to do the same.' Conscious of their civic duty, all the composers present accepted." The musicians worked together at a feverish pace, writing songs to freshly-penned poetry and sending them off to the *Altavoz* choir and orchestra for recording. Immediately afterwards, the songs were broadcast over radio antennas all day and night.

While successful in the rearguard and on the front, propaganda music was often an exercise in manipulation. One example can be found in the Republican *Colección de Canciones de Lucha* published in 1939. The book

opens with a rousing introduction:

[Contained within] are songs of Madrid's defense, combat marches, songs of children in arms. The soldiers sing them while fearlessly resisting the bombs of foreign air fleets, while they attack with heroism to re-conquer Spain. Therefore...[using] compositions of the most prestigious Spanish musicians, we consider it worthy to put in this songbook those tunes that, improvised in the midst of combat fire, came about spontaneously without artistic or literary zeal.

Although mellifluous, the language is patently false. The collection does not list an original publisher, but the compiler and four illustrators of the volume were artists associated with the Republican Army's propaganda arm. Moreover, the lyricists of many songs were well-known poets who wrote for the Republic. Carlos Palacio, the volume's cataloger, composed the majority of the tunes by himself. These compositions most certainly did benefit from the aid of "artistic and literary zeal."

By claiming that music "came about spontaneously" during battle, both the Republicans and Nationalists were clearly embellishing the circumstances under which the songs were produced. In this sense, these songs did not represent an authentic popular voice. The government-sponsored songs were not a grassroots reaction to the war's events, but rather a top-down attempt to influence their course. By trying to conceal the songs' manufactured quality, propagandists felt that they were more effectively able to elicit patriotic fervor.

But as evidenced by the Osheroff

episode, the use of propaganda music eventually backfired. By the end of the war, Osheroff and his comrades had rejected the disingenuous cultural exhortations made by the higher-ups that came to visit them. The "ridiculous" propaganda was disdained because it was inauthentic. Osheroff and the other Lincoln volunteers—men who exemplified the "hard, yet romantic" stereotype of the 1930s—hardly needed to be told why they were fighting. They had already shown their valor by volunteering in a foreign war against fascism in the name of universal ideals.

Accordingly, Republican propaganda units disbanded and cultural groups shut down as morale disintegrated with the approaching end of the war. Quite simply, the Republic's strategy of using culture as a primary weapon to defeat the insurgents did not work. Propaganda, it seems, only took hold when it magnified truths about success. When defeat was imminent, propaganda ceased to be effective.

It is perhaps tempting to conclude that the war's outcome undermines the idea that culture and music significantly impacted the war. Certainly, the Republic placed a greater emphasis on the "cultural war" than did the Nationalists, yet still lost the overall war. But such a conclusion would be faulty on two counts. First, the Nationalists' historical image of Spain and claim to power was much more unified and focused. Throughout the war, the internecine political battles within the Republic extended into the cultural realm as each party attempted to paint a vision of Spain with its own brush

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Poetry and the Spanish Civil War

By Michael Pak

Editor's note: These poems were written for a course, "Politics and Poetics: Art and Literature of the Spanish Civil War," taught by ALBA board member Tony Geist at the University of Washington, Winter 2005. Students were given the option of writing a research paper or developing a creative project.

The premise of my project is to write poetry mimicking Vallejo and Neruda's voices using the famous Robert Capa photograph as inspiration. In Vallejo, I tried to emulate his glorification for the average soldier, while in Neruda, I attempted to show the dark reality of loss through war.

Using an avant-garde style similar to Vallejo, I described the soldier as stealing a bullet from the enemy by literally taking a bullet in the chest. I contrasted the cold sterile steel of a bullet with warm blood of the Republic, touching Vallejo's common motif of reincarnation. I also tried to use book and education motifs in the same light as Vallejo.

In the second poem, I tried to emulate Neruda's metaphor upon metaphor layering style of poetry. The poem is written in the point of view of Capa, situated between the fallen soldier and the soldier who shot him. Stanza by stanza, I tried to slow time down by describing the Republican soldier's pain, followed by his body falling and landing in the battlefield. In all, I created scenes of triumph and tragedy so that people with no background on the Spanish Civil War can see two sides of the same picture.

Francisco Borrell! We thank you!

That bullet now yours and warm
No longer cold
From its damned homeland
Marching in shattered cross lines
With other undead bullets.

No! Your bullet has evolved
Welding itself to your stanch skeleton
And marrow is growing inside

And when the metallic rain becomes mere paragraphs
In middle school textbooks
With a few scars of evil
Left on the pages bound called Spain
Your marrow will grow!

Your marrow will grow
Because you stole that bullet
Spain will bloom
Amidst your rifle and corpse
Burning because Spain will never bleed cold
Francisco Borrell! One day we will study your bullet
In anatomy class!

Where you swallowed that steel
Your chest grimaces with dimples
As you plant and burrow yourself deep
As deep as your farm's well
Where your son goes to dip your bucket
In Spain's water.

Francisco Borrell! We thank you!

A Fallen Soldier

Somewhere in a wheat field
Where the cloudless sky cries
Like a wailing moon
Like a waning eyelid
Flickering in and out
Like a dirty cellar light bulb
I saw his last sigh
And heard his forehead cringe
With a thousand screaming wrinkles.

His back, marred with red thread
Smeared with the color of grief
Reached like a shy hand
And embraced his shadow
Pale like the bones of a rustic book.

Lungs filled with empty guns shooting empty shells
I inhaled his rising must from the wheat field
Where Spain embraced his body
Piece by piece like an overripe grenade.

I tried to remember his last expression
But the sandy dust settled over his stoic face.

