

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

Vol. XXV, No. 1

March 2008



The Bay Area post was serenaded at their annual picnic by Bruce Barthol, Nayo Ulloa, and Heather Bridger, accompanied by vets (left to right) Ted Veltfort, Hilda Roberts, Milt Wolff (in back), Dave Smith, and Nate Thornton (far right). Photo by Richard Bermack.

INSIDE

Puffin Education Grant, inside cover.

National Monument dedication March 30, page 1.

Winner, National History Day Competition, page 2.

Vandalism, Dark Side of Memory, page 3.

Spanish Civil War Exhibits, page 4.

CP Archives, page 7.

Journalists of the Spanish Civil War, page 9.

Paul Robeson in Spain, Ch. 2, page 11.

War Medicine, page 14.

Book Reviews, page 19.

Remembering Milt Wolff

Milton Wolff
(1915-2008)

Milton Wolff, the last commander of the Lincoln-Washington Battalion consisting of the North American volunteers in the Spanish Civil War and an iconic leader of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade since the war ended in 1939, died of heart failure in Berkeley, California, on January 14. He was 92.

“Nine men commanded the Lincoln and Lincoln-Washington Battalions,” wrote Ernest Hemingway at the end of the war; four were dead and four were wounded. The ninth, Milton Wolff, was 23 years old, “tall as Lincoln, gaunt as Lincoln, and as brave and as good a soldier as any that commanded battalions at Gettysburg. He is alive and unhit by the same hazard that leaves one tall palm tree standing where a hurricane has passed.”

Born in Brooklyn on October 8, 1915, Wolff stood six feet two in bare feet and a few inches higher in the mud-died brown boots he had picked up after swimming across the swollen Ebro River during the great retreats of 1938, just a few months before Hemingway wrote his profile. He had a loud, gravelly voice that was pure Brooklyn. Later, he claimed that was the reason he was picked to lead the Lincoln volunteers at the age of 22, but Wolff knew—he always knew but it embarrassed him—that he possessed a tremendous charisma that won the love of men and women throughout his life. And what all of them also knew was that Milton Wolff was a very intelligent man.

The author Vincent Sheean, who, like Hemingway, wrote about the Spanish Civil War for various U.S. newspapers, had witnessed Wolff’s unexpected return after being lost six days behind enemy lines and had seen him enter the small, hastily-built shelter that served as battalion headquarters after the recent defeat. “You built this thing pretty low,” Wolff had deadpanned. “I guess you guys didn’t think I was coming back.” Then he had taken a plate of garbanzo beans cooked in olive oil, grabbed some long-delayed letters from his girlfriend in New York, and disappeared into a deep silence. “Now he sat doubled up over his beans and his letters,” observed Sheean, “his gaunt young face frowning in concentration. I think he knew how glad they all were to see him, and he wanted to

Continued next page

The Volunteer
Journal of the
**Veterans of the
Abraham Lincoln Brigade**

an ALBA publication
799 Broadway, Suite 341
New York, NY 10003
(212) 674-5398


Editorial Board
Peter N. Carroll • Gina Herrmann
Fraser Ottanelli • Abe Smorodin

Book Review Editor
Shirley Mangini

Art Director-Graphic Designer
Richard Bermack

Editorial Assistance
Nancy Van Zwalenburg

Submission of Manuscripts
Please send manuscripts by E-mail or on disk.
E-mail: volunteer@rb68.com



Letters to Editor

Dear Editor

I was very sorry to hear about Milt. All of us here at the I.B.M.T. send our condolences. Please pass them on to Milt’s family.

It is so sad that he didn’t live to see the memorial in San Francisco, which you have all worked so hard to achieve--and to lose both Milt and Moe in such a short space of time will be particularly hard for you all.

We remember them both with great admiration of their indomitable spirit, and their continued dedication to the cause for which they fought in Spain 70 years ago.

It is good that our two organizations exist, and that we can use the example of all of the Brigaders to inspire us to work for their memory.

Keep going!
Salud,
Marlene Sidaway,
Secretary, International Brigade Memorial Trust.

Dear Editor

Continued on page 21

Remembering Milt Wolff

ignore it as much as possible.”

Wolff described his childhood in an autobiographical work, slightly fictionalized, titled *Member of the Working Class* (2005). His was an ordinary story, tempered by a curious mind confronting hard times. Coming of age in the Depression, a high school drop-out, Wolff took the opportunity to enroll in the New Deal’s experimental Civilian Conservation Corps, a military-type operation that brought unemployed city boys to work on forestry projects. He loved the physical activity and camaraderie and developed some skill as a first-aid assistant. But he also witnessed a bureaucratic indifference that led to the death of one of his friends. For protesting conditions there—his first political act--Wolff was not permitted to reenlist.

He returned to Brooklyn, hung around with neighborhood kids, and found a job in a millinery factory in Manhattan. As part of their social activity, some had joined the Young Communist League, and Wolff followed them into the ranks. As he later explained, his political development was rudimentary, but when the Spanish Civil War began in 1936 and one of the YCL organizers asked if there were any volunteers to join the fight, Wolff raised his hand. He planned to serve as a first-aid man.

He sailed for Spain in March 1937. Wolff recounted his experiences as a soldier in the autobiographical novel *Another Hill* (1994). Moved by the enthusiasm of the other volunteers, he switched from a medical assignment to serve in a machine gun company in the newly formed Washington Battalion and went into action at

Brunete in July 1937. Men inches away from him were wounded and killed, but he emerged without a nick.

A few weeks later, while he was on leave in Madrid, his captain, Philip Detro from Texas, steered him to the Café Chicote on the Gran Via. There he met Ernest Hemingway. The 21-year-old Wolff was not impressed. “Ernest is quite childish in many respects,” he wrote to a friend in Brooklyn. “He wants very much to be a martyr....So much for writers,” he concluded. “I’d much rather read their works than be with them.”

Within a month, Wolff was fighting on the Aragon front, leading a section of the machine gun company at Belchite and Quinto. By October, he commanded the machine gunners at Fuentes de Ebro. At Teruel, in January 1938, Wolff was a captain and an adjutant. Two months later, when a direct hit destroyed the battalion headquarters and killed the leadership, Wolff became the commander. He led the soldiers through the treacherous retreats, avoided capture, and wandered alone behind enemy lines until he managed to swim across the Ebro.

Wolff assumed responsibility for rebuilding the broken battalion. During the training period, Robert Capa, the legendary photographer, captured Wolff standing next to Hemingway, a visual contradiction: Hemingway, stocky, an adventurer in his half-opened zippered jacket; Wolff, lanky in uniform, a beret covering his thick, dark hair, but shy, hands in his pockets, face turned downward, impatient to get on with the war.

A few weeks later, the photograph appeared in a New York Yiddish newspaper. To her surprise, Wolff’s

mother finally discovered what her absent son was doing in Spain. Not, as he had reported in his letters, working in a factory so that a Spanish worker could fight for the Republic, but leap-frogging through the military ranks. A “nobody at home,” the soldier-poet Edwin Rolfe wrote about Wolff in his diary; “leader of men here.”

Wolff led the Lincolns back across the Ebro during the summer of 1938 and held them in the lines of the violent Hill 666 in the Sierra Pandols, until ordered to turn over the battalion to Spanish officers as the government arranged for the withdrawal of foreign troops in 1938. In a ceremonial transfer of authority, Wolff was promoted to the rank of major.

It was then that the prominent American sculptor Jo Davidson was making clay busts of the Spanish leaders and proposed including an American face. When he saw Wolff’s shaggy hair and gaunt features, Davidson asked him to model. Misunderstanding the image he projected, Wolff first had a haircut and shave, nearly causing the furious sculptor to cancel the session.

