

The Volunteer

FOUNDED IN 1937 BY THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE LINCOLN BRIGADE.
PUBLISHED BY THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVES (ALBA)

My Brother's Keeper HIV testing campaign.
Photo MBK.

My Brother's Keeper wins ALBA/Puffin Award

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Founded by the Veterans of the
Abraham Lincoln Brigade

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The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) is an educational non-profit dedicated to promoting social activism and the defense of human rights. ALBA's work is inspired by the American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade who fought fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Drawing on the ALBA collections in New York University's Tamiment Library, and working to expand such collections, ALBA works to preserve the legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade as an inspiration for present and future generations.

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Dear Friends,

"Health care is a human right," Neal Rosenstein, the President of the Puffin Foundation, said at our annual gala on May 2. "And yet in a country as wealthy as the United States, health care isn't a right, but all too often a condition of privilege."

The urgent need for health care reform—and the precarious access to health care among this country's most marginalized populations—was a recurrent theme at our annual gathering (online). The recipients of this year's ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism, the Mississippi-based My Brother's Keeper (MBK) and Open Arms Healthcare Centers, struggle on the frontline for health care reforms. "An award such as this really invigorates an organization," My Brother's Keeper's CEO, June Gipson, said. "We look forward to expanding and enhancing our services throughout the LGBT community and ensuring that quality health care becomes a basic right for all."

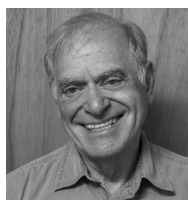
At the gala, Dr. Vikas Saini, a cardiologist who heads the Lown Institute and is founding co-chair of the Right Care Alliance, drew direct links between My Brother's Keeper and the American volunteers who fought fascism in Spain, among whom were over a hundred medical personnel. One of them was Esther Silverstein, a nurse, whose son, Dr. Paul Blanc of the University of California, also spoke at the event. You can watch the entire gala—including music by Guy Davis, Miriam Elhajli, and Billy Bragg—on ALBA's website (alba-valb.org).

In this issue, we're proud to bring you new stories that embody ALBA's motto: *Teaching History, Inspiring Activism, Upholding Human Rights*. We're reporting on recent and upcoming workshops for teachers, as well as our well-attended film screenings and upcoming Susman lecture (page 4). We're speaking with the world-renowned sociologist Richard Sennett, whose father and uncle both fought in Spain. Look on pages 8, 10, and 14 for touching stories on volunteers Syd Harris, Maurice Wolf and John O'Reilly, the Irishman who married Salaria Kea. A Spanish memory from the Chinese volunteer Hwei-Ru Ni, translated by Len and Nancy Tsou, can be found on page 16. Adam Hochschild, an honorary ALBA Board member, has read Giles Tremlett's important new history of the International Brigades; look to page 17 and further for our book review section.

As always, pages 22 and 23 are reserved for you: the donors without whose support none of this work would be possible. Thanks, as always, for your steadfast, generous support.

¡Salud!

Peter N. Carroll and Sebastiaan Faber, Editors



P.S. Don't forget to tell your teachers and friends about our workshops, and make a donation to sustain your future!

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Thank you so much for the wonderful discussion on *Invisible Heroes*. I was wondering if you knew if Langston Hughes' writing on Spain for the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper is available in book form. I understand his writing was published in Spanish by BAAM, but I cannot seem to locate a compilation in English. Thank you.

- Phil Mazzone

More letters on page 21

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER WINS ALBA/PUFFIN AWARD

"All you fascists, you are bound to lose," sang Billy Bragg, the legendary British folk singer and activist, at ALBA's annual gala on May 2. Bragg was one of the event's featured musical guests, along with Miriam Elhajli, the cast of the musical *Goodbye Barcelona*, and Guy Davis—the Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter and bluesman, whose parents, the actors and activists Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis, were longtime friends of the veterans of the Lincoln Brigade. (You can re-watch the entire event at our website, alba-valb.org.)

Among the event's highlights was the acceptance of the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism by June Gipson, the CEO of My Brother's Keeper, a Mississippi-based nonprofit that works to improve the health and well-being of minority and marginalized populations in the United States. "Healthcare is a human right," Neal Rosenstein, the President of the Puffin Foundation, said in his speech. "And yet in a country as wealthy as the United States, healthcare isn't a right, but all too often a condition of privilege." Another speaker was Dr. Paul Blanc, of the University of California, whose mother, Esther Silverstein, was among the more than 100 medical volunteers from the United States who treated the wounded and ill in Spain.