General Walter's Photo Exhibition in Madrid

By José Ignacio García Muniozgueren

A two-month exhibition of Spanish Civil War photographs collected by General Walter opened in Madrid's Conde Duque Culture Center on September 14. Organized by the Asociación de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales, the show includes 163 pictures of the 333 that form the Walter collection. The photos were donated by Walter's daughter to the Amigos in the late 1990s and had never been displayed. However, they are available to the public, together with other materials belonging to the Amigos, in the IB section of the Albacete Regional Archives. The Amigos keep alive the memory of the IB and are generally acknowledged by IB associations worldwide as their only interlocutor in Spain. After the show closes, the Amigos plan to distribute the exhibition catalogue, which contains the entire collection.

Karol Swiercewski, known as General Walter, was born in Warsaw in 1897. He took part in the Soviet Revolution and Civil War. In May 1937 he became commander of the 35th Division of the Republican Army. He died in Poland in 1947, in a skirmish with Ukrainian guerrillas—former collaborators of German occupiers.

War and Culture Conference

University of Bristol, July 17-19, 2006

Profoundly Spanish in origin, yet almost immediately internationalized, the Spanish Civil War had a marked impact on the politics and culture of many nations. Considered by many of its generation as the first ideological war, it has become for



Photo from Walter Collection

many since a precursor of World War II, sometimes subsumed into, or obscured by, this latter in our memory of the period. Yet, its significance continues to be reflected in a variety of cultural representations of the conflict emanating from many different nations and cultures and in its continued pertinence and interest as a subject of historical research.

The aim of this three-day international conference is to explore the international social, political, military and cultural history of this conflict from 1936 to the present. The organizers welcome proposals for papers on any aspect of the conflict from established scholars or postgraduates working in a range of disciplines including, for example, social, political and cultural history; military history and war studies; intellectual history; cultural memory; literary studies; art history; photography; media studies; and film studies.

Proposals should not exceed 350

words and should be sent, in English or in French (the two official languages), to the organizers at the addresses below by the 31st December 2005.

Dr. Martin Hurcombe
Department of French
University of Bristol
19 Woodland Road
Bristol
BS8 1TE
U.K.
Tel (+44) (0)117 928 8447
E-mail: M.J.Hurcombe@bristol.ac.uk

Prof. Debra Kelly
School of Social Sciences,
Humanities and Languages
University of Westminster
309 Regent Street
London, W1B 2UW,
U.K.
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E-mail: kellyd@westminster.ac.uk

Ebro Memorial to British Battalion Volunteers

By José Ignacio García Muniozgueren

A memorial to the British volunteers who fell in the Battle of the Ebro was unveiled on May 7 at the top of Hill 705 in the Sierra de Pandols, where some of the bloodiest fighting took place. The plaque lists the names of the 90 volunteers (mainly British, but also from Australia and New Zealand) who died in the last big offensive of the Republican Army. David Leach, who currently lives in the Terra Alta, one of the scenes of the battle, organized the unveiling.

Four IB volunteers (Jack Jones, Alun Menai Williams, Sam Russell and Bob Doyle) and a Republican avia-

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Double Happiness Fishman & Wolff Turn 90

By Nancy Tsou

October 1: The sky was blue and the air was crisp. It lightened your heart and made you want to whistle like a teenager. We were on our way to a party in New York City to celebrate double 90th birthdays for Moe Fishman and Milton Wolff!

When we entered the party room in the 1199 building, Moe was there smiling and hugging guests. There were almost 200 people! You could easily spot Milton, who was tall and held a beer. Around the tables were other Lincoln vets: Abe Smorodin, Al Koslow, Jack Shafran, Jack Penrod, Murray Dauber, and Matti Mattson. It was a great joy to see all of them!

Nancy Tsou is the author of *The Call of Spain: The Chinese Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (Taipei, Taiwan, 2001).

Henry Foner, the master of ceremonies, called the former city councilwoman Miriam Friedlander to speak. She was only 91.5 years old, but her energy made us all envious. Her brother Paul Siegel was also a Lincoln—he was killed

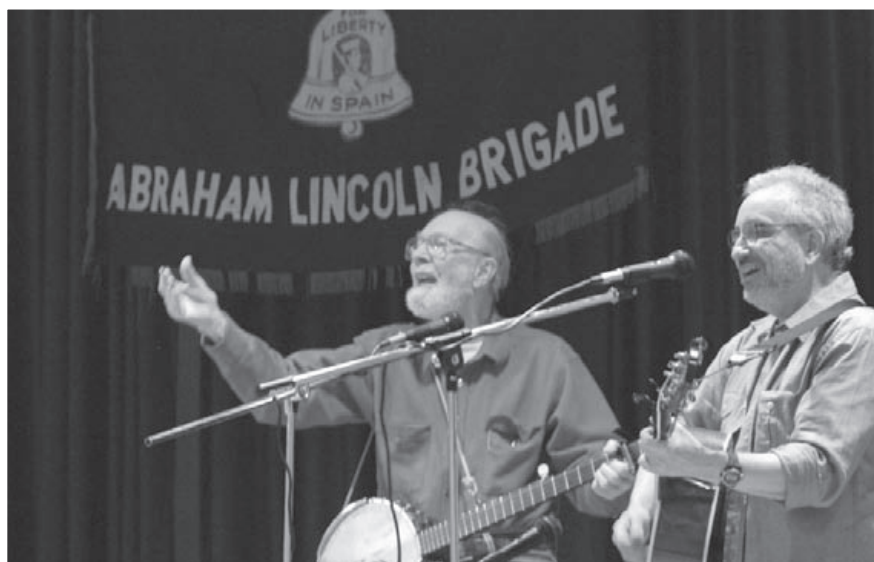
in Spain. Miriam said she had to bring a gift to the birthday party. Unraveled was a miniature copy of the monument to the International Brigades erected in Barcelona! With thunderous applause, Moe proudly received this gift to the VALB.

