

American Tourists in Spain

Ernest Hemingway and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade

The novelist Ernest Hemingway was the most famous American writer to endorse the Spanish Republic during its civil war. He was generous with his funds and with his words, urging the public to support the elected government. The U.S. volunteers viewed him both as a celebrity and an ally, and Hemingway reciprocated in his friendship. But his great novel of the war, For Whom the Bell Tolls, disappointed many veterans for political reasons, and the wartime alliance between the writer and many of the ex-soldiers collapsed. Still, for many Lincoln veterans, Hemingway's presence in Spain remained unforgettable and their love-hate relationship continued long after his suicide in 1961. This paper, first written circa 1989 to attract editorial interest in my book proposal about the Lincoln Brigade, has been revised many times as new information surfaced.

▷ “Nine men commanded the Lincoln and Lincoln-Washington Battalions,” wrote Ernest Hemingway in 1939 at the end of the Spanish Civil War. By then, four were dead and four were wounded. The ninth and last commander, Milton Wolff was 23, “tall as Lincoln, gaunt as Lincoln, and as brave and as good a soldier as any that commanded battalions at Gettysburg.”¹

A native of Brooklyn, Wolff stood six feet two in bare feet and a few inches higher in the muddied brown boots he had picked up after swimming across the flooded Ebro River during the great retreats in the Aragon province in the spring of 1938, a few months before Hemingway wrote his profile. The journalist Vincent James Sheean, who, like Hemingway, wrote about the Spanish Civil War for various American newspapers, had witnessed Wolff's unexpected return after being lost for six days behind enemy lines and had seen him enter the small *chabola*, a hastily built hut that served as battalion headquarters after the recent debacles. “You built



Milton Wolff and Ernest Hemingway near the Ebro Front, spring 1938. According to Wolff, when this photo appeared in the New York Yiddish newspaper *The Forward*, his mother learned that contrary to her son's claim to be working in a factory behind the lines, he was really captain of the Abraham Lincoln battalion. (Photographer unknown; attributed by Milton Wolff to Robert Capa. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.)

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 with concentration. I think he knew how glad they all were to see him, and wanted to ignore it as much as possible."²

Spain in wartime captured the passion and the professional interests of the finest writers of the 1930s. Most of them gave their talents to defend the Republican, or Loyalist, side against the military rebellion launched in July 1936 by General Francisco Franco and a coalition of monarchists, the Catholic hierarchy, large landowners, and fascists. Weighed against the military aid Franco received from Italy's Mussolini and Germany's Hitler, the literary voices that rallied to the Spanish Republic brought scant assistance. But perhaps, in compensation, they

offered remarkably lucid prose and poetry. The English novelist Ralph Bates, who had served as political commissar of the Anglo-American Fifteenth Brigade, spoke to the League of American Writers in New York in 1937, stressing the natural sympathy intellectuals felt for the Republic, referring to “our sense of sharing the responsibility for the war.” Writers “who have spread democratic ideas,” he explained, “are really responsible for the fact that hundreds of thousands are now dead because they refused to live under fascism.”³

Such feelings impelled numerous authors to visit Spain as eyewitnesses and reporters; others journeyed to the war to fight. And some who went to witness the war, such as the young journalist James Lardner, son of the celebrated writer Ring Lardner, wound up enlisting in the ranks, much to the consternation of his older colleague, Ernest Hemingway. Another Hemingway friend, the poet Evan Shipman, drove an ambulance, as his mentor had during the World War. But Lardner, wounded once in action, rebuffed requests to withdraw and disappeared into an ambush just before all foreign soldiers were withdrawn from combat. He was the last American volunteer killed in Spain.

Among the English stood the poets W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender; young writers like John Cornford and Julian Bell, both killed in battle; and the renowned George Orwell, who was wounded fighting with the anarchists on the Aragon front and returned home to write *Homage to Catalonia*, describing the conflict between local leftist revolutionaries and the central government. Orwell lived, however, to have second thoughts. In a 1943 essay titled “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” he conceded, “The Fascists won because they were stronger. . . . No political strategy could offset that.”⁴