The resulting clay composition inspired Hemingway’s eulogy to Wolff, in which he compared him to Lincoln. “He is a retired major now at twenty-three and still alive,” wrote Hemingway, “and pretty soon he will be coming home as other men in age and rank came home after the peace at Appomattox courthouse long ago. Except the peace was made at Munich now and no good men will be home for long.”

Continued on page 22



David Smith Spotlights Children's Art Show

By Char Prieto

December 2007 was a historic month for California State University, Chico. Spanish Professor Char Prieto brought the art show “They Still Draw Pictures: Children’s Art in Wartime from the Spanish Civil War to Kosovo” to the campus. David Smith, the Chair of the Bay Area VALB, was the guest of honor at the opening, where he spoke to a very crowded gallery about his experiences in the International Brigades. Undergraduates Raquel Mattson and Tami Marron presented historical introductions to the war and the International Brigades to community members, students, and professors who attended the opening, despite heavy rain and cold weather.

During the Spanish Civil War, and subsequent conflicts, children were encouraged to draw pictures to express their emotional responses. This art show presents the essence of children’s feelings, communicating to the viewer what kids undergo during

warfare and chaos. The exhibition, curated by Anthony Geist and Peter Carroll, reveals the collective testimony of children’s traumatic experiences representing the trauma of war, separation and exile. The show is not only an important and invaluable historical and sociological document that gives physical form to children’s experiences during war, brutality, destruction, and homelessness, but it is also a historical document that encapsulates the historical memory of Spain and the world.

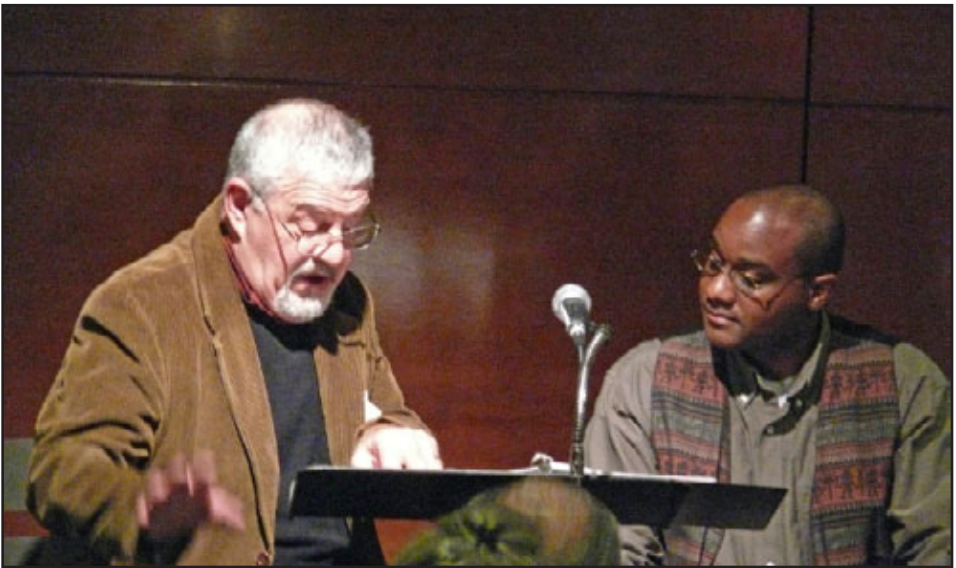
These transparent pictures, the student presentations, and the personal stories of the 94-year-old Lincoln Brigade veteran educated the public about the United States’ role in the Spanish Civil War. The event galvanized today’s students into thought, action, and research, making the connection between knowledge and education, past and present. The exhibition is history, and it is certainly our own history.

The Archives Come Alive

By Sebastiaan Faber

In one of the combative book reviews on the Spanish Civil War that Herbert Southworth—then a junior employee at the Library of Congress—wrote for the *Washington Post* between 1937 and 1938, he remarked that “most of the pro-Franco books have been inferior compositions”: “There has been nothing from rebel Spain of the high quality prose of the books of Langdon-Davies, Elliot Paul, and Ramon Sender.” “No writer,” Southworth concluded, “can present the hopes of the twentieth century with his head and heart twisted into the narrow shell of a dark and barbarous feudalism.”

While the relationship between bad politics and bad prose has never been actually proven, “The Archives Come Alive,” an anthology of Spanish Civil War-inspired texts performed to a full house at the King Juan Carlos Center this past December 8, did seem to support Southworth’s point that good politics can be a strong catalyst for extraordinary writing. “Many of the archive’s hastily composed



letters,” James D. Fernández said, “often written in the most uncomfortable circumstances—in trenches, on trains or in hospitals—are full of arresting images, luminous turns of phrase, stirring insights. Teachers who have worked with the material in the ALBA archives never fail to wonder: how is it that these volunteers—many of them members of the working class—were able to write consistently with such force, clarity and beauty?”

The program, brilliantly scripted

by Fernández and performed by Broadway actors Paul Hecht and Alison Fraser, ALBA’s Fraser Ottanelli, Ian Holmes, and Coco Núñez, opened with a selection of poignant quotes from letters written home by Hy Katz, Jim Lardner, and other American volunteers in Spain. The performance then flowed into Spain-inspired texts by Hemingway, Langston Hughes, Genevieve Taggard, Edwin Rolfe, Alvah Bessie, and Pasionaria, as well as a touching poem by Peter Carroll on the veterans’ passing, “And Counting.” The night closed with a short story by Prudencio de Pereda.

The event was made possible by generous grants from the Puffin Foundation and the Program for Cultural Cooperation.



Sebastiaan Faber teaches Spanish at Oberlin College.

“Facing Fascism” Opens in Spain

By James Fernández

Alcalá de Henares, birthplace of the great Miguel de Cervantes, is 20 kilometers northeast of Madrid, on the road to Zaragoza. The Instituto Cervantes has its headquarters here, in a beautiful 16th century building that was once part of the University of Alcalá, one of the oldest in Europe.

On December 13, in the patio of this lovely renaissance building, the Spanish language version of the museum exhibition “Nueva York y la Guerra Civil Española” was inaugurated. Speaking at the opening were the leaders of the show’s sponsoring organizations—Carmen Caffarell of the Instituto Cervantes, Susan Henshaw Jones of the Museum of the City of New York, Salvador Clotas of the Fundación Pablo Iglesias, Peter Carroll of ALBA, and Carlota Álvarez Basso of the Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales. Judge-Magistrate Baltasar Garzón, by now an old friend of ALBA, was also on hand for the inauguration. The show occupies the interior and exterior walls of the glass-enclosed patio and features some 40 full color panels and six interactive video kiosks.

The Spanish press responded favorably to the new exhibition. *El País* (December 23, 2007) published a lengthy illustrated article. *El Público* ran an even longer piece on January 3, 2008, praising the exhibition’s innovative point of view. Meanwhile, *Cadena Ser*, one of the country’s most important radio stations, broadcast a report about the exhibition in mid-January. The catalog, translated into Spanish

James Fernández is co-editor of the catalogue *Contra el Fascismo: Nueva York y La Guerra Civil*.



and published in full color, has also received considerable attention.

The Instituto Cervantes reports that the exhibition is being visited by large numbers of individuals and school groups. The run in Alcalá de Henares has been extended through March, and plans are being made to travel the show to other Spanish cities.



Continued next page

After Spain, “Beyond Abstract Art”



By Robert W. Snyder

The wide-ranging art of a Lincoln Battalion veteran recently received its first full exhibition at La Roche College in Pittsburgh, Pa.: “Beyond Abstract Art—Reflections of Life on Shell, Rock, Bark and Flat Surfaces: The Amazing World of George Brodsky.”