Now was Moe's turn to step up to the podium. He gave a long and passionate speech on the struggles of the Lincoln vets throughout their lives. Then Milt took the mike and said, "I thought this is a party. But where is the wine? I had to send my granddaughter out to get beer for me!" He waved the beer bottle to the crowd with a roaring laugh.

The birthday candles on a big sheet cake were lit. We all sang "Happy Birthday," and Moe and Milton blew out the candles.

Then the entertainment began. Pete Seeger came with his wife and banjo, hopped on the stage, and the whole crowd stood up. John Fisher, son of Lincoln vet Harry Fisher, was already on stage with folksinger Jackie Steiner. The guests were given handouts to sing along the great songs, "Banks of Marble," "Freiheit,"

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Osheroff Launches Seattle's Bob Reed PeaceMobile

By Joe Butwin

On October 1 Abe Osheroff, just shy of 90, accepted a lift in the back of a flat-bed truck in Seattle's Pike Place Market, where he led a band of activists and shoppers in the dedication of what he calls the "PeaceMobile" in honor of Bob Reed. Reed died, at the age of 90, last January. Abe needed a lift because he is mostly confined to a wheel-chair these days, but his mobility—thanks in part to the PeaceMobile—is as great as ever.

Abe's career as a progressive activist began 75 years ago when he helped evicted tenants move back into their apartments in Brownsville, Brooklyn. That led to the Y.C.L. and Spain, where he and Bob Reed began their defense of the Republic by swimming ashore from the sunken ship, *City of Barcelona*. Wounded in Spain, Abe returned home, recovered, and joined the U.S. army. Twenty years later—Freedom Summer, '64—he was building a community center in Mississippi. Down the line he did the same for the Sandanistas in Nicaragua, and for the last 20 years, he and Bob Reed have been leaders of the progressive community of Seattle.

Abe explained his endless activism to the crowd in Seattle: "Activism is not a sacrifice. I have benefited in some way from almost every social involvement. It's a great way to live, because you never suffer 'unemployment.' You meet some of the greatest people, and it's the

highest paid job because you are paid in some things more valuable than money or prestige. You gain the respect and even the love of some wonderful people."

The current project takes the form of a white GMC van equipped with loud-speakers, space for changeable signs on the roof and sides, a video projector, and a printer that makes fliers on the spot. In addition to giving renewed mobility to Abe and his magnificent voice, the PeaceMobile will be made available to all progressive organizations in Seattle. It will bring the word—and the truth—to high school students currently bombarded by military recruiters; it will enlist public support for strikers in the Malls; it will show films to strollers at Green Lake. And there's no reason that what works in Seattle won't work around the country.

Abe's initiation of the PeaceMobile received good coverage in the Seattle press; now it wants national attention and further support for its maintenance and promotion. Abe is 90 at the end of the month that began at the Pike Place Market. Now is a good time to honor him and to remember Bob Reed with a contribution.

Visit the website at www.PeaceMobile.Info; contribute to Abe Osheroff, 2100 N. 128th St., Seattle, WA. 98133, or give a call at 206-364-4521. ▀

Joe Butwin is a professor of English at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Bay Area Vets For Peace



By David Smith

At the San Francisco anti-war march on September 24, my friend June Spero—a World War II nurse—and I marched with the Veterans for Peace. I was wearing a label insignia from the Tom Mooney machine gun company, Lincoln Battalion, and the man next to me looked at it, put his arm around my shoulder, and said, “Wow – Are you a Lincoln Vet?” And then he hugged me. I glanced up and noticed the oak cluster on the shoulder of his US Army uniform, and then the row of ribbons on his chest. This was Lt. Col. Fred Seamon, a wounded veteran of the Vietnam War—and now a fervent opponent of the war in Iraq and member of the Veterans for Peace. As we walked and talked, his friend, Lauren Sterling, was taking photos. I asked her for a few copies (see this page and cover).

I have been an active member of Veterans for Peace for the past year and have been quite impressed with the broad range of activities in which these men and women

participate throughout California. For instance, co-sponsoring “Eyes Wide Open,” the American Friends Service Committee’s exhibit about the costs of the war; working with many organizations to decrease the effectiveness of US military recruitment; sponsoring fundraisers for Camilo Mejia, a conscientious objector and Gulf War veteran who served 9 months in a military prison; traveling with Cindy Sheehan to Crawford, Texas and standing vigil with her.

And now the Bay Area Vets & Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade will honor the SF Bay Area Chapter of the Veterans for Peace at our annual affair in March 2006.

The feeling of marching with the younger Veterans for Peace was incredible. It brought me back to the early days of our VALB marches. As September approached, I had been concerned that it would be difficult to join the march without our banner, as it had been with us for all these years. However, I felt uncomfortable marching as a sole veteran (as others couldn’t participate this day). In the



Lincoln vet Dave Smith (left) and Lt. Col. Fred Seamon march with the Veterans for Peace in San Francisco to protest the Iraq war. The Veterans for Peace will be honored at the Bay Area reunion in March 2006. See back page for details.

end, marching with the Veterans for Peace was exhilarating, an honor to be with such dedicated folks, and it even managed to make me feel young again! ▀

David Smith heads the Bay Area Friends and Vets.

Letters

Salud!!

I am one of the second generation of Interbrigadists mentioned in Guillemos Casañ's article about the plaque at the Benicassim cemetery. The article appeared in your December 2004 issue. The great help and dedication of people like Guillermo and many others succeeded in placing the plaque at the entrance of the Benicassim cemetery honoring the Internationals buried there. We are grateful. My father, Dr. Günter Bodek, is buried in this cemetery. He died in June 1937, being the director of the B.I. Hospital. He was 42 years old, I was 4.

Ulrich Bodek

bodek@cableonline.com.mx

Dear Editor,

My name is Mario and I live in Madrid. Thank you so much for helping us during our Civil War, which became transformed into one for you as well. People like yourselves are among the few who continue to give us the strength and the spirit to fight to restore the 3rd Republic that was taken away from us. Few people from your country would have had the courage to go to Spain in order to fight for a cause, for an ideal, and from Madrid I salute you and send you a most warm-hearted greeting.

