

Salud Bernie: Revisited

A Tour of Places Connected with the
Memories of Bernard Entin and the Spanish Civil War

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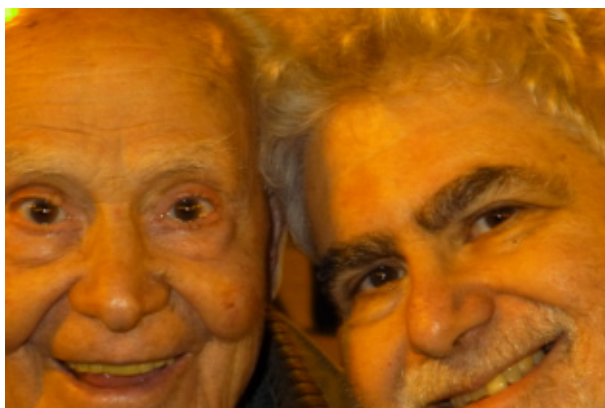
“That’s the real tragedy of war, you know. None of us will ever see what the dead might have accomplished with their lives. What their sons and daughters would have grown up to do. It’s the waste, not the dying, that’s so horrid.” Charles E Todd, author, *The Murder Stone*

“But save a life and you will save the whole world...”
“And the old shall dream dreams and the youth shall see visions...”
Debbie Friedman, singer, songwriter, Debbie Friedlander at Carnegie Hall

This trip to Spain was personal. There were only three of us, all with personal connections to the Spanish Civil War. Josie Nelson, daughter of Stephen Nelson, a beloved and charismatic leader who was the Commissar of the Lincoln Brigade in Belchite; Vaughn ("Parkie") Parker whose half brother Clinton DeWitt was a battalion political commissar and killed at the battle of Belchite on his first day in action; and myself. My Uncle Bernard ("Butch") was killed in Brunete and I wrote about his life in the March 2006 Volunteer. Our tour guide was Alan Warren who is extremely enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the Spanish Civil War.

It was also very personal because we each wanted to visit not only the sites of the Spanish Civil War, but the places our relatives fought and gave their lives for a cause in which they deeply believed: the freedom of the Spanish people.

On our first evening in Madrid we were going out to dinner and passed a protest march in the Plaza del Sol. To my surprise and utter delight I saw Gervasio Puerta and his wife in the crowd. Gervasio is president of the Asociación de Ex-Presos y Represaliados Politicos, one of the organizations that sponsored the protest against Franco's policies of repressed memories of the Spanish Civil War. He had been a prisoner during the Franco regime for over 20 years. I had the pleasure of meeting and dining with Gervasio and his wife at two previous Homenajes de las Brigadas Internacionales.



Alan and Gervasio at Protest Rally in Madrid

We started our trip with a visit to Seve Monterro, president of AABI (International Association of Friends of the International Brigadistas). Seve translated an article I wrote about my uncle and used it during last summer's march to Brunette which he organizes.



Alan giving Seve photo Grafiti Nuevo 2, Castelldefels, at AABI Offices

Afterwards, we went to Villanueva de Cañada to meet with the deputy Alcadesa (vice mayor) about naming a street after the famed photographer Gerda Taro, who, coincidentally, was killed in Brunete when she was standing on the running board of a car that was sideswiped by a retreating Russian tank and subsequently died of her wounds, the same day as Bernie.

We then visited Morata de Tajuana to see the battlefields of the Battle of Jarama, the Museo de la Batalla del Jarama, and the Monument to the International Brigades, unveiled and dedicated at the 70th Anniversary of the International Brigades in October, 2006. We ate lunch at the Meson El Cid, where we also ate after the dedication of the Monument, and visited the Museo de la Batalla del Jarama, curated by Gregorio Salcedo Diaz, next door. Everywhere we went on our tour Alan introduced us by our relationship to our family members who were Brigadistas; their response was universal admiration for our relatives and they were pleased to meet us and thank us for the sacrifices our families made for them. Gregorio was no exception. He was interested in my uncle's story because Bernie fought and died in the general area. When I showed him photographs of my uncle and told him that I had written up the story of his life, in English with a copy in Spanish, translated by Seve, he was interested in it for the new room addition he is creating for his museum. This was quite a thrill that Uncle Bernie will be memorialized here and in this way.



New addition being built to the Museo de la Batalla del Jarama

The tour of the Monument to the International Brigades was a heartbreaker! The Monument, so lovingly dedicated and surrounded by green growth, wreathes and flowers in 2006, now was not only barren of life, but most of all, it was vandalized, black and orange paint thrown and splattered on the plaques and memorial. While I had no expectation that the photograph of Bernie that I placed in the grass next to the Monument would still be there after four years, although I hoped my placement would preserve it, on a wooden stick with a Star of David on top, sent to me by Martin Sugarman of the Museum of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women in London, after viewing the Monument I wondered whether the fragility of the photograph was destroyed by time or vandalism. How sad the lack of tolerance leads to such desecration.



Monument to the International Brigades, Morata de Tajuna

We went back to Villanueva de Cañada the next day to meet with historian Ernesto Viñas. During lunch, he showed us many maps of Brunete prior to and during the war, showing the extent of the devastation the town sustained during the war. After lunch Ernesto took us to a nearby hilltop where the front line of the attack began on July 6, 1937. In contrast to the extreme heat they probably experienced that summer, we observed the areas where the fighting took place in Brunete on a windy, cold, overcast afternoon. Ernesto pointed out the strategic positions of the troops and the areas of the retreats at the end of the battle and roughly where my uncle might have been killed by the “Condor Legion,” the German planes that bombed the area almost at the end of the battle. We were going to go to the Guadarrama River where the XV Brigade advanced towards Mosquito Hill. Unfortunately, a car accident before the bridge blocked the road and forced us to turn back.