The show was organized by Brodsky’s grandnephew, Paul Le Blanc, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at La Roche, with Lauren Lempe, director of the college’s Cantellops Gallery, where the exhibit ran from January 14 to 31, 2008.

Brodsky, born in Russia in 1901, immigrated to the United States with his family in 1903. His father was a garment worker and active in the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union.

During the 1920s, Brodsky took classes at the American Academy of Art and at the Art Students League, where he studied with John Sloan,

Robert W. Snyder is an associate professor of journalism and American Studies at Rutgers-Newark.

Reginald Marsh and Boardman Robinson. In the 1930s he was active in the Artist’s Union and the artists’ section of the John Reed Club. Brodsky worked with Axel Horn for the WPA to produce a mural for the lobby of Bellevue Hospital in New York City. His work was influenced by artists of the period, including Moses Sawyer,



Raphael Sawyer, Ben Shahn, Jose Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera. He was briefly married to another art student, Rifka Angel.

During the Spanish Civil War, Brodsky joined the Lincolns. He was at the battle of Jarama. After he returned from Spain, he expressed his experiences there in his art, which by the 1940s included landscapes.

From 1939 to 1965 Brodsky worked as a proofreader at the *Daily News*. He was also active in political causes. He married Rose Margolis Brodsky, a social worker.

In the 1940s, Brodsky found his artistic impulses blocked, but they returned as he approached retirement. He began to paint faces on unconventional surfaces. In 1977 he wrote, “Continuing to work on flat surfaces, I was irresistibly drawn to painting and drawing on sea shells picked up along the Atlantic shore not far from my home. Then in the quarries and rivers

Continued on page 6



of Vermont, I found rocks and stones to paint and draw on. More recently, I have added bark as a surface to paint on."

Brodsky died in 1999.

Individual works of Brodsky have been exhibited at the Salmagundi Club and Parsons School of Design in New York City and at the Thoreau Lyceum and Concord Art Association in Concord, Mass.

Following the closing of "Beyond Abstract Art," his collected works are available for display at other exhibition sites. Le Blanc hopes to find a home for the works where they can be stored and made available to the public.

Le Blanc can be reached at paul.leblanc@laroche.edu.

Children's Exhibition in New Jersey

"They Still Draw Pictures," ALBA's exhibition of the drawings made by Spanish children during the civil war, will be on display at Drew University in Madison, NJ, March 19 to May 20, 2008. For more information, call (973) 408-3661 or email amagnell@drew.edu.

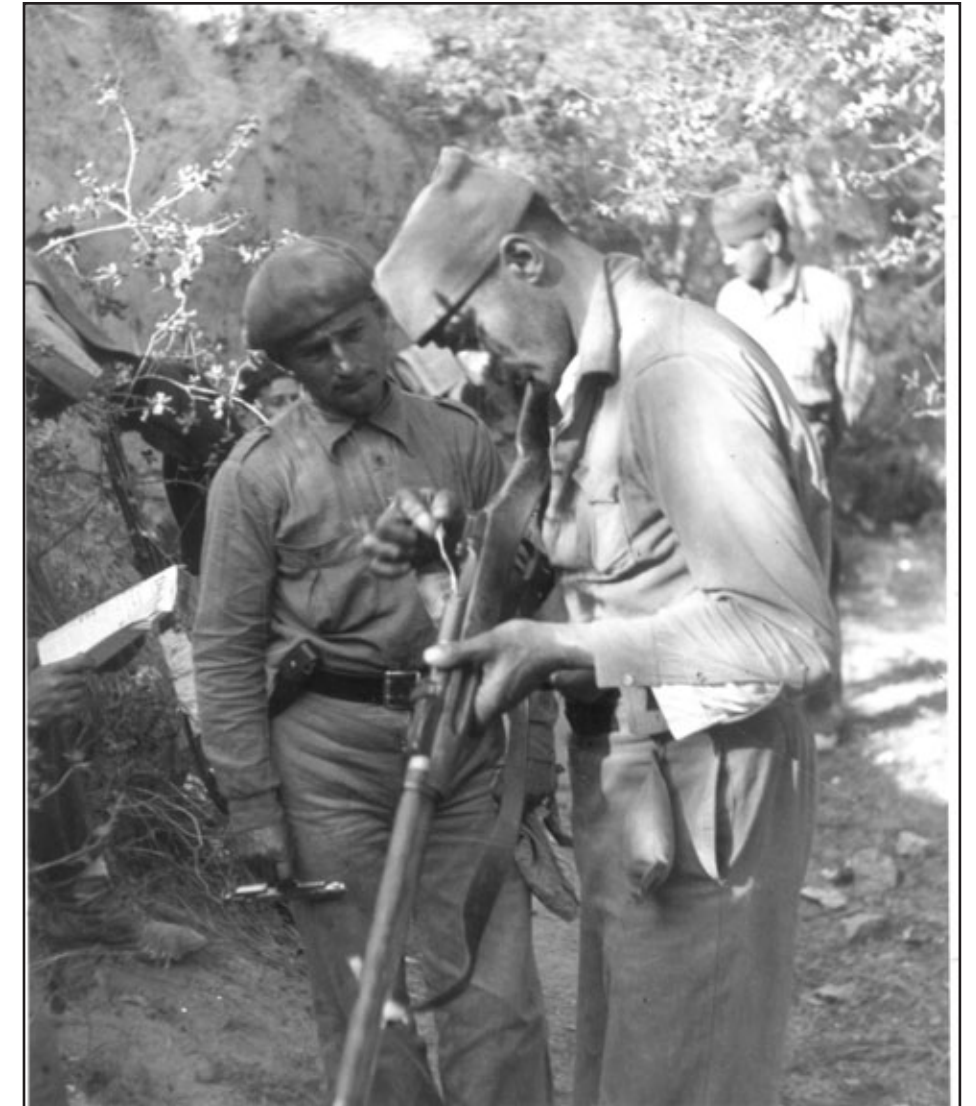
Italian-American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War

By Fraser Ottanelli

Editor's Note: this article is reprinted from THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN ETHNIC HISTORY. Copyright 2007 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with permission from the University of Illinois Press.

On August 20, 1937, a front-page article in the Italian-American Communist weekly *L'Unità Operaia* reported that one of its leaders, Nello Vergani, had been killed while fighting Fascist troops in Spain. Vergani, whose real name was Mafaldo Rossi, came from the town of Molinella, near Bologna, well known for its tradition of militant rural labor activism. His political activities had earned him the designation by Italian police of "Communist terrorist," as well as several beatings from Fascist black-shirts. In 1924, Rossi had emigrated from Italy to France, then to Germany, Brazil, Algeria, and eventually North America. In 1926, arrested while trying to cross illegally from Canada into the United States, Rossi jumped bail and settled in New York. Although he adopted several aliases to conceal his identity, Rossi remained under surveillance by Italian authorities from virtually the moment he left Italy until he arrived in the United States. By June 1927 the Italian consulate in New York reported to Rome that Rossi was one of the most active, visible, and "dangerous" Communists within the Italian-American community. He soon became one of the leaders of the

Fraser Ottanelli is Chair of the History Department at the University of South Florida and co-editor of the anthology *Italian Workers of the World*.



Alleanza Antifascista del Nord America (Antifascist Alliance of North America or AFANA). After its dissolution, Rossi headed the Italian-language bureau of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) and served as business manager and editor of *L'Unità Operaia*, as well as of the Italian Bulletin of the United Shoe and Leather Workers Union.