Long live the Republic!

Dear Editor,

I believe I have read every word of the special issue of *The Volunteer*, and quite a few of the items twice over. As I know I have said to you more than once, the IB's as a collective are just the most wonderful group of human beings I have had the privilege to know.

Mazel Tov,

Gabe Jackson

Dear Editor,

Thanks for putting me in the "culture" brochure, with much distinguished company, though some would say it is an undeserved honor. I would love to visit the exhibit, but Manhattan is no place for an old man, even one in good health.

Regards and best wishes,
Jim Benet

Dear Editor,

In the 1939 correspondence of Esme Odgers, Director of Foster Parents Plan for Spanish Children in Biarritz after the evacuation from Puigcerda, she mentions an inquiry about Barton "Nick" Carter from a Col. A. Johnson, and tells Eric Muggeridge in London that she will handle it. An American, Carter had worked with Odgers in Puigcerda until he joined the British battalion in February 1938. He went missing in early April 1938 during the retreat down the Ebro River. It seems likely that Johnson was Allan Johnson, former US Army Captain, who served as a trainer for the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (and probably other units) from early 1937. It is not clear what Johnson's connection to Carter may have been, or what the specific inquiry to Odgers was about.

It is possible that Carter may have received some specialized training, prompting continuing interest from Johnson, or that a year after he went missing, Carter's parents were attempting to find some resolution by writing Johnson.

Any intelligence concerning Johnson's continuing role in the Spanish Civil War, or of his connections to Odgers and Carter, will be gratefully received.

Sincerely yours,

Nicholas H. Wright

Box 642, Williamstown, MA 01267
wrightnh@adelphia.net

Dear Editor,

I have read with dismay the article you published recently by the Madrid journalist Miguel Angel Nieto entitled "Separatism in Today's Spain." In it he depicts what he clearly wishes your readers to see as the imminent and terrifying prospect of the disintegration of Spain. Whilst it is true, and has been for centuries, that some Basques and some Catalans aspire to self-determination, it is very far from clear that anything like a majority in either the Basque Country or Catalonia would vote for independence, if given the chance.[. . .]

Far more unpardonable, however, than Sr. Nieto's alarmist picture of the threatened disintegration of Spain is the way he seeks to link it to the question of the so-called Salamanca Papers. In the course of his cruel, methodical conquest of Republican Spain, Franco employed special forces to seize at gunpoint tons and tons of documents that were then sent to his headquarters in Salamanca in the summer of 1939. This operation, led by Franco's brother-in-law, Ramón Serrano Súñer, a fervent admirer of Hitler and Mussolini, received technical supervision from the SS. The aim of the exercise was to create a huge police archive, following in the footsteps of the Gestapo and the KGB. On the basis of the Salamanca archive, three million defenders of the Republic were put on file and, over the following decades, hundreds of thousands of them were summarily executed, sentenced

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MUSICAL PROPAGANDA

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strokes. Such division and infighting certainly weakened the Republic's message of historical legitimacy, but culture still figured prominently in their effort to win the war.

More importantly, Republicans and Nationalists both attempted to put forth a vision of an unrealistic and untenable Spanish identity. As each side pitched its vision to the public, they ironically further entrenched the divisions that split Spanish society. The Second Republic, even though

it claimed to cherish Spain's regionalism and religious roots, alienated large segments of the population by promoting a unified Castilian culture that disdained the Catholic Church. Their reforms of culture and society were met with a competing set of more traditional values—one that also alienated large swaths of the population by supporting ultra-conservative Catholic thought and a Castilian-based culture. These competing ideologies chipped away at each other on the cultural

battlefield for the war's duration until Franco's forces eventually triumphed.

The Second Republic's inability to forge cultural unity was assured by its own founding principles. The liberal and democratic society espoused by Republicans hindered their ability to produce a shared vision of Spanish identity that would consolidate their base of power. The production of propagandistic songs and music was an attempt to overcome that obstacle and provide some much needed unity, but in the end, the Republican alliance proved too fractured to sustain any coherent vision. ■

Letters

Continued from page 14

to hard labour, imprisoned, tortured or dismissed from their posts.

As your readers are only too painfully aware, very few of the injustices of the Spanish Civil War can be righted now, more than 65 years after the event. However, at least one of them can. Ever since 1978, with the restoration of democracy in Spain, the Catalans have taken every opportunity to claim the return of the documents seized by Franco's forces in Catalonia – from the Catalan Government and Parliament, and from hundreds of municipal authorities, the offices of political parties and trades unions, associations of all sorts (including vegetarian and sporting societies), and from private individuals.

Whilst the Popular Party—and Sr. Nieto—claim that the return of these stolen goods to their rightful owners would dismember a valuable historical archive, the fact is that the sinister Salamanca archive was created by dismembering thousands of archives throughout Republican Spain. What is more, far from wish-

ing to destroy the Salamanca archive, when the stolen documents are returned, the Catalans are perfectly willing to allow digitalized versions of them to be kept in Salamanca.

The Salamanca archive is not—as Sr. Nieto claims—a key source of Spanish Civil War material. It is, in fact, one of the last collections of documents that any student of the Civil War would wish to consult, as it contains very little indeed on the progress of the war, and a great deal on the running—and especially the membership—of the institutions that were ransacked in order to create it, including material that goes back to the 19th century. Contrary to the name it has borne since 1999, Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española, the collection is in fact a very partial record of the Francoist repression.[. . .]

Henry Ettinghausen
Emeritus Professor
Hispanic Studies, University
of Southampton, England.