Dr. Vikas Saini, a Boston-based cardiologist, drew connections between the fight for affordable healthcare and the activism of the Lincoln Brigade. "Those connections

run deep," he said, highlighting the long list of medical innovations implemented during the Spanish Civil War, from mobile blood banks to topical antibiotics. "It's hard to remember today, with our cult of entrepreneurial innovation," he added, "but the inventiveness of the Brigades came from someplace completely different. Here was a group of 2,800 people who took up the cause of the Spanish Republic as

the American Southwest. "Like the rest of the world," one of NMD's volunteers said, "our work was reshaped by the Covid pandemic, the resurgence of right-wing violence, and the righteous movement to dismantle white supremacy. The ALBA/Puffin Award allowed us to address these problems in concrete ways. Covid has amplified global injustices that force people to migrate as an act of survival."



One of the largest monetary awards for human rights in the world, the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism is a \$100,000 cash prize granted annually by ALBA and the Puffin Foundation to honor the nearly 3,000 Americans who volunteered in the Spanish Civil

War (1936-1939) to fight fascism under the banner of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. An initiative to sustain the legacy of the experiences, aspirations, and idealism of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the award supports contemporary international activists and human rights causes. The late Perry Rosenstein, a philanthropist and visionary, created and established an endowed fund for this human rights award in 2010. This year's award acknowledges the importance of health justice in America, especially at this moment, and hopes to highlight the work that community health organizations are doing during the pandemic. ▲

their own. What really drove them was in their hearts—and that is the lesson for us today. The dedication of the Brigades was timeless. What drove them is at the heart of our identity as a species. We've survived because we take care of one another. The lesson of the Brigade is a strategic insight for the years ahead, because our shared biological frailty can unite us." Dr. Saini is the president of the Lown Institute, a think tank advocating for a radically better American healthcare system, and founding co-chair of the Right Care Alliance, a grassroots network of physicians, nurses, patient activists, and community leaders dedicated to creating public demand for care that is safe, effective, affordable, and just.

Last year's award winner, No More Deaths (NMD), which works to save the lives of migrants crossing the desert, reported from

To see a videorecording of this year's gala, visit ALBA's website at alba-valb.org.

ALBA News

SUSMAN LECTURE WILL FEATURE RALPH FASANELLA'S WORK

ALBA's annual Susman lecture—offered online this year—will feature Marc Fasanella, who will speak about the art of his father, Lincoln Brigade veteran Ralph Fasanella (1914-1997). A largely self-taught painter, Fasanella was born to an Italian immigrant family in the Bronx. His art focused on the city and the lives of working-class people. Discovered late in life, in 1972, he appeared on the cover of *New York* magazine. One of his paintings, "Family Supper," a memoir of the immigrant experience, is on display at the Ellis Island Museum in New York Harbor.

The lecture series was established by ALBA to honor one of its founding members, Lincoln vet Bill Susman.

Susman Lecture

Marc Fasanella: "Ralph Fasanella, American Tragedy"

May 27, 2021, 7PM Eastern, online

To register for the lecture, email ALBA at info@alba-valb.org.

ALBA's Second Online Workshop draws teachers from the US and Spain

From late January through early March, ALBA faculty once again partnered with the Massachusetts-based Collaborative for Educational Services to offer a five-week, online professional development institute for teachers. The workshop drew an enthusiastic and committed group of teachers from the United States and Spain, who developed engaging lesson plans to incorporate the history of anti-fascism into their curricula and establish meaningful links with the present.

Watt Award: Call for Submissions

Students around the world are invited to submit their work for ALBA's annual essay prize. The Watt Award, named in honor of Lincoln Brigade volunteer George Watt, awards outstanding work about any aspect of the Spanish Civil War, the global political or cultural struggles against fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, or the lifetime histories and contributions of the international volunteers who fought in support of the Spanish Republic from 1936 to 1938.

The contest offers cash prizes and accepts submissions in Graduate, Undergraduate, and, Pre-Collegiate (high school) categories. The deadline for submission is **July 5, 2021**, and all submissions should be emailed to dmeaney@alba-valb.org.

Inaugural Perry Rosenstein Cultural Series Draws Hundreds

Several hundred people from around the world joined on February 21 to attend a panel discussion of the documentary film *Invisible Heroes*, which tells the story of the African-Americans who joined the Spanish Civil War. The film was made available for screening beforehand. The lively panel featured the director, Jordi Torrent, along with Tim Johnson (former head of the Tami-ment Library), and UCLA's Robin D.G. Kelley, who is an ALBA Honorary Board member. The event was moderated by Lindsay Griffiths, graduate student at Princeton University.

Five-week Online Teacher Workshop offered this summer

What is fascism? Where did it come from? How does it impact human rights? What is anti-fascism and how did it arise? How did ideology shape the Spanish Civil War and WWII? What legacies did they pass on in the decades since—in Spain, the U.S., Europe, and globally?