For Rossi, as for many other men and women from around the world, the Spanish Civil War became the

symbol of the global fight against exploitation, oppression, and racism. As Franco's troops advanced through the Spanish countryside, the slogan "Madrid will be the tomb of fascism" embodied the certainty that events in Spain foreshadowed the global defeat of Fascism and Nazism. Eventually, together with approximately 300 other Italian Americans, Rossi joined the fight to defend the Spanish Republic. Rossi was only 35 years of age when

Continued on page 8

he was killed by enemy artillery while leading an advance. In honoring him, the editorial in *L’Unità Operaia* stated emphatically, “we promise to fight to the end to ensure that liberty will prevail not only in Spain but...also in Italy.”

For Italian Americans who would volunteer to fight in Spain, factors such as year of birth, length of stay abroad and occupation shaped the political involvement in their country of adoption and determined the different forms of their relationship with Italy. The average age of Italian-American volunteers was 35, their formative political experiences had been the post-war labor upsurge, the rise and consolidation of Fascism in Italy, the Sacco and Vanzetti defense, the Depression, and the rise of Nazism in Germany. Three-fourths of the Italian Americans who fought in Spain had emigrated from their country of birth as adults. Prior to emigration almost half were industrial wage earners and slightly over one-fourth were artisans and shopkeepers. The remainder included generally defined service workers, professionals, and intellectuals. Less than 6 percent had worked as agricultural wage earners, sharecroppers, tenants, or farmers.

Most had become politically active in their teens during Italy’s charged and violent post-war years. In terms of political affiliation, 60 percent of the volunteers were Communists, followed by almost 20 percent who were anarchists, 13 percent generic anti-Fascists, and a handful of Republicans, Socialists and members of the liberal-socialist organization *Giustizia e Libertà*. While still in Italy, many had attempted to stem the Fascist offensive in their native regions. Not

surprisingly, for those who had left Italy as adults there was a direct relationship between level of political activity, place of origin, and the decision to emigrate. They originated from areas of the peninsula where Fascist violence had been the fiercest and where Left-wing or simply anti-Fascist views placed people in physical danger and jeopardized their ability to make a living. Police officials unabashedly reported how several of the men who would later volunteer to fight in Spain were repeatedly attacked and beaten by Fascist *squadristi*.

Fleeing repression in Italy, anti-Fascists did not find reprieve on the other side of the Atlantic. Italian officials devoted significant resources to the surveillance and repression of anti-Fascists abroad. In the United States the combination of continued surveillance by Fascist police and the pervasive nativist and anti-radical sentiment of local, state, and federal authorities meant that those anti-Fascists who resumed political and labor activity did so at great risk.

Despite the real threat of reprisals, some anti-Fascist immigrants engaged in varying degrees of political activity. A few recent arrivals joined specifically Italian political groups. These included the New York City branch of the Italian Republican Party and Italian-language anarchist groups linked to publications such as *Germinale* and *Il Martello*. Some also joined the followers of the Italian anarchist leader Luigi Galleani, meeting at the corner of Broadway and 23rd Street or at the “circolo anarchico” on East 2nd Street. In contrast, the

majority of politically active anti-Fascist immigrants joined ethnically based organizations in decidedly “American” radical political parties. These groups included the Italian Federation of the Socialist Party of the United States and more commonly one of the language branches of the CPUSA, such as the Italian Workers’ Club in Brooklyn and the Italian Workers’ Center “L’Unità” in Manhattan. Over 60 volunteers belonged to the Garibaldi Lodge, the Italian branch of the Communist-led mutual aid society the International Workers Order (IWO).

This group whose formative experiences occurred in Italy contrasts sharply with Italian-American radicals who came of age in the United States. While slightly more than half of this second group were born in Italy, all of them had been raised in the United States, and with few exceptions, they spoke Italian poorly if at all. Many anti-Fascists born or reared in the United States held jobs in basic industries such as maritime, steel, auto, and electrical, and most were openly involved in radical and labor activities of the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, they generally expressed their political radicalism and labor activism by joining multi-ethnic labor unions and political parties. Italian-American volunteers raised in the United States included 17 percent who were anarchists, while members of the Socialist party of America combined with generic anti-Fascists accounted for another 10 percent. Once again, Communists were the largest group but in a significantly higher

percentage than among anti-Fascists raised in Italy (73 as opposed to 60 percent).

Regardless of whether their formative years had taken place in Italy or in the United States, both groups provided a vital base for anti-Fascist activities during the 1920s and 1930s. By exposing the repressive, brutal, and expansionist nature of Fascism, thousands of Italian Americans engaged in a struggle to eradicate the Mussolini regime in Italy, oppose its influence within the Italian ethnic community, and prevent the spread of Fascism to the United States.

Italian police files indicate that a common practice among opponents of Mussolini was to mail anti-Fascist literature to family and friends in Italy. Others took on a more public posture by writing articles for anti-Fascist newspapers, raised money to help anti-Fascist causes, and participated in Italian-language and “multi-ethnic” anti-Fascist organizations such as the pro-Communist American League Against War and Fascism. Several of those who would later volunteer to fight in Spain also took part in protests against visiting Italian Fascist dignitaries as well as in many of the bloody confrontations against Fascists in Little Italies across the country that left scores injured or killed on both sides. Finally, “first” and “second” generation Italian-American anti-Fascists were in the forefront of interracial demonstrations in Harlem to protest Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia.

Italian-Americans were among the first foreign volunteers to fight in Spain. Several crossed the Atlantic on their own initiative shortly after the military uprising. With the creation of the International Brigades, the first

organized group of 86 volunteers from the United States included at least six Italian-Americans, who sailed from New York on the French liner *Normandie* the day after Christmas 1936.

When Congress banned travel to Spain in 1937, volunteers had to find ways to circumvent the law. For legal immigrants or citizens this usually involved applying for U.S. passports by concealing their ultimate destination. Illegal immigrants had to use other strategies to get to Spain. Several Italian Americans enlisted on merchant vessels and then jumped ship in European ports or used forged papers to obtain a U.S. passport. But most were issued a Spanish passport by the Republican consulate in New York.

After the French government closed the border, the only individuals allowed to cross legally into Spain were those traveling as part of humanitarian missions. Among these was the nurse Ave Bruzzichesi. Born in Bloomfield, New Jersey, in 1913 and raised in a religious Catholic family, Bruzzichesi had no history of political activism. In the spring of 1937, shortly after completing training at Newark’s City Hospital in New York, she heard Father Michael O’Flanagan, the Irish Republican priest and ardent socialist who was touring the United States in support of the Spanish Republic, speak at the Hippodrome in New York. O’Flanagan’s call for volunteers for medical aid to Spain influenced Bruzzichesi’s decision to join the West Coast Medical Unit led by Dr. Leo Eloesser.

In Spain Italian-American volunteers did not serve in the same battalion. Those who maintained strong cultural, linguistic,

and political connections with Italy preferred to join the Italian-speaking Garibaldi battalion. In contrast, those whose formative experiences were in the United States found their place within the Abraham Lincoln battalion as part of a multi-ethnic and interracial “American” unit.

Not all volunteers joined the Communist-led International Brigades: a small number chose to enlist in the POUM or in the anarchist militias. Among these was Carl Marzani, who made his way to the front lines from England where, after graduating from Williams College, he had gone on a scholarship to attend Oxford University. In December 1936 he arrived in Barcelona with the intention to write newspaper articles about the war. Swept up in the enthusiasm of the war, he joined the anarchist Durruti column, deployed on the Aragon front. Up to this point Marzani’s experience bears a striking similarity to that of George Orwell, except that the English writer, while on the same front, enlisted in the POUM. While on the front lines, Marzani became disaffected with the anarchists’ exaltation of individualism, which prevented their militias from becoming a disciplined military force capable of fighting a modern war. In contrast with Orwell, Marzani’s experience convinced him to join the Communist Party upon his return to Oxford in 1937.