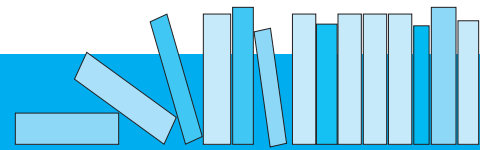
*This letter has been edited
for reasons of space—Editor.*

Ebro Memorial

Continued from page 10

tor, Antonio Villela, attended the unveiling. For the first time at an event of this kind there were official representatives of the British government: the Consul General in Barcelona, Geoff Cowling, and the Military Attaché in Madrid, Colonel Mark Rollo-Walker. For more than two hours without interruption, the latter held a parasol to shelter the volunteers from the heavy sun. Afterwards he would say, "It is the best thing I have done in 30 years of service."

The four volunteers and Antonio Villela gave vibrant speeches. The plaque was unveiled by Alun Menai Williams, a Welsh volunteer who served as a medical aide in the Ebro and had not returned there since 1938. The unveiling was a most moving moment that Alun afterwards vividly described: "I did not see the names – I saw their faces." ■



An Idealistic Adventurer Goes to War

George Sossenko. *Aventurero idealista*.

Prologue by Gabriel Jackson. Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2004.

By Shirley Mangini

Sossenko begins his war odyssey as an “idealistic adventurer” with a Don Quixote-like twist. In the preamble, he explains how he acquired the manuscript of an autobiography by a man named “Burenko,” whom he met at the Miami airport. The autobiography is, of course, his own and his preamble is fictitious.

Using his nom de plume, Sossenko describes his childhood in Russia, providing a portrait of his family and their idiosyncrasies. He emphasizes the cruelty, death, and hunger caused by World War I, the Russian revolution, and the epidemic of 1918 that devastated much of Europe. Sossenko talks of his father’s liberal politics—especially his allegiance to the head of the Russian Provisional Government before the Bolshevik revolution, Alexander Kerenski—and how his father politically and intellectually influenced him.

Like many anti-Bolsheviks, Sossenko’s family fled Russia for Germany and then France. In 1928 the family settled in Paris, where his father started a restaurant in the Latin Quarter. Both Sossenko’s political education and his sexual awakening—which he describes in detail—took place in Paris. But

soon Hitler’s shadow would darken the City of Light. By this time, Sossenko notes, he was politically active among French leftist groups.

While on vacation near Spain in August 1936, when the family began hearing the distant sounds of war, the author’s father began to evoke the tragedies of the Russian revolution. Inspired by his idealism, Sossenko tried to enlist to fight in Spain at the age of 16. He was rejected because of his age, but he was tenacious and managed to be accepted as a soldier by the Anarchist Federation. Leaving nothing more than a note for his parents—he knew that they would not let him go to war—Sossenko boarded a train for Perpiñán with fellow fighters from the Durruti Column (though most of the soldiers in his group were Marxists).

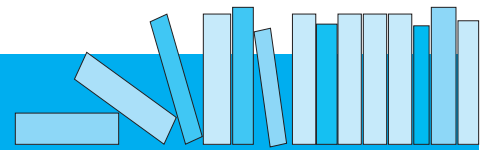
Unlike most male war autobiographies, which concentrate on bravery in battle and war strategy, usually with a tone of bravado, Sossenko’s narrative is more personal; the author weighs his psychological and emotional reactions to violence and political disharmony more frequently than other memoir writers. He lived through the Teruel front, then the battle at Jarama. Sossenko admits that his experiences through those bloody battles made him irrepressibly violent afterwards, which was contrary to his beliefs about universal harmony. The author discusses his disillusionment

once leftist factionalism became clear to him; he abandoned the Durruti Column to join the XIV International Brigade in May 1937.

By August, Sossenko was inexplicably sent to Barcelona, where he found his father waiting to take him home. Sossenko explains that his heart was torn; he felt like a traitor abandoning Spain, but his father managed to convince him because his mother was devastated without her favorite child. So he returned to his family in Paris, only to find that they were preparing to move to Argentina, so that George would not be drafted into World War II.

Throughout his account of the Spanish Civil War, the author interjects his idealistic feelings that Spain could have been saved from war if Hitler had been crushed early on, or if the League of Nations had intervened in 1937 to save what was left of the Republic. He laments how Hitler used Spain as an experiment for his future war on the world. But what is most fascinating about Sossenko’s narrative is that it provides us with a microcosmic view of the violence that washed over Europe in the first half of the 20th century, and how it affected a boy who became a product of strife, whose very soul seemed shaped by war wherever fate took him. ■

Shirley Mangini is author of *Memories of Resistance: Women’s Voices from the Spanish Civil War*.



Remembering the VALB

Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America. By Peter Glazer. University of Rochester Press, 2005.

By Michael Batinski

What if the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were forgotten? Readers of *The Volunteer* have their own answers, and that is why they subscribe. The answers are often attached to public events. Some readers who remember rallying in support of democratic causes in Latin America or against a nuclear arms race, remember the veterans present lending their support once again against the forces of tyranny. Others have traveled to banquets or concerts called to honor the surviving veterans in San Francisco, Chicago, or New York and to rally support for peace in our times. Remembering the 1930's volunteers for democracy, joining hands against today's bloody injustices—the two acts join themselves organically. Each in our own way, we sense this truth. We also know that in this joining of present with past, we look to brighter futures.

Peter Glazer lives in these places where past, present, future meet. He remembers, long before he began to think about the commemoration of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, listening to his father sing the songs of the Spanish Civil War with Pete Seeger;

Michael Batinski teaches history at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

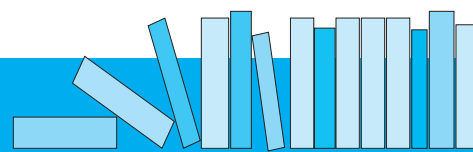
he remembers the songs sung during the struggle against American imperialism in Vietnam. Thus, as a graduate student, he turned to this past, first delivering readings and then organizing public commemorations of the Lincoln Brigade in Chicago. Now on the faculty at the University of California, Berkeley, he continues creating commemorative events in the San Francisco Bay area. Many readers doubtless recall his musical show, *We Must Remember!* Personal past informs his professional work, infusing his project with vital energy. Glazer's story of commemorating the Spanish Civil War, while addressing academic questions regarding the interplay of memory and history, helps us to understand how we are able to step off curbs and into the street in solidarity with good causes and how we are able to persist in doing so in the face of powerful and numbing forces of callous indifference.