French intellectuals, closer geographically to Spain and to the fascist powers, hoped to stop the aggressors on Spanish soil. None was more influential than the novelist André Malraux, who described the early months of the war in a fictionalized memoir, *Man's Hope*, portraying the conflict between political idealism and the obligations of war. “When a Communist addresses an international conference, he puts his fist on the table,” the novelist said. “When a fascist addresses an international conference, he puts his feet on the table. . . . A Democrat—be he American, English, or French—when he addresses an international conference, scratches his head, and asks questions.” Rejecting ambivalence, Malraux helped organize the Spanish Republic’s air forces and, then, in the spring

of 1937, embarked on a tour of the United States, seeking military aid for Spain. "It is good that writers and artists have their share of responsibility here," he told the Artists and Writers Ambulance Corps in New York, a group that was raising money for medical aid for Spain; "so that this swelling tide of democratic voices may be the roar which comes from the other side of the ocean to muffle the dull noise of human suffering."⁵

The words resonated for the culture critic of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the novelist Alvah Bessie, who interviewed Malraux at his Manhattan hotel and became captivated by the Frenchman's political sensibilities. "He is that rare being," wrote Bessie, "an artist and a man of action, the one inseparable from the other."⁶ Bessie was impressed by Malraux's stories of aviation. As a seven-year-old boy, Bessie had witnessed a flight by Orville Wright above Manhattan in a biplane and ever since had yearned to fly. He had recently published the novel *Dwell in the Wilderness* and written short stories good enough to appear in the annual O. Henry anthologies. Now he took Malraux as a model, joined a flying club on Long Island, and began to earn his wings. Bessie flew solo for the first time on July 4, 1937, and resolved to follow Malraux's path to Spain. Leaving behind a stormy marriage and two young sons, he volunteered to join the International Brigades to aid the Spanish Republic. He was 33, slightly older than most of the American volunteers, and some of his comrades called him Papa. He took with him a pocket-sized notebook, which he used to record his experiences in the war. When Bessie arrived in Spain, however, he learned that by then only Spanish nationals could serve in the Republican air force. Instead, he enlisted in the Lincoln Battalion.

Other American writers journeyed to Spain, bore witness, and transmitted reports to the public at home. At a time when politicians decried the financial tangles that had drawn the United States into the world war, Washington refused to support the Spanish government against the military rebellion. Rather, the White House adopted the "non-interventionist" policies of Britain and France. Those "Western democracies," as President Franklin D. Roosevelt called them, opposed the left-leaning Republic and had no interest in hastening another general war. Germany and Italy also agreed to non-intervention, but only on paper. Meanwhile, Josef Stalin's Soviet Union responded to the fascists' support of Franco by providing limited military assistance to the Republic. Since the rebels obtained abundant support from Hitler and Mussolini, the non-intervention policies served primarily to isolate the elected government.

United States neutrality, formalized by congressional legislation in January 1937, reflected widespread "isolationist" sentiments. American volunteers ignored diplomatic formalities. They applied for passports as "tourists" or "students," sometimes using false names and, in cases where those tricks failed, sneaked aboard ships and stowed away. Few people were fooled by the tourist disguise. At Le Havre, U.S. consular officials warned travelers of the risks of violating the neutrality laws. "You're supposed to be tourists," Alvah Bessie was advised in Paris; "so act the part. . . ." We wondered," he recalled, "how we could look like tourists; eight men with identical paper parcels getting off at the same station. Eight men? Perhaps eighty men. We didn't ask."⁷ By 1937, when most of the volunteers landed in Europe, France had closed the border with Spain. At sea, Italian submarines attacked coastal shipping to the Republic. Consequently, most Americans entered Spain only after a dangerous midnight climb over the steep Pyrenees, guided by experienced smugglers.

Their violation of passport laws would haunt the volunteers for the rest of their lives. But precisely because non-intervention proved to be a pro-Franco policy, most writers felt obliged to seek wider public support for the Loyalist cause. The list of names is long, including Erskine Caldwell, Malcolm Cowley, Lillian Hellman, Josephine Herbst, and Dorothy Parker. The writer Langston Hughes went to Spain to write about the black volunteers for the African American press. In the summer of 1937, he joined another poet and Lincoln volunteer, Edwin Rolfe, to send shortwave radio broadcasts from Madrid to the United States. Stressing the lack of racial prejudice in Republican Spain, Hughes warned that "if fascism creeps across Spain, across Europe, and then across the world, there will be no place left for intelligent young Negroes at all."⁸ After a visit to Barcelona in 1938, the novelist Theodore Dreiser pleaded with the French foreign minister Georges Bonnet to send a few automobiles urgently needed to assist Spanish refugees across the border. "In Paris," Dreiser reported, "Bonnet said he would see what could be done. But nothing was done."⁹