Italian-American anti-Fascists took part in every major battle of the war. Dispatched with other members of the International Brigades to the most dangerous parts of the front, Italian Americans in the Garibaldi and the Lincoln battalions suffered high

Continued on page 10

Italians in Spain

Continued from page 9

casualty rates, with one in six killed and many wounded at least once, in many cases seriously. Plagued by a chronic lack of supplies and weapons, and confronted with the horrors of war and eventually with the realization of defeat, volunteers displayed a composite cycle of reactions. Individual personnel files record countless acts of courage and dedication under fire, of soldiers repeatedly wounded and returning to the front, of volunteering for dangerous assignments, and of “having been the last to leave his position” in the face of an advancing enemy. Many like Mafaldo Rossi, though lacking previous military experience, showed exceptional soldiering and leadership skills and quickly rose through the ranks.

As the war dragged on, its brutality took a toll on soldiers. After long periods at the front many broke down and had to be hospitalized or even repatriated. In some extreme instances, mostly during or immediately following the costly retreats on the Aragon front in the spring of 1938, a number of volunteers deserted and fled to safety. Significantly, the measures taken against deserters who were caught or returned voluntarily were quite lenient. In a common practice within the International Brigades, officials appealed to deserters’ pride, political commitment, sense of duty, and the shame of returning home under the stigma of having abandoned their comrades.

The varying paths of the surviving Italian-American anti-Fascist volunteers are hard to follow once they crossed back over the Pyrenees at the end of 1938. Heroes in Spain, in France they confronted the harsh reality of the western democracies’ policy

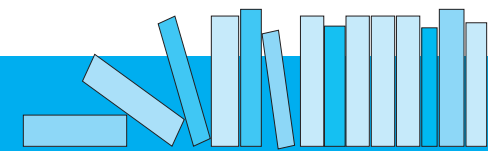
of appeasement. Italian-American volunteers who could demonstrate they were citizens or legal residents of the United States were permitted to travel back across the Atlantic. Those who could not prove their legal status were denied re-entry in the United States. Some eluded French police and stowed away on U.S.-bound ships; others were held at Ellis Island upon their arrival until immigration authorities could determine their fate which, in a few cases, led to their deportation to places such as Chile, Cuba, and Venezuela. The rest were stranded in Europe, where they faced innumerable challenges and dangers. Most were interned in detention camps in southwest France, set up expressly for tens of thousands of Spanish Republican soldiers and members of the International Brigades who could not return to their countries of origin.

The fate of most prisoners was sealed following the fall of France to Nazi Germany in the summer of 1940. In the case of Italian anti-Fascists volunteers, the Vichy government turned them over to Mussolini’s police, which imprisoned them on the Italian island of Ventotene. Suffering a worse fate, Alvaro Ghia, who had gone to Spain from New York, was handed over to the Nazis and deported to Mauthausen.

The experience of war and defeat, followed by the convulsions surrounding the outbreak of World War II in Europe, weighed heavily on the subsequent activities of Italian Americans who had fought in Spain. For some, their experiences in Spain, followed by the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, led to open criticism of the Communist Party. After the U.S entered the war, scores of Italian-

American veterans of the Spanish Civil War served in the U.S. armed forces and in the merchant marine. Similarly, many anti-Fascists forced to remain in Europe after the end of the war in Spain resumed the struggle against Fascism, this time in their country of origin. By early fall 1943, following their release from Fascist jails, veterans of the International Brigades, drawing on the military experiences gained in Spain, provided a vital core of the armed resistance against Fascist and Nazi troops in Italy.

The stories show that for class-conscious Italian Americans, whether they hoped to return to their place of origin or had incorporated into U.S. labor and radical organizations, their politics continued to be informed by personal, cultural, and political ties with Italy. Through anti-Fascism they created a definition of what it meant to be an Italian “patriot” or a “true” American, rooted in the redemption of their place of origin, in the defense of their country of adoption, and in the worldwide struggle against oppression. The connection of anti-Fascism with national and cultural identity that prompted Italian Americans to volunteer also motivated members of other ethnic and racial groups: the flag of the Jewish battalion was embroidered in Yiddish with the motto “For your liberty and ours.” German volunteers sang “Today our homeland is before Madrid,” and Italian anti-Fascists decreed, “Today in Spain, tomorrow in Italy.” For all of them the struggle against Fascism in Spain reverberated with the promise of their ultimate deliverance.



Women at War

Warm Earth. By Angela Jackson.
Pegasus Elliot Mackenzie Publishers,
\$18.58

By Charles Oberndorf

It's the summer of 1936 in an England worn down by the terrible economics of the 1930's. Constance is a midwife, recently employed by a hospital. She's read about the Spanish resistance to the military uprising, and she wishes she could go to support the Republic. In the autumn, Adelaide, the daughter of an American teaching in London, gets wrapped up in campus politics and decides she must go to Spain to help. Rose is a nurse, a woman from a poor background who resents the poor people she helps. When she is fired for supporting the hunger strikes, Spain is the next obvious place to go.

Angela Jackson's novel, *Warm Earth*, follows these women from the heady days of resistance in Madrid to the last ditch efforts at the Ebro, concluding six decades later in 1996 when surviving veterans receive a hero's welcome in Spain.

Jackson is best known as a historian, the author of *British Women and the Spanish Civil War*, a book I've read only in bits on line. (The text costs \$160, making it prohibitive for most readers and libraries to purchase.) Jackson does a marvelous job of categorizing events and reactions and finding the right series of very human anecdotes to make her point. It makes for compelling reading. The book feels like a novelization of all she's learned

from her research.

Warm Earth has impressed fellow historians of the war. Gabriel Jackson writes, "believable persons, real events, and a narrative that keeps you wanting to learn more." Paul Preston says, "The historian is constrained by the requirement for documentary proof and thus can say little about unrecorded dialogue or feelings. In the hands of a novelist who can get inside the skin of the protagonists, and can capture time and place with the turn of an elegant phrase, the same material can come alive. Angela Jackson is just such a novelist and her vibrant prose and emotional understanding breathe life into her un-putdownable story of the sacrifices made and the dangers undergone by the remarkable women who went to Spain as volunteers during the civil war."

An omnivorous reader will most likely enjoy the novel for the way it captures the milieu. The reader of novels, especially a reader who is not as passionate about the war, will find *Warm Earth* to be uneven. As a novelist, Jackson is most effective when describing human landscapes--Madrid under siege, the ruins of a Barcelona late in the war, or a field hospital set in a cave. Her scenes between men and women are where her characters are at their most complex.

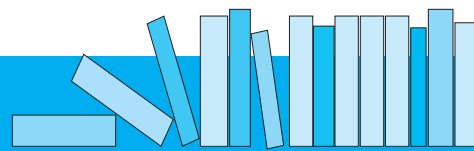
The biggest challenge Jackson faces is that she has decided to cover the lives of three characters throughout the war, while at the same time

trying to include references to most of the issues raised by the war. This is a great deal of material for a 360-page novel. To fit everything in, Jackson summarizes key moments that I would have loved to have seen in dramatic form. I wanted to spend pages with Rose when they bring to her three friends, wounded on the battlefield. I wanted to live in her mind and body during triage, as she examines each friend and decides which goes on to surgery and which does not.

Fortunately, Constance, Addie and Rose are likeable protagonists, and I read on just to see what would happen to them. As the novel progresses, vivid scenes increase as Jackson seems to develop a greater sense of craft.

Warm Earth may not be entirely successful as a novel, but for those who are endlessly fascinated by the Spanish Civil War, it is a treasure trove of vivid details.

Charles Oberndorf is a teacher and novelist as well as a book reviewer for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.



Roosevelt's Embargo on Spain

FDR and the Spanish Civil War: Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle that Divided America. **By Dominic Tierney.** Duke University Press: Durham & London, 2007.