Remembering is an act of citizenship. While nostalgia often serves conservative purposes by encouraging sentimental retreat from the present into a fanciful past, nostalgia does assume a radical form when it summons the present to recall just causes not yet realized, to yearn for their fulfillment, and to persist. Radical nostalgia becomes a political act situated in the present and focused on a just future. Commemorative performance evokes such political yearnings and sustains a sense of community among politi-

cal activists. Glazer begins this story of commemoration with the veterans themselves, their great longing for resolution that came with loss in Spain, their search for purpose in the present, their struggle to maintain community in the face of political repression and despite internal political division. His story takes a turn with the Vietnam War era, when a larger public became aware of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the acts of commemoration included a new generation of public activists.

Glazer reveals a nostalgia that is active, creative, often tormented, but rarely frozen in a past. While recounting the pull between yearning for community and political fractiousness, Glazer does us a service by focusing on the important creative and reflective moments within this community. During the Vietnam War, the issue became not how to take up arms against injustice but how to refuse to fight. Glazer recalls his personal troubles with the memory of Spain that seemed to glorify the warrior's stance. Robert Colodney, who as a youth had stepped forward to fight in Spain, understood that place and spoke passionately and effectively in support of those who resisted the draft. It was in remembrance of the Spanish volunteers that Americans should not fight in Southeast Asia. For singer Ronnie Gilbert, however, performing the songs from the Spanish conflict exposed her to contradictions between the celebration of combatant and her pacifist principles that she seemed unable to resolve. Commemoration serves as an umbrella covering a va-

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Fictional Look at Guardia Civiles

The Watcher in the Pine. By Rebecca Pawel. Soho Press, 2005.

By Charles Oberndorf

In May 1981, roughly six years after Franco's death, a young man by the name of Juan Mañas left Santander with two friends to return to his native Almería to attend his young brother's first communion. Days later their car was found burned out at the base of a cliff. It seemed like a terrible accident, but upon examination, it appeared that the men had been shot. Worse, two arms and one leg were missing from the bodies. It turned out that in response to the attempted murder of a general in Santander, several guardia civiles had stopped Juan Mañas and his friends, mistaking them for the terrorists. They tortured the three friends for confessions, then murdered them.

Not long after, the men responsible were arrested, and a brave prosecutor made the case against them (despite serious death threats). For the first time in Spain's history, members of the Guardia Civil were held accountable for the murder of innocents.

For many in Spain, this moment of outrage symbolized the true nature of the Guardia Civil, and there were calls to disband the organization.

The last decade, however, has seen a rehabilitation of the Civil Guard in popular culture, pulling it out of the

dark age of repression into a modern age as helpers and crime solvers. For instance, Elvira Lindo, a popular writer, has sympathetic (and slightly off-kilter) female guardia civiles in one of her children's books featuring Spain's beloved Manolito Gafotas. And novelist Lorenzo Silva has written four books featuring criminal investigator Sergeant Rubén Bevilacqua and his assistant, Virginia Chamorro.

On this side of the Atlantic, Rebecca Pawel is attempting a more radical rehabilitation. She has written three mysteries set in Spain after the Civil War, when those Republicans who haven't been shot or gone into exile are serving prison terms. Against this background, Carlos Tejada is a decent man and guardia civil who has fallen in love with a woman sympathetic to the Republican side of the war. This is an act of radical humanism, for surely there were decent, well-meaning men who served in this repressive body. On another level, Pawel risks becoming an apologist for the Guardia Civil.

If you visit her website, RebeccaPawel.com, you discover that Pawel doesn't intend to be an apologist. There are links to numerous fine websites, including a link, for the first novel in the series, to the ALBA exhibition of children's art during the civil war, "They Still Draw Pictures." While her first novel, *Death of a Nationalist*, is appearing in translation in Spain, Pawel's third and most recent novel in the series has

been released in the U.S. (a fourth is scheduled for next February).

The Watcher in the Pine is set in the winter of 1940. Tejada has been transferred to the small town of Potes in the mountains west of Santander. The town was burned down during the war, and prison labor is being used to rebuild it. There Tejada will have his first command. With him he has brought his pregnant wife, Elena. They soon discover that the man Tejada is replacing had been murdered by the maquis, the anti-Franco underground, which is strong in the area. Of course, Tejada can't refer to them as the maquis or as guerrillas; by Nationalist standards they're thieves and murderers without a cause.

The young couple's introduction to Potes is not comfortable. Given the lack of room in town, they stay in the inn operated by a woman whose son had been killed by the guardia. Many of the locals want to have little to do with the wife of the new guardia civil lieutenant. The few guardias on duty in Potes want to have little to do with a man who is married to a Red. Soon the guardia shoot down a member of the maquis, but since the bullet is lodged in the guerrilla's back, it becomes clear to the reader (much sooner than to the characters) that something is terribly wrong.

For American readers who know little of the Spanish Civil War, and thus come to this novel without prejudice, this must come off as rich and fascinating stuff. The Mystery Writers of America awarded the first novel the Edgar Allan Poe award for best first novel. To foreign eyes, it feels

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Charles Oberndorf is a novelist and English teacher who lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio.