The novelist John Dos Passos left Spain with a different anger. Having gone there to assist Ernest Hemingway and Joris Ivens in making a pro-Republic propaganda film, *The Spanish Earth*, he was shocked to learn that his old friend and translator, José Robles, had been killed by communist agents. His political views changed instantly, and he began

to condemn the Republican cause. The reversal infuriated Hemingway, who made no apologies for the communists, but insisted that the survival of the Republic was more important. "A war is still being fought in Spain," he protested in 1938; ". . . [F]or you to try constantly to make out that the war the government is fighting against the fascist Italian, German Moorish invasion is a communist business imposed on the will of the people is sort of viciously pitiful."¹⁰

Later scholars and biographers of Hemingway, looking back at Spain from the perspective of the Cold War, would criticize his failure to address communist machinations while the war was being fought. By contrast, writers on the Left would denounce the novelist's portrayal of specific communist leaders in Spain, sometimes excusing his lack of ideological commitment by saying he was "naive." But it was Hemingway's unyielding dedication to Spain—not so much to the government as to the Spaniards he loved and respected—that earned him the admiration of the Lincoln volunteers. The New York-born poet Edwin Rolfe, "having heard much" of Hemingway's anti-Semitism, initially "felt like meeting him even less than he felt like meeting me—nil," but came in Spain to respect the novelist's character—"a sort of overgrown boy," he noted in his diary, "very likeable." Later, in his history of the Lincoln Battalion, Rolfe acknowledged that "the presence of this huge, bull-shouldered man with the questioning eyes and the full-hearted interest in everything that Spain was fighting for instilled in the tired Americans some of his own strength and quiet unostentatious courage."¹¹

Believing that the Spanish war would be "a dress rehearsal" for a general war in Europe, Hemingway embarked for Spain, promising to write "anti-war war correspondence" to keep the United States out of the conflict "when it comes." His work on *The Spanish Earth*—Hemingway eventually wrote and narrated the film's voiceover—showed sophisticated military understanding, and his dispatches for the North American Newspaper Alliance revealed his commitment to the Republican cause. Once he visited a wounded American volunteer, Robert Raven, blinded in both eyes by a grenade, who had attended the University of Pittsburgh. "And it still isn't you that gets hit," Hemingway told readers in the United States, "but it is your countryman now. Your countryman from Pennsylvania, where once we fought at Gettysburg." Returning to America, he spoke to a Writers Congress in New York about the evils of fascism. "A writer who will not lie cannot live and work under fascism," he said.¹²

The journalist Martha Gellhorn (Hemingway's lover and later his third wife) covered the war for *Collier's* magazine. Using her personal friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, she arranged for Hemingway and filmmaker Joris Ivens to have a private screening of *The Spanish Earth* for President Roosevelt and a few administration officials at the White House, impressing them with their commitment for Republican Spain. Like Hemingway, Gellhorn expressed no doubt about the importance of the war's outcome. "It is not a war between Spaniards," she later wrote to Mrs. Roosevelt, "it is a fight between one democracy and three fascisms."¹³

Having failed to alter Washington policy, the filmmaker-writers took a train to the west coast to raise money for ambulances. Hemingway also paid for the passage of a few Lincoln volunteers, including, the ambulance driver-poet Evan Shipman. On a second trip to Madrid Hemingway and Gellhorn lived in the Hotel Florida, subject to sporadic shelling and bombardment from Franco's forces. "All this was very strange, like movie music," wrote Gellhorn of the echoing sounds of war, "and you had to keep telling yourself that men were making this, and more men were out there half a mile away where the shells hit."¹⁴

Despite the shortages of wartime, the Florida tried to maintain an air of elegance—polished silverware, table linens, waiter service. But the menu seldom varied—bread, garbanzo beans, orange slices, cheap wine, and rough brandy. "There was never enough food," Edwin Rolfe would later write, "but always poetry." Hemingway's room served as a watering hole for soldiers on leave from the front. Here they enjoyed hot baths, Hemingway's private store of delicacies—hams, cheeses, even caviar—and a magical fifth of scotch that never dwindled. "No visiting American Brigadier," one veteran recalled, "was ever denied the pleasure of his company or cigarettes, or a long pull at this bottomless bottle."¹⁵