By Soledad Fox

During the Spanish Civil War, many Americans viewed the isolationist policy of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration as the key obstacle facing the Spanish Republic. For his wife Eleanor, the President's policy was a source of shame and frustration. In April 1938, she wrote to the pro-Republican correspondent Martha Gellhorn: "... I understand your feeling in a case where the Neutrality Act has not made us neutral...the Neutrality Act is really not a Neutrality Act, but very few people realize it."

Gellhorn was one of the many influential American writers who covered the war in Spain and lobbied tirelessly for Washington to repeal the arms embargo imposed on the Spanish Republic, which struggled to defend itself against Franco's better-equipped forces. While Mussolini and Hitler supplied the military rebels copiously, the Republic had nowhere to turn to buy arms. Gellhorn and others were in due course disappointed by the President's intransigence since his own doubts about the policy had been steadily mounting.

Dominic Tierney's study maintains that Roosevelt had, especially as the war progressed, an increasing sympathy for the Republic. Tierney examines the opposition between

Roosevelt's private inclinations and the official foreign policy of non-intervention. So why wasn't the embargo lifted? Did pressures from American Catholic organizations hem him in? Did he think it would weaken popular support for his administration? Was he afraid of upsetting U.S. relations with the British and the French?

According to Tierney's nuanced reading, there was a complex web of domestic and international factors constraining Roosevelt's Spanish policy, despite intense pressure to change it. The embargo had stirred widespread and passionate dissent in the United States. Some, as Tierney says, idealized the Republic, others demonized it and in turn glorified Franco's Catholic "crusade." The mere suggestion of any official aid—whether military or humanitarian—to Republicans was suspect and politically charged. In 1937 U.S. Catholic politicians even opposed a proposal backed by Ambassador Claude Bowers and Eleanor Roosevelt to bring Basque refugee children to the United States.

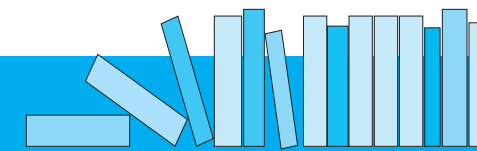
Tierney provides a long overdue update on this subject. He reviews existing works in light of new findings from Russian and American archives, and his analysis underlines the international ramifications of the war and shows to what extent its outcome was the consequence of decisions made elsewhere, particularly in Washington. Roosevelt's stance towards the Spanish Civil War emerges as neither heroic nor indifferent but "marked variously by creativity, inconsistency,

activity, incoherence, experimentation, as well as both flexibility and inflexibility."

Tierney traces Roosevelt's evolution as he came to doubt the merits of the embargo and struggled to circumvent its legislation. He relates the fascinating episode in May 1938 when the President became involved in a "hair-brained," "outlandish," and covert attempt to ship planes to Spain via France. Although the plan was leaked, and eventually failed, it reveals a leader who tried to aid the Republic without seeming to break with his own policies.

Even for most readers who know the outcome of this story, Tierney's account manages to be suspenseful. It was always, of course, highly improbable that Roosevelt would reverse the embargo, yet his chameleon-like political persona consistently gave Republican supporters hope that a radical shift in U.S. policy was imminent. When it was too late, Roosevelt could only offer his remorse to the Spanish Republic. In January 1939, he addressed his cabinet and, as Harold S. Ickes recalled, stated for the first time that "the embargo had been a grave mistake...that we would never do such a thing again." Eleanor would always deeply regret the American embargo of Spain, and she was quick to assign blame collectively and to her husband: "We were morally right, but too weak. We should have pushed *him* harder."

Soledad Fox teaches Spanish and comparative literature at Williams College. She is the author of a biography of Constanca de la Mora.



La soledad de la república: el abandono de las democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética. **By Angel Viñas.** Barcelona: Crítica, 2006. ISBN 84-8432-795-7.

Tío Boris: Un héroe olvidado de la guerra civil española. **By Graciela Mochkofsky.** Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2006. ISBN 950-07-2730-7.

By Daniel Kowalsky

Nearly a generation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the once closely-guarded secrets of the now defunct communist state continue to cast new light on the history of the 20th century. For researchers working on the Spanish Civil War, recent investigations have been unusually fruitful and have gone a long way towards demystifying key episodes of the Iberian imbroglio that began in July 1936.

Among the most important new books currently available only in Spanish is *La soledad de la república*, the first volume of Angel Viñas's eagerly anticipated trilogy on international dimensions of the war in Spain. Viñas is an unusual figure in post-Franco Spain: at once diplomat, economist, historian, and occasional gadfly for the reactionary Spanish right. The principal thesis of this study, revealed in its title, is that the Spanish Republic

Daniel Kowalsky teaches modern Spanish history at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He is author of *La Unión Soviética y la Guerra Civil Española* (2003) and *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* (2004).

turned to Stalin's Russia only after Madrid had exhausted all hopes of winning military assistance from Britain, France, the United States and other Western democracies. The Second Republic had no ideological affinity with Soviet communism, and the eventual alliance with Stalin was a last-ditch measure by the besieged and desperate government of Largo Caballero. To make his case, the author assembles an exhaustive bibliography and mobilizes an impressive array of previously unexplored empirical evidence, whose provenance ranges across Europe and the Americas. Most tantalizingly, Viñas uses hitherto unavailable Russian documentation to flesh out Soviet-Spanish ties as they gradually emerged in autumn 1936.

Viñas's work matters for two reasons. First, this book is a much-needed antidote to the current trend towards historical revisionism in Spain, most strikingly characterized in the best-selling *Myths of the Spanish Civil War*, Pio Moa's simplistic exercise in updated fascist propaganda. Central to the revisionist approach to the civil war is the tarring of the Republic as a "red zone," a Stalinist redoubt eager for conversion to a East Bloc-style people's democracy, and thus requiring a purifying, if bloody, crusade. Viñas's meticulous research and measured conclusions convincingly argue that it was Britain's intransigence that drove Madrid towards the Kremlin, but

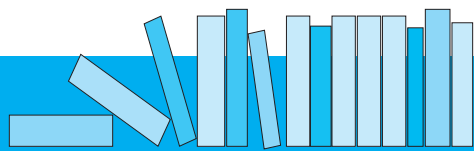
strictly for reasons of self-preservation. Second, this scrupulously-documented tome serves as repudiation of a lamentable trend in historical publishing on the war: that of lightweight, anecdotal, or synthesized pseudo-histories, which have nothing new to offer but appear in greater numbers every year.

Equally satisfying, though for different reasons, is *Tío Boris*, whose author is Graciela Mochkofsky, one of Argentina's leading journalists. Still in her 30s, Mochkofsky has authored half a dozen books on far-flung topics, and she has held senior posts at several newspapers in Buenos Aires. While Viñas writes from the perspective of a diplomat/historian seeking to fulfill his public and academic responsibility, Mochkofsky's motivation is far more personal. She writes to unravel a family mystery and to rescue from obscurity a courageous but maligned relation, her great uncle Benigno.

Born in 1911, Benigno was an active communist from his early teens, but he would be disowned by his parents and henceforth referred to derisively as "Boris." The author of this fascinating, suspenseful, and often moving biography had never heard of her lost uncle until 2003. Then she learned that he had fought in Spain with the International Brigades.