Added to Memory's Roster



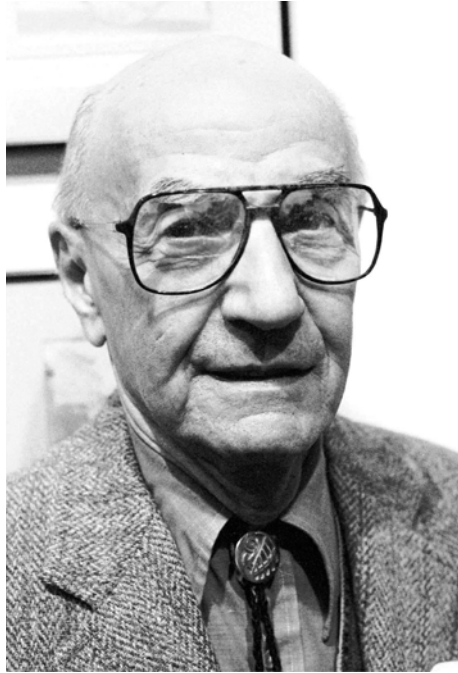
Leonard Levenson (1913-2005)

Lincoln vet Len Levenson passed away on August 7, 2005, in New York City.

A native New Yorker born into a Jewish family from Latvia, Len earned a law degree from New York University and went to work as a fingerprint specialist in Washington D.C. for none other than the FBI. He earned a place on the bureau's pistol team and, irony of all ironies, had his photograph taken alongside J. Edgar Hoover.

Arriving in Spain in the summer of 1937, Len served in the Mac-Paps, under Bob Thompson, in the battles of Fuentes de Ebro, Teruel (where he was wounded), and the Great Retreats. In the latter engagement, according to Arthur Landis, a hodge-podge group gathered by Captain Dunbar and Lieutenant Levenson made a stand on a hill along the road out of Gandesa, near Pinell de Brai, blocking the Italian advance towards Cherta for a full 48 hours. In preparation for the Ebro battle, Len was transferred to the Special Machine Gun Battalion of the 15th Army Corps along with Ben Sills. Len fought in its number one company until the Internationals were withdrawn.

After Spain, Len married Goldie and had two children, Eric and Joan. Hounded by the FBI for his political beliefs, he struggled to keep a job. He worked in different fields, including the defense industry during World War II. Len enjoyed a position at International Publishers, from which he retired. While there, one of his proudest



achievements was the 1979 publication of a collection of Spanish Civil War posters edited by veteran John Tisa, titled *The Palate and the Flame*.

Active in VALB, Len was the editor of *The Volunteer* for years. Close inspection of photographs shows he attended many, probably all, historic marches under the VALB banner, from anti-Vietnam rallies in the 1960s to the recent protests of the war in Iraq. I doubt Len missed many veterans' reunions. He loved the Spanish people dearly and was proud of their fight against fascism. He was always happy to return to Spain for IB reunions.

I was fortunate to accompany Len on a personal trip to Spain in the summer of 2002. It would take too long to detail the many adventures, both emotional and funny, we shared during that special time. Suffice it to say that Len was very moved at the reception that friends and strangers alike showed him. During our trip, the memories of his adventures,

both pleasant and trying, flowed freely. His urge to connect with the Spanish people was constant. There was nothing he enjoyed more than answering questions asked by younger Spaniards, be it over a family dinner in Madrid or in the Mediterranean countryside enjoying a paella cooked over an open fire. While we were traveling, several people stopped us to talk when they realized Len was a veteran of the International Brigades, a behavior which belies the argument that Spaniards want to forget the war to avoid opening old wounds. It was during these brief encounters when he surprised himself by steadily remembering his Spanish of 1937-38.

The most moving of our many experiences was a return to the small agricultural town of Vilella Alta, where Len and Ben Sills were billeted prior to the Ebro offensive. Upon arrival, we were shown the town and introduced to three generations of the family, including the son of the couple who had housed Len, also a veteran of the Army of the Ebro. We visited the same house, examined old family portraits, and were treated to lunch. It

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List of Veterans who Died in 2005

Ernest Amatniek
Milt Felsen
Charles Hall
Len Levenson
Bob Reed
David Sack
Salmon Salzman
Celia Seborer

empty holster attached to it. We lived in a large peasant house, with a yard and a stable, with a pigsty and cages for chickens and rabbits, with no running water or bathrooms, with shady bedrooms where a child could always breathe the mysterious smells of adult people's privacy. The same way I loved to overhear their conversations, I liked to pry into their cupboards and closets, into their bed tables' small drawers.

If my paternal grandfather was shy and spoke little or nothing, the other one was right the opposite: he was tall, expansive, talkative, even garrulous, a master storyteller, and something of a liar when he got carried away by his own narrative drive. He provided me with the best war stories, with the most exciting words and names I heard in childhood, names as magnificent as Manuel Azaña or General Vicente Rojo or Largo Caballero or Brigadas Internacionales, Congreso de los Diputados, none of which he took the pain to explain to me. He just repeated them, as wonderful incantations, as names of people bigger than life.

Being six feet tall and having taught himself to read and write while working at the same time as a foreman in a large country estate, at the beginning of the war he successfully applied to enroll in the "Guardia de Asalto," the elite police force the Republican government had founded and trained on the model of the French gendarmes, an armed force loyal to the new regime. Being tall and handsome, my grandfather was always picked out to stand at the forefront of parades or to be part of honor guards. Delivered from peasant work, furnished with a fancy uniform and shiny boots and buttons, my

grandfather Manuel, who was rather conceited, had the time of his life, but only as long as the war went on.

The day the victorious Francoist forces were marching into town, a Sunday, my grandfather showed up for duty at the offices of the provincial government, against the best advice of his terrified wife, who urged him to get rid of the uniform and go into hiding. He had done harm to no one, he argued, in his ponderous voice, so he considered he had nothing to be afraid of. Having always made his duty as a Guardia de Asalto, it would be unworthy of him to run away as a criminal. The moment he arrived at the building where he was to stand as a guard, dressed in the full gala uniform of a defeated army, my grandfather, as his wife had foreseen, was immediately arrested, imprisoned and sent to a concentration camp, where he was to spend the next two years, almost dying from starvation, mistreatment, and disease.