Hemingway's other watering hole was the Café Chicote, which he remembered from prewar days as the place where "the good guys went." One warm afternoon, shortly after the fighting at Bruneté in the summer of 1937, Hemingway sat drinking at a crowded table in Chicote's with Shipman and Herbert Matthews, the *New York Times* Republican correspondent (the *Times* sent the pro-fascist William Carney to cover the other side), as well as some Lincoln soldiers on leave and some Spanish women. The 21-year-old Milton Wolff, steered there by his captain, Philip Detro from Texas, entered the bar to say hello. Wolff was then leader of a machine gun company. A high school dropout, he'd barely heard of Hemingway's

literary work and remained unimpressed by the chit-chat. "Ernest is quite childish in many respects," Wolff 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." Wolff stuck around long enough to pick up one of Hemingway's women friends. Only later did Edwin Rolfe tell him that the novelist had arranged the affair. "I just wanted to cheer you up," a Hemingway-type character remarked in a similarly situated story, "Night Before Battle." "Grow up," the soldier replied; "what's one more?" The Hemingway answer: "One more."¹⁶

Wolff visited the writer again at the Florida and read manuscript pages of *The Fifth Column*, Hemingway's only play. They did not meet again until the following spring, when Hemingway covered the retreats of the Republican army on the Aragon front. Robert Capa, the legendary photographer, captured them together: Hemingway—stocky, curious, an adventurer in his half-opened, zippered jacket; Wolff—lanky in uniform, a beret covering his dark hair, but shy, hands in his pockets, face turned downward, wanting to get on with the war. "Hemingway was eager as a child," Alvah Bessie wrote of this visit to the front, "like a big kid, and you liked him. He asked questions like a kid: 'What then? What happened then? And what did *you* do? And what did *he* say?'" Bessie was flattered when the novelist recognized his name and immediately felt bad about the critical reviews of Hemingway's novels he'd written. Other writers were more sardonic about the novelist's appearance. The poet James Neugass was filling in a shell hole when "a small limousine came tearing down the road so fast I had to put on the ditchdiving act I use when the planes come near. 'That's Hemingway,' said someone pointing at the vanishing cloud of dust. 'He's a writer and I'm a writer,' I thought and went back to work."¹⁷

A few weeks later, the photograph of Hemingway and Wolff appeared in the photogravure section of a New York Yiddish newspaper. To her surprise, Wolff's mother finally learned what her absent son was doing in Spain. Not, as he reported in his letters, working in a factory so that a Spanish worker could fight at the front, but leapfrogging through the ranks from machine gunner at Bruneté to commanding officer of the Lincoln Battalion. A "nobody at home," Rolfe wrote about Wolff in his diary, "leader of men here." With others, Rolfe observed, the reverse had been true.¹⁸

While the Lincolns launched a bold offensive on the Ebro front during the summer of 1938, Hemingway returned to America to write his Spanish war stories. The news from Europe remained bad. At the Mu-

nich conference in September, the British and French capitulated to Hitler's territorial demands, agreeing to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Appeasement of the dictators boded no good for Republican Spain. In a desperate effort to end the charade of non-intervention, the Spanish premier Juan Negrín appealed to the League of Nations in Geneva for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Spanish territory, including the International Brigades. The League agreed only to supervise the withdrawal of the volunteers on the Republican side, including many soldiers who were not permitted to return to their home countries. Franco made no concessions and the war continued unabated.