Starting from scratch, Mochkofsky painstakingly fleshed out the tumultuous and often miserable life of an outcast militant who would find himself in the Fifth Column. Taking the *nom de guerre* "Ortiz," he fought alongside the more celebrated Argentine communist Vittorio Codovilla and

Continued on page 20



Book Reviews

Culture Wars before the War

Brian D. Bunk. *Ghosts of Passion. Martyrdom, Gender, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War.* **Duke University Press, 2007.**

By Lisa Vollendorf

Brian D. Bunk's *Ghosts of Passion* brings renewed attention to the October 1934 Revolution, an event that has been at the core of many debates about the origins of the Spanish Civil War. Bunk shifts the focus away from the events themselves and instead argues that the propaganda produced by politicians, writers, and artists laid the groundwork for the war. Republicans and Nationalists created a large body of posters, songs, poems, speeches, and other cultural artifacts that, when considered together, point to a concerted campaign to glorify the victims of the revolution and to dehumanize the victimizers. Both sides made martyrs of their fallen, and much of *Ghosts of Passion* traces the rhetorical threads that ran through those martyrologies. While the political right called upon men to defend a Catholic nation, the left appealed to liberal-leaning Spaniards to defend the Republic. In tracing the rhetoric, Bunk emphasizes that the struggle to define the "truth" of the 1934 events divided the nation to such a degree that Civil War broke out less than two years after the failed revolution.

Readers unfamiliar with the two years leading up to the Spanish Civil War and those interested in learning more about the dueling propaganda

machines that operated during that contentious period will find many references to literary, artistic, and political texts for further reading. However, not everyone will come away from Bunk's book convinced that propaganda alone paved the way for the bloody events of 1936-39. In this regard, *Ghosts of Passion* would benefit from a more thorough contextualization of the propaganda and more data about individual Spaniards' responses to the campaigns to glorify Republican and Nationalist causes. Similarly, more textual analysis of the propaganda would have bolstered the argument that rhetoric and cultural production made a substantial contribution to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936.

Nonetheless, Bunk should be applauded for his discussion of the repercussions of the October 1934 Revolution during the post-Franco period. In exploring the commemorations of 1934 in democratic Spain, the final chapter provides a bridge between the propaganda's effects on the war and the pressing questions of historical memory that have made their way to the fore of Spanish cultural politics in the 21st century. Recent controversy over historical memory pitted the church against the Socialist-controlled government, for example, when Pope Benedict XVI beatified 498 Civil War martyrs in October 2007. The beatification provides ample evidence for the ongoing struggle to shape the "truth" of the past, as churches throughout Spain

were blanketed with photographs and banners glorifying the martyrs' sacrifice for God. Days later, those who decried the beatification as a one-sided affair that insulted the memories of Republican victims of the war found gratification in the Spanish parliament's legislation denouncing the Franco dictatorship and calling for the exhumation of mass graves. As Spain moves to reconcile its past with its present, books such as Bunk's remind us that the battle over "truth" is waged long before—and long after—blood is shed on the battlefield.

Lisa Vollendorf, Associate Professor of Spanish at California State University, Long Beach, is currently preparing a book on the history of sexual and domestic violence in Spain.

Music

Continued from page 19

eventually commanded 4,000 men in the field. His participation in the war is mentioned in the memoirs of Enrique Lister and Pasionaria. To tell his story, Mochkofsky appealed to the former Comintern archive in Moscow (now RGASPI), which supplied her with the dossiers on all Argentine brigaders. The book thus tells not only Boris's story, but that of the Argentine volunteers, who were the most numerous of the Latin American contingents that fought for the Republic.

This book is something more than just another Spanish Civil War biography. While Mochkofsky succeeds admirably in saving her uncle from the dustbin of history, his heroism in Spain gives the author--and her readers--something intangible, but perhaps

Letters

Continued from page 2

I am very sorry about Milt's death, all of us loved him so much. I beg you to express to his family our support, and to all the comrades and friends of the Lincoln Brigade our deep feelings for this loss.

You said it when Moe died and it can be repeated now: an era is ending and our elders are going away.

Ana Perez

Asociación de Amigos de las Brigades Internacionales

Dear comrades,

I was deeply touched by the news of Milton Wolff's decease. We had fought a lifetime for a common cause, for the Spanish Republic. Please forward to his family and to the surviving American brigadistas our condolences.

Viva la República! Salud!

Gerhard Hoffmann

Germany

To Milton

Don't hesitate, Milton. If we get into trouble in the future, we'll give you a call. Because you are more than yourself, beloved commander. You are all your dead, as you called your comrades fallen in combat, and also all your deeds. You are the wind of youth and solidarity that from the Jarama, and Brunete, and Belchite, Teruel, Aragon and the Ebro, blows away over the legend and the History, the universal legacy of the International Brigades.

A wind made of non-conformism, protest against injustice, and a disposition to swim against the current, being opposed to the rich and the powerful, putting life in jeopardy, and giving it to defend the other's freedom know-

ing that it is one's own.

Thank you Major Wolff, for having taken the part of the poor and oppressed. For having taken the decision of coming to Spain for fighting fascism. Thank you for surviving before the crossing of the Ebro River during the retreats. And for leading American Volunteers for Liberty beyond the Ebro again.

Thank you for your 28 years as President of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, from 1939 until 1967, becoming a bridge between the old generation of fighters and the new ones. For not having forgotten the prisoners in Franco's jails and concentration and extermination camps.

You helped them to organize resistance and hope. Thank you for leading the fight against Vietnam's war, becoming a teacher for the youth in America and all over the world.

Your gaunt figure was reminiscent of Lincoln, of course, but it was also reminiscent of Don Quixote, like you a man of action and a great idealist.

The AABI (Asociación de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales), the ADABIC (Associació d'Amics de les Brigades Internacionals a Catalunya), and the Former Political Prisoners in Spain--we'll never forget your faith in victory, your love for Spanish people and your last travels to Spain, where everyone was astonished about your incredible everlasting youth.

Salud, Milt, y hasta siempre.

Juan María Gómez Ortiz

Albacete, Spain

Dear Editor,

Day before yesterday, here in Australia, I was spending the day down at the Victorian beach house of

the daughter of a very old friend of mine, Netta Burns, passed away some years ago, who traveled with me to Spain first in 1983 for my work on my book and in 1986 for the 50th anniversary of the Civil War. She led our Canberra activity to make the memorial for the Australians who fought in the SCW.

Looking through her photo albums and telling her daughter about the people in the 50th anniversary pictures, Milt Wolff's fine face shone out and I told her about what a splendid man he was and of the happy and great occasion we had there. Then, when I came home and opened my email, I received your message about his death. A very sad occasion.

Please give my my condolence to Milt's family.

Amirah Inglis

Albert Park

CONDOLENCES ON THE PASSING OF MILT WOLFF

On behalf of the Relatives and Friends of Irish International Brigaders, I wish to extend to the relatives of Milt Wolff, to the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and to all at ALBA, our heartfelt condolences on the sad loss of Milt Wolff. It was my privilege to have met Milt in Spain in 1996 at the 60th anniversary commemorations, while my own brigadista father Michael O'Riordan (died 2006) would have been reunited with him on many more occasions, as they are now reunited in our memories.

While old age and illness may reduce the element of surprise on hearing such news, it does not diminish the painful sense of loss on the passing of these heroes, particularly

Continued on page 23

Wolff

Continued from page 1

Wolff, of course, admired the elegant prose. But his heart and soul were always with the rank and file. Back in New York, some of the returned veterans of the Lincoln Brigade read the reports from Spain with amusement: “Hemingway and [Herbert] Matthews say he looks just like Lincoln. Wonder when they saw Lincoln.”

After Spain
Wolff’s iconic stature kept him at the forefront of the struggle to save the Spanish Republic, even after General Francisco Franco claimed military victory in 1939. Wolff participated in street protests in New York, urging Washington officials to lift the embargo on shipments to Spain and to provide assistance for the Spanish refugees trapped in French concentration camps. When the French government threatened to deport these victims of war back to Franco’s Spain, where many would face summary execution, Wolff joined other Lincoln veterans in demonstrations outside the French consulate in New York. He was arrested in 1940 for this activity and served 15 days in jail.