Ernesto pointing out the strategic positions of the Lincolns at the Battle of Brunete

The next day was auspicious. On the way to Brunete we played SCW music and saw a rainbow in the sky. At the river we found a nice sheltered rock and tree overlooking the gently flowing Guadarrama and held a memorial service to Bernie and all those killed on the hallowed grounds in Spain and for their loved ones in that and other wars.



Memorial Service at the Guadarrama River, Brunete

We all took turns reading from a service that I adapted from a High Holidays Memorial Service from Congregation Or Ami in Richmond and reads, in part:

This is an occasion for contemplation. Together, at Brunete, we recall our losses, remember our dead. We, who live, gather to mourn those whose lives are past, mourn those whose fate is inevitably ours to share. Transitory life: months and years somehow disappear. Perhaps we delude ourselves... perhaps it would be better to let heartbeats count the hours, births and deaths measure the years. ...Let us take this moment to regard our losses; remember those no longer in this life, no longer partaking of the present... and for the sacrifices they made for the Spanish people and all humankind.

As we were leaving the parking lot Josie noticed a car barrier near where we had parked, and like a coda on our experience, there were graffiti markings of the Republican Flag from the Spanish Civil War. And, as if to punctuate the event, we sighted another rainbow off in the distant sky as we departed. Thus the significance of my visit to Brunete was bookmarked by the twin rainbows and highlighted by the Republican graffiti.



A few days later, Alan Warren gave us copies of various Orders of the Day and Battalion Rosters. The roster of the Nineteenth Battalion, 15th Brigade for June 26, 1937 lists under Second Company, Section I, Group 1, Bernard Entin, almost a month before his death on July 25. It lists his friend from NY who traveled to Spain with him and recently died (2010), Norman Berkowitz. I spoke with him a couple of times and he provided me with information about Bernie and their voyage to Spain. He remembered loaning my uncle money for my grandmother prior to their departure, then thought he might have given it to him, and he vacillated about whether it was a loan or a gift. His daughter said that was very characteristic of her dad. Another member of Group 1 was Colon Nancarrow who would go on to become a well known, innovative, contemporary composer.

Jack Shaffran was another friend of Bernie's from New York. We passed a countryside battlefield in Cuatro Camins where Jack carried and rescued John Mura. In Barcelona, at the Memorial Democratic there was a very sophisticated multimedia exhibition about the war and various events leading up to and following the SCW. One of the images featured Jack and was taken at the 70th Homenage in 2006. These were especially significant for me because, using his alias of Jack Small, many Lincolns used aliases during the war, I had a letter he wrote my family wanting to meet with them and tell them about what happened to my uncle. Wendy Fisher revealed the secret: Jack Small was her "Uncle Jack," Jack Shaffran. And this was after I spoke with Jack Shaffran on several occasions, not knowing about his alias or his writing the letter. And I got to meet him and travel to Spain with him on several Homenages. This trip certainly personalized and gave me a good understanding of the Spanish Civil War.

In Marçà, for dedication of a bench in memory of Clarence Kalin, along with Angela Jackson's No Jubilem la Memoria event, I was reunited with Juan María Gómez Ortiz. I first met at the 70th Anniversary Homenage in 2006. He saw in Bernie a man of visions and dreams, much like Don Quixote who is from the region in where he lives, and we visited, Tarazona de la Mancha. He wrote an article, based on my biography, *Con la Tierra de España como mortaja* (With the Land of Spain as a Shroud): Bernard "Butch" Entin, and ended with the line, he "was an idealist with deep faith and conviction in doing what was right, who supported his friends, and believed strongly in the causes working class."



Juan María Gómez Ortiz in Marçà

As a member of the Associació d' Amicis de les Brigades Internacionales a Catalunya, Juan María gave a speech commemorating the 62nd anniversary of the Farewell for the International Brigades from Barcelona and venerated my uncle, along with "(N)ot only the most famous like Hans Beimler, General Lukacz, Robert Merriman, Dave Doran, but also the anonymous ones... Butch Entin..." (*Blood that sings beyond the frontiers*, 2000). He also translated Harry Fisher's book Comrades into Spanish. I got a copy of the book which I plan to read side by side with the English version to relearn Spanish, which I studied in college.

In Barcelona we went to the ancient Major Synagogue, built in the third or fourth century and described as one of the oldest synagogues in Europe. We met the Director, Miguel laffe, who invited me to submit information about Bernie so he could be included in their memorial plaque of honor, along with Milt Wolff, John Cookson, and several others whose names I did not recognize.

I still cannot verify the date of my uncle's death. Carl Geiser, in Prisoners of the Good Fight, writes that my uncle was among those seven captured Americans who did not survive and were killed after being captured by Franco's forces. Harry Fisher, however, writes that my uncle was wounded on July 25 and John Rody helped him into an ambulance a few miles from the front and which was then bombed by three Nazi planes. After almost 70 years of uncertainty, our family has now come to accept the date of July 25, 1937 as the date Bernie was Killed in Action, at the age of 22 years, only 2 months and 2 weeks after arriving in Spain, in Brunete.