Hemingway returned to Barcelona in November 1938 and planted himself at the Majestic Hotel, described by Vincent Sheean as "almost the worst hotel in Europe," but which during wartime had cultivated a "friendly atmosphere and was used to the strange hours and stranger behavior of the foreign correspondents."¹⁹ Together with Matthews, Sheean, and Capa, Hemingway toured the battle front along the Ebro and later visited the remnants of the American volunteers at Ripoll. He met Bessie again, congratulating him on surviving the war. "I always felt responsible for your being here," he admitted. When Bessie wondered why, Hemingway mentioned the speech that Bessie had heard him deliver at the Writers Congress. Bessie, thinking of Malraux, was struck by the exaggeration.²⁰

As last commander of the Lincoln Battalion, Wolff moved around more than most of the soldiers waiting for repatriation. He stayed at the Majestic, attended meetings with Spanish communist leaders, and enjoyed the writers' company. Among the hotel's other residents was the sculptor Jo Davidson, who was completing a series of clay models of the leaders of the Spanish Republic—among them the charismatic communist Dolores Ibárruri; Julio Álvarez Del Vayo, minister of foreign affairs; and El Campesino, the popular general. But he wanted an American face and 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 a shave, nearly causing the sculptor to cancel the session.

It was this clay composition that Hemingway depicted when he wrote about Wolff at the end of the war. Both, by then, believed that Spain would be the prelude to another world war, which would surely embroil the United States. Once again, Hemingway drew analogies to the American Civil War. Wolff, "gaunt as Lincoln," symbolized that earlier battle for

freedom. The name Lincoln Battalion deliberately reflected a cult of the sixteenth president that flourished during the 1930s and included Hollywood films by D. W. Griffith (*Abraham Lincoln*, 1930) and the characterizations by Paul Muni and Henry Fonda in *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. From this perspective, the Lincoln volunteers in Spain were also defending the legal government from a violent insurrection. American conservatives who supported the Franco side typically appealed to George Washington, a founding father. In this isolationist decade, public interest in foreign affairs demanded a local touch.

Hemingway manipulated the symbols of Lincoln's Civil War deliberately. Just as President Lincoln resisted Confederate efforts to trade with Britain, anti-fascists criticized Washington's policy of embargoing the elected government while allowing commerce with the Franco side. Hemingway used other Civil War metaphors. His elegy "To the American Dead," which appeared in the left-wing magazine *New Masses*, evoked the timelessness of mortal sacrifice and the historical immediacy of their cause. "The fascists may spread over the land, blasting their way with the weight of metal brought from other countries," he wrote. "They may destroy cities and villages and try to hold the people in slavery. But you cannot hold any people in slavery."²¹ For Hemingway, Wolff personified that tradition. "He is a retired major now at twenty-three and still alive," said Hemingway, "and pretty soon he will be coming home as other men his 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 at home for long."²²

Hemingway departed Spain in November 1938, already at work on war stories that would culminate in a major novel. His sympathies appeared unchanged. "There is only one thing to do when you have a war," he declared, "and that is win it." Driven by a desire to validate his commitment, he wrote feverishly. By the end of the year, he had written over one hundred thousand words. He also remained sensitive to criticism. When Alvah Bessie questioned the politics of one of his stories, Hemingway attacked the "ideology boys," suggesting that "what was wrong with his outfit was too much ideology and not enough military training, discipline or materiel."²³

He nevertheless maintained friendly relations with the Lincoln veterans, helping Bessie land a publisher for his memoir, *Men in Battle*, and praising it as "a true, honest, fine book." He paid hospital bills for Rolfe's

wife, sent money to others in need, and wrote letters to assist foreign-born veterans caught by immigration officials on Ellis Island. "The people . . . [who] did nothing about defending the Spanish Republic," he complained, "now feel a great need to attack us who tried to do something . . . to justify themselves in their selfishness and cowardice." When Wolff approached him for a loan to underwrite a chicken and egg farm cooperative for some unemployed veterans, the novelist advanced four hundred dollars on his word. It would be the last time they met.²⁴

By the time Hemingway's classic *For Whom the Bell Tolls* appeared in October 1940, the camaraderie of the Spanish war had shattered amid the twists and turns of global politics. The novel did not tell the story of the Lincoln volunteers, as many had expected, but focused on a single volunteer, "Robert Jordan," sent on a special mission to demolish a bridge behind enemy lines. There are important parallels between Hemingway and his fictional hero. Both, as the novel puts it, "fought now in this war because it had started in a country that he loved, and he believed in the Republic and that if it were destroyed life would be unbearable for all those people who believe in it."