More than 20 years later, when I was the only person who paid any attention to his tall tales about war, glorious parades and captivity, my grandfather still kept his uniform hung among his other clothes in the closet, and I stared admiringly at it as if I had found the evidence attesting the truth of his stories, and was slightly frightened as I touched the pistol shaped holster where a long-vanished pistol had been held. But there was something else I dug out of a heap of mothsmelling shirts: a tin box that I opened, as thrilled as if I were lifting the lid of a treasure chest. And a treasure there was hidden indeed: red, blue and violet banknotes, as fantastic an amount of money as I had ever seen in my life. Was my grandfather hiding a fortune, the same way he

hid his wartime uniform? But this treasure was obviously as unreal as those you find in dreams: the worthless republican money my grandfather had managed to save from his salary as a Guardia de Asalto, as bright and promising as the future he and his family had figured out during the short period of freedom and hope for justice that had begun in 1931, only to break down only eight years later.

Stories, words, and images like these gave shape forever to my imagination at the time it was most impressionable, and I am sure they are still at work at the back of my mind, in that unconscious part of the inner self from which fiction flows. But they have also shaped my conscience as a citizen. Both as a writer and as a civic minded person, committed to democracy and justice, I like to quote a line from William Faulkner, who was also haunted in his childhood by stories about a war fought in the youth of his grandparents: "The past is not dead. It is not even past." ■

Len Levenson

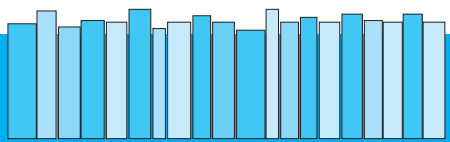
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felt to me that at that moment, being united with the descendants of the Paramón family, to a certain extent, Len's life came full circle. He was impressed, and perhaps a bit proud, at how his little adopted town of so long ago had progressed.

Len is survived by his two children, three grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and friends on both sides of the Atlantic.

A celebration of his life was held at the King Juan Carlos I Center at New York University on October 8.

--Bob Coale



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Guardia Civiles

Continued from page 18

as if Pawel works to see both sides of the war, with a slight leaning toward the forces of rebellion whenever she portrays the regressive social attitudes of the ruling Nationalists.

The mystery in *The Watcher in the Pine* isn't as strong as it could be. We don't get to know enough people or their motives for there to be multiple suspects, and there isn't enough police work for the novel to qualify as a procedural. Rather than a "who done it?" it's more a "what's going on here?" novel, with Tejada the fish out of water trying to understand his new environment.

Pawel has some skill as a writer. When Tejada and Elena solve different aspects of the mystery at hand, the novel can be compelling. Plus there are several well-structured scenes that climax with a new realization about Spanish postwar life. However, Pawel slows things down with her double-protagonist structure. Tejada will discover something and share it with Elena; Elena will realize something and share it with her husband. There's hardly a single important fact that isn't discussed twice, and it takes two thirds of the book for the plot to work up a head of steam.

So if the novel might appeal to mystery readers, will it work for readers of *The Volunteer*, many of whom (I am sure) have strong opinions about postwar Spain and the guardia civil. As decent a man as Tejada is, he's still a guardia civil, he's working for the organization that worked to keep the countryside under Franco's strict control. When members of the maquis take potshots at Tejada, I couldn't help but cheer them on.

I don't think the writer is trying to

write an apologia, but I do think that Pawel is too nice a person. The themes of the novel demand a writer with a darker vision of the world and a character who's a little more tormented or cruel. Tejada is not just a nationalist—José Camilo Cela was a nationalist, but he could also chronicle the squalor of Franco's postwar world in two masterpieces of Spanish literature—but Tejada is also a member of the Falange, a man who sings "Cara al sol" and fondly remembers Jose Antonio.

It's not that Tejada doesn't behave like a guardia civil of that time period. He does order one of the guardias to talk nicely to a prisoner while another is instructed to beat him. And Tejada does sometimes comport himself like a conservative man of the time. When full of righteous anger at his wife, he threatens to have their newborn child sent away after it's been weaned so that the child won't be contaminated by his wife's liberal approach. In these moments, when Tejada's nature slips free, the novel blazes alive with its dramatic truth.

Unfortunately, Pawel doesn't want us to understand her lieutenant, she wants us to like him enough that we'd

invite him over for dinner. While another writer might ask what happens to a decent man who must do what a member of the guardia civil must do, Pawel instead redeems her character again and again. A man who sometimes behaves like a monster—and the ordering of torture is a monstrous act—must always risk becoming a monster himself. This is a risk Carlos Tejada never seems to run. It made me wish that Pawel had a harder heart and a willingness to tell the truth about her characters. ■

Remembrance

Continued from page 17

riety of people, giving them shelter from an often hostile world and invigorating them to step forward.

In explaining how commemoration and song work to keep this nostalgia radical and how this memory is politics of the healthiest kind, Glazer answers the question by indirection: what would we be like if we forgot? And as he concludes, "So we keep at it." ■

Happiness

Continued from page 11

"Miner's Lifeguard," "Solidarity Forever," "Strangest Dream," "Viva La Quince Brigada," and "Union Maid." When we sang "Union Maid," Henry Foner jumped in with his own verse and brought the hall into a standing ovation.

The celebration was ended by actress Vinie Burrows. When she talked about Cindy Sheehan's

struggle to end the war on Iraq, the crowd erupted with enormous applause. A group from Veterans for Peace was clapping non-stop. Indeed, the struggle for peace and justice continues.

Happy birthdays to Moe and Milton! ■

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