While in court, Wolff was abruptly subpoenaed to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the spring of 1940, the first of many tangles with the government’s anti-Communist crusade. Although Wolff had joined the Young Communist League before going to Spain and had nominally joined the Communist Party of Spain during the war, he always insisted he had not joined the U.S. Communist Party even though he sympathized with its policies. To the government, it was a distinction without a difference, and

Wolff’s movements would be monitored closely by the FBI and other government agencies for decades. Meanwhile, when faced with government inquiries, he answered questions selectively.

From his wartime friendship with journalist Vincent Sheean, Wolff had fortuitously met William Donovan, chosen by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to head the newly formed Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency. During the spring of 1941, Donovan summoned Wolff to his offices in Wall Street and requested Wolff’s assistance in recruiting Lincoln veterans to work for British intelligence. According to Wolff and backed by sparse documentary evidence, this conversation occurred before the German invasion of the Soviet Union and so violated the official Communist position of non-participation in World War II. Wolff’s willingness to cooperate with OSS reflected his flexibility about ideology: though a man of great principles and ideals, he avoided dogma and rhetoric, and he appreciated the imperfections of given situations.

Wolff spent the next year working quietly with British intelligence officials. When the bombing of Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war, Wolff sent a telegram to President Roosevelt offering the services of the Lincoln Brigade in the war effort. He also assisted Donovan’s OSS in recruiting Lincoln veterans for special projects that would later bear fruit in U.S. victories in North Africa, Italy, and the Normandy invasion.

But Wolff saw himself first as a soldier and wanted to participate in the military defeat of fascism. In 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Army,

expecting to serve as an infantryman in battle and to bring his military experience to speed the victory. Those illusions soon confronted a military establishment that saw Spanish Civil War veterans as “premature anti-fascists” and so considered them unacceptable for combat assignments. To his growing frustration, the Army dropped Wolff from Officer Candidate School and gave him non-combatant assignments.

While pulling strings to get a transfer, Wolff picked an assignment that took him to Burma, where he saw action under General Joseph Stillwell. Soon afterward, the OSS summoned Wolff to Italy. There he joined other Lincoln veterans he had earlier recruited, such as Irving Goff, Vincent Lossowski, and Irving Fajans, in establishing intelligence networks among the Communist partisans.

One of Wolff’s proudest achievements was graduating from parachute school, but he was on the ground when he was sent into southern France on a secret mission that was never consummated. However, while there he met members of the Spanish resistance planning to invade Spain. Wolff’s efforts to bring them OSS assistance resulted in his hasty recall and a transfer back to the United States.

In the post-World War II climate, Wolff and other Lincoln vets continued to work for Spanish democracy, tirelessly lobbying the State Department to break relations with Franco Spain and to gain assistance for Spanish refugees and prisoners of the Franco regime. At a time when the U.S. government was creating an anti-Communist alliance that included Franco Spain, however, Wolff’s

Letters

Continued from page 21

when Milt Wolff himself passed on so close to the date of the unveiling of the National Monument at San Francisco.

Indeed, the very last email I received from Moe Fishman, only six weeks before his death last year, stated: “A monument will be put up on the ferry slip next to the Embarcadero, San Francisco. I will send you exact information. Maybe there is some chance you can come across and join us for this occasion.”

Yes, I will certainly honor that invitation to come across to San Francisco to pay tribute to all the Lincoln Brigaders, and, in particular,

to recently departed comrades and friends like Milt Wolff, Moe Fishman and Lou Gordon. And I know that on that occasion my own father will also be joining them in spirit.

Salud y abrazos
Manus O’Riordan
Executive Member for Ireland
International Brigade Memorial Trust

Dear Editor,
I am sad, but at the same time glad to have had the honor to know Milt.
Take good care,

Saturnino Aguado
Dpto. de Fundamentos de Economía e Hª Económica
Universidad de Alcalá
Dear Editor:
It was with great sadness that I read of Milton Wolff’s death today. His life far overshadows anything I can say, but I feel the need to acknowledge that life and his life-long struggle against fascism in all its forms. We are better for his struggle.

Salud,
Theron P. Snell

leadership position alarmed the FBI, which kept him under constant surveillance.

When the Department of Justice classified the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade as a subversive organization in 1947 and the McCarran Act of 1950 obliged the veterans to register with the government, Wolff emerged as the public face of the VALB. He and Moe Fishman presided over the defense of the veterans before the Subversive Activities Control Board in hearings during 1954 and carried the subsequent appeals through the federal courts. During this period, Wolff also worked for the embattled Civil Rights Congress, a left-wing organization that defended African Americans accused on dubious grounds of capital crimes.

As the anti-Communist crusade abated in the 1960s, Wolff remained active in the U.S. Committee for a Democratic Spain, an organization that lobbied against U.S. treaties with the Franco regime, assisted the families of Franco’s political prisoners, and advocated for political reform. Wolff also led the revitalized VALB in demonstrations against the Vietnam War. At one point, he wrote a personal letter to Ho Chi Minh offering the services of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He also advocated ending the trade embargo with Cuba and helped provide medical aid to a children’s hospital in Havana.

During the 1980s, Wolff and other veterans instituted a campaign to send ambulances to Nicaragua, an echo of U.S. domestic support for the Spanish Republic 50 years earlier.

Invited frequently to return to Spain, Wolff was a beloved figure among Spaniards. In a recent visit,

he won cheers when he reminded them that if they got into trouble in the future, “give me a call.”

As he reached his later years, Wolff devoted more time to painting and writing his memoirs in fictional form. He had recently finished a draft of a third volume, dealing with his experiences in World War II.

Through it all, Milton Wolff saw himself as a man of action. For all of his thought and intellect, he knew how to make decisions and get things done. Sometimes, his impulses led to frustrating mistakes, as when he joined the Army expecting to organize an invasion of Spain and found himself exiled as a potential subversive. But he never doubted the choice he made to fight in Spain.

In 2005, nearly 70 years after he’d swum the river waters, he stood at the rail of a boat on the Ebro and paused for a long moment of silence. Then he evoked the men who had died there beside him—“I call them my dead,” he said—and dropped a bundle of red carnations into the water. Now he is with them.

--Peter N. Carroll

Preserving the past...
to change the present.

Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) is an independent, nonprofit educational organization devoted to enlightening the American people about our country's progressive traditions and democratic political values. Over the past twenty-five years ALBA has created the largest U.S. collection of historical sources relating to the Spanish Civil War, including letters, diaries, public documents, photographs, posters, newspapers, videos, and assorted memorabilia. This unique archive is permanently housed at New York University's Tamiment Library, where students, scholars, and researchers may learn about the struggle against fascism.

For more information go to: **WWW.ALBA-VALB.ORG**



☐ Yes, I wish to become an ALBA Associate, and I enclose a check for \$35 made out to ALBA (includes a one year subscription to *The Volunteer*).

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ Zip _____

☐ I've enclosed an additional donation of ____.

I wish ☐ do not wish ☐ to have this donation acknowledged in *The Volunteer*.

Please mail to: ALBA, 799 Broadway, Suite 341,
New York, NY 10003

SAVE THE DATES

March 30, 2008

Unveiling of the Abraham Lincoln
Brigade National Monument
and Bay Area Annual Reunion,
San Francisco

April 27, 2008

New York Annual Reunion,
Skirball Center for the Performing Arts,
New York University



Getting ready for the unveiling, Chris Reed and
Alice Shaw display a tile from the monument.
Photo by Peter Glazer.



www.alba-valb.org

Support the National Monument!

The Volunteer

c/o Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives
799 Broadway, Suite 341
New York, NY 10003

NON PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
SAN FRANCISCO, CA
PERMIT NO. 1577