Like the novelist, Jordan expressed little interest in ideology other than being "anti-fascist," and accepted "Communist discipline" only because it seemed the most effective way to win the war.²⁵ Indeed, most scholars have assumed that Hemingway's hero, an amalgam of personalities, was based largely on the communist-leaning commander of the Lincoln Battalion, Robert Merriman, who, like Jordan, had an academic background. A more likely model, however, is the later battalion commander Philip Detro, a non-communist Texan who shared leadership with commissar Fred Keller. "Where I come from," Detro would kid Keller, "we shoot communists." Hemingway, in a letter to Milton Wolff, described "A guy named Detro with no more politics than Robert Jordan [who] commanded that battalion before you did."²⁶ In any case, Hemingway's fiction showed the communists not as heroes but as foolish, selfish, hypocritical leaders, a necessary evil perhaps in real life but near villains in the book. There was ample reason for the Lincoln volunteers, somewhere between two-thirds and three-quarters of whom were affiliated with the Communist Party, to despise the book's political views.

"It was going to be the greatest book," Fred Keller recalled. "It was going to vindicate us all. Now somebody was going to tell the true story about why we went to Spain." Instead, the novel tripped sensitive nerves.

During the summer of 1939, as Europe plunged toward a second world war, liberals like Hemingway and communists like Bessie, Rolfe, and Wolff shared a common anti-fascist position. When Hemingway privately expressed interest in enlisting in the French army, Bessie wrote to Rolfe, "He loves [war], the dope. We'll be in before you can count the letters in totalitarian," he predicted.²⁷

The surprise announcement of the signing of a German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939 rapidly altered the political context. The liberal literary critic Alfred Kazin chided those who remained in the Communist Party as "ideologues," lacking "moral imagination."²⁸ Hemingway was no communist. Yet he had no trouble rationalizing the diplomatic reversal. "The Soviet Union was not bound by any pact with Hitler when the International Brigades fought in Spain," he said. "It was only after they lost any faith in the democracies that the Alliance was born."²⁹ This analysis mirrored the feelings among most Lincoln veterans. Having experienced the consequences of Anglo-French non-intervention in Spain, they had no desire to encourage U.S. assistance for the allies who had strangled the Spanish Republic. Thus, as President Roosevelt moved to increase U.S. aid to the allies, traded American destroyers for British naval bases, and supported the first peacetime conscription laws in U.S. history, the organization Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB) announced "This is not our war."

Arriving in the middle of this heated political climate, Hemingway's Spanish novel aroused a bitter controversy among the Lincoln veterans. Already facing government harassment for their political beliefs—summoned before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, their offices raided by FBI agents who confiscated papers, charged with political offenses on the state and local levels—Lincoln veterans viewed *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as an anti-communist work. "What emerges from your book," VALB declared in an open letter, "is a picture so drastically mutilated and distorted . . . as to slander the cause for which we fought, which the great majority of the democratic people of the world supported, and which you yourself honorably sustained both by your writing and your personal action." In a series of particulars, the Lincolns charged Hemingway with placing all the atrocities on the Republican side; using the real names of leading communists for the purpose of criticizing their decisions; and maligning the role of Soviet advisors in Spain. In a prescient comment, Alvah Bessie also warned that Hemingway "will

live to see every living and dead representative of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion attacked and slandered because of the great authority that attaches to Hemingway's name and his known connection to Spain."³⁰

In the continuing debate, Milton Wolff, Hemingway's heroic civilian-soldier, stood with his battalion, accusing the novelist of having been a "tourist" and a "rooter" in Spain. Hemingway fired back. "What would you like me to have done to aid the cause of the Spanish Republic that I did not do?" Indeed, Hemingway's personal efforts outside of journalism were not known to the Lincoln veterans in 1940. News of his visit with Martha Gellhorn to the White House did not circulate in Spain. And the novelist's secret mission behind enemy lines—not, like Robert Jordan's, to blow up a bridge but to provide intelligence about the prevailing political climate in an unnamed town—was not something Hemingway would admit or discuss publicly. Instead, in anger, he called Wolff "a prick." Then within a month he retracted the insult. The Lincolns went on denouncing the book, even holding a public symposium to criticize the novel and the novelist.

The release in 1943 of the movie version of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, starring Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman, perpetuated the antagonism. Hemingway, possibly responding to the Lincolns' earlier complaints, had criticized the Hollywood script, written by Dudley Nichols, for its lack of political clarity.³¹ "It gives *nothing* of the reason for which a man will die and know it is well for him to die." He proposed that "the enemy should be called the Fascists and the Republic should be called the Republic. . . . Unless you make this emphasis the people seeing the picture will have no idea what the [Spanish] people were fighting for." His complaints produced no results. And Lincoln veterans like Alvah Bessie and Milton Wolff, even the former guerrilla fighters in Spain William Aalto and Irving Goff continued to scorn Hemingway's work. "The green boy-scouts are the fanatical dopes. (Hemingway)," said Aalto; as for the movie, "it stank."³²

Despite the sniping and Hemingway's deep resentment of what he considered unjustified criticism, Lincoln veterans understood the power of his reputation and often appealed for his assistance. During World War II, the U.S. Army had treated Spanish Civil War veterans as potentially disloyal soldiers, labeling them "premature anti-fascists."³³ As the Cold War with the Soviet Union intensified after 1945 and government agencies launched a domestic anti-communist campaign, the veterans, both as a group and as individuals, faced condemnation and harassment

for their political views. Nevertheless, they remained outspoken critics of the victorious Franco regime in Spain and of the U.S. foreign policy that supported his dictatorship. To commemorate their continuing defiance of fascism, VALB planned a tenth-anniversary celebration on Lincoln's birthday in 1947 and invited Hemingway to New York to read his eulogy "To the American Dead in Spain." Wolff made the phone call, but the novelist had other commitments. Instead, he offered to send a recording of his reading.³⁴

In his dry, Midwestern voice, sharing an old camaraderie, he mentioned first his pleasure to be in the company again of "premature anti-fascists." He said that the soldiers of World War II likely would have been able to stay at home if Washington "would have let us win in Spain." It was knowing that, Hemingway said, that "made a man a premature anti-fascist." Hemingway could not resist pointing out that having to wear World War II army helmets had turned "many premature anti-fascists prematurely bald."

Hemingway afterward maintained an occasional correspondence with Lincoln veterans, particularly Rolfe, Wolff, and Irving Fajans. When Rolfe sent him an elegy to the city of Madrid, the novelist wrote back that it had made him cry. Wolff also appealed for his assistance to help Lincoln veterans facing imprisonment for defying anti-communist committees in Washington. Hemingway kept his distance, acknowledging that Dr. Edward Barsky, a frontline surgeon in Spain and head of a Spanish refugee aid committee, was a "saint," but feeling that others did not deserve his friendship. "You guys sort of bought this anyway," he said. "You hired out to be tough and then somebody gets hit and says you can't do this to me."³⁵ Wolff ended this round of their correspondence lamenting Hemingway's failure to speak out against the raging anticommunist atmosphere. "What we all need from you," he wrote, "is a handful of brave words."³⁶

It was this lingering antagonism that prompted a contingent of Lincoln veterans to oppose the inclusion of Hemingway's eulogy in an anthology of literary works about the Spanish Civil War, eventually published under the title *The Heart of Spain* in 1952.³⁷ After Wolff led a formal vote to exclude Hemingway's work, Fajans resigned as editor, leaving Bessie, now facing prison for contempt of Congress as one of the Hollywood Ten, to explain the decision. "Under the name and prestige of

Hemingway," he concluded, "important aid was thus given to humanity's worst enemies." "Bessie," Hemingway said, "I consider to be a jerk on the best day he ever lived."³⁸

Nor did the quarrel cease. The controversy between Hemingway and the Lincolns was no literary debate, but rather addressed issues of responsibility. Were the Lincolns responsible for alleged communist crimes in Spain? Did their commitment to the Republic justify persecution at home? For their part, the veterans demanded accountability from Hemingway for the plight of the Spanish people living under Franco. To what degree had his novel contributed to the pro-Franco sentiment in the United States? Should Hemingway have spoken out? Should he have accepted journalistic assignments in the dictatorship during the 1950s?

"I don't know one damned thing about [André] Marty," Wolff assured Herbert Matthews twenty-five years later, referring to Hemingway's prime villain, the head of the International Brigades. "And *that's* significant."³⁹ Whatever the machinations of the Communist Party in Spain—and Hemingway knew about some of them—Wolff argued that the Lincoln volunteers had fought primarily as anti-fascists—and were ignorant and innocent of Stalinist politics in Spain. No evidence exists showing that Lincolns killed anyone in Spain on political grounds, except fascists. Moreover, Wolff insisted that Hemingway neither faced the risks of warfare in Spain nor saw best friends and comrades killed nearby. "He was a 'tourist' in Spain," Wolff told Bessie in 1981, "a voyeur who darted in and out of action as it pleased him. . . . Which is not to say Ernest Hemingway was not on our side. He was. And his contribution was considerable. . . . But his commitment was not as ours." Unlike the Lincolns, Wolff advised another comrade, Hemingway "was free to choose where to go, when to go, when not to go. . . . In other words his commitment was such that he could write *For Whom the Bell Tolls* without taking into account what was truly best for *la causa*." The result, said Wolff, was that for Hemingway "the essence of commitment to the struggle did not exist."⁴⁰

Ironically, despite Wolff's criticism of Hemingway, it could be said that the Lincoln volunteers were the real tourists in Spain, at least at the beginning. Unlike the novelist, who had long shown his love of the Spanish people, most of the Lincolns knew almost nothing of the country they went to help: not its geography, customs, food, language, or culture. They went to Spain, as Hemingway stated, for reasons of "ideology."

They might have gone anywhere to fight fascism (later, during World War II, they did just that). But in Spain their ideology did mature into love, leaving them with a passionate desire to see Spain free.

"Ideology," to use Hemingway's word, made all the difference: it motivated the Lincolns to take action, to risk their lives to affirm anti-fascist principles and the idea that an elected government should be protected from aggression. Unlike the many sympathetic writers in Spain who struggled to awaken the public mind in America, the Lincolns faced genuine deprivation, exhaustion, injury, pain, and death. Over eight hundred Americans were buried in Spain; nearly all were wounded at least once. For them, the war was literally a struggle between life and death, a struggle, therefore, they could never abandon.

"Ideology" also carried the Lincolns outside the American mainstream. Unlike Hemingway, they were never welcomed back home. While he was writing a best-selling novel and earning an enormous sum for the film rights, they endured endless harassment from government agencies and employers. And while Hemingway eventually made peace with the Franco regime, the Lincolns fought to prevent Spain's admission into the United Nations, opposed the mutual aid agreements made between the United States and Franco, and struggled to send aid to Spanish refugees in concentration camps in France and political prisoners caged in Franco's cells. Indeed, "ideology" could thwart their best interests: expunging Hemingway's work from their anthology offended the very people they wanted to reach.

Those attitudes dominated the rest of their lives. "If you lose [a war]," Hemingway wrote in 1939, "you lose everything and your ideology won't save you." Most of the Lincolns—Hemingway's "ideology boys"—clung to the opposite view. Although they "lost the war," Milton Wolff insisted, "neither the Spaniards nor the [International Brigades], nor anti-fascists of any mettle, lost their ideology, much less 'everything.'" To Wolff, writing twenty years after Hemingway's suicide, the novelist's lack of political commitments meant "he had no ideology to save him in the end and contrary to what he says it is exactly that that saved us. And may yet save the world." It was this spirit of commitment—unswerving optimism in the face of political defeat and personal tragedy—that distinguished Lincoln veterans from many literary observers and reporters. To be fair, there were also many writers, Hemingway's ex-wife, Martha Gellhorn among them, who remained outspoken critics of the Franco regime. For

them, Spain was the touchstone, symbol of anguish and hope that gave continuity to their lives.⁴¹

And the world moved on. After Franco's death in 1975, veterans of the Lincoln Brigade returned to Spain, individually and in tourist groups, old men and women come to testify about their role in history and to celebrate the anniversary of their youthful struggles. Fifty years after the war began, as Alvah Bessie prepared a second literary anthology of Spanish Civil War writings, the veterans were proud to include Hemingway's elegy "To the American Dead in Spain." By then, the Spanish dictator lay in his grave and a parliamentary government had taken the first steps toward a modern democracy. To be sure, the transition hinged on a so-called "pact of silence" by which the incipient democracy agreed not to discuss, much less redress, the enormous crimes committed by the Franco regime during and after the Spanish Civil War. Nevertheless, it seemed time to make peace with the past. For the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the war was finally over. "The dead do not need to rise," Hemingway said. "They are a part of the earth now and the earth can never be conquered. . . . It will outlive all systems of tyranny. Those who have entered it honorably, and no men ever entered earth more honorably than those who died in Spain, already have achieved immortality."⁴²