Examine the history of world fascism from its peak in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and WWII in Europe (1939-1945) through the Nuremberg Trials (1945-1946) to today. Study and discuss the impact of fascist thought and action on human rights through that decade of war, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the post-WWII era, with effects that reach into neo-Nazi, White Supremacist, and other present-day far-right movements in Europe, America, and around the globe.

Participants will:

- Delve into a compelling mix of primary sources: letters, propaganda posters, photographs, film, literature, and including trial documents and laws
- Experience hands-on, inquiry-based activities to engage students with this powerful political and philosophical subject
- Utilize practical tools to facilitate classroom discussion and student analysis of controversial topics and of bias
- Trace links throughout U.S. and World History, Civics and Government, with a particular focus on Spanish language and culture (around the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath)
- Create standards-based classroom activities to engage students with this unique and compelling era and its enormous impact
- Learn powerful strategies to teach content and literacy

This **fully online** workshop runs for **five weeks**, during which participants will read and view primary and secondary source material and post regularly in a discussion forum. We will meet in four **live webinars** (July 8, 15, 29, and August 5, 2021, 4:00pm - 5:15pm; there will be a fifth optional webinar in Spanish (August 5, 2021, 5:15pm - 6:30pm). Participants will also research and create a lesson plan or course syllabus to apply learning. Live webinar sessions. All sessions will be recorded.

This workshop, **offered in English with Spanish-language breakout sessions**, features resources and free curriculum from the Library of Congress and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. For Social Studies Teachers, and Spanish and other World Language Teachers, Grades 4-12. 22.5 PDPs or 1 graduate credit will be awarded to participants upon completion of this training, in addition to outside readings and assignments (as per DESE regulations). Graduate credit is available through Westfield State University at an additional cost of \$125. The cost of the training is \$42.50 for member districts and \$50 for non-member districts. **Registration Deadline: June 28.** Register at www.collaborative.org/events-and-courses/america-and-world-fascism

“There’s a Solid Bedrock of Violent Racism in the US”

Richard Sennett, Sociologist | Sebastiaan Faber

Richard Sennett was in his late twenties when he found out his father had served in the International Brigades defending the Spanish Republic. So, it turned out, had his uncle.

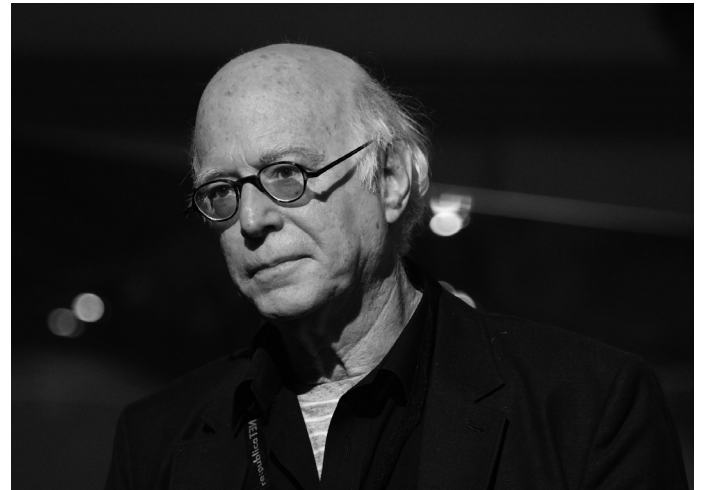
Richard Sennett can’t remember when he first heard about the Spanish Civil War. It was simply there. “When I was growing up, it was mythological. It was the Good Fight,” he told me when we spoke in early March. “I *always* knew about the war in Spain—even though I had no idea my family had been a part of it.”

Sennett, a red-diaper baby, was born in Chicago in 1943 and raised in the Cabrini Green public housing project by his mother, a life-long Communist. It wasn’t until his late twenties that he found out his father, Maurice, who had abandoned the family when Richard was seven months old, had served in the International Brigades defending the Spanish Republic. So, it turned out, had his uncle, William. Bill Sennett had arrived in Spain in early March 1937; his brother Maury crossed the Pyrenees on April 2. While Bill served as commissar, Maury was a truck driver.

“I never actually met my father,” Sennett told me. “After he’d left us, we never heard from him. He just disappeared. In my late twenties, when I’d written something in the *New York Review of Books*, I got a postcard from him: *I am probably your father*. I threw it out. I figured I’d done fine without him.”

Around that same time, however, Richard also heard from his uncle, who was then in his late fifties. After Spain, Bill Sennett had become a paid CP functionary, but he’d left the Party in the wake of Khrushchev’s 1956 report to the Twentieth Congress. “I got to know Bill a bit and asked him about his time in Spain,” Sennett recalls, “I wouldn’t say he was very forthcoming. But he had an amazing moment in 1986 when he traveled to Barcelona for a tribute to the International Brigades, where he recovered many of those memories.”

Richard Sennett, who turned 78 in January, lives in London with Saskia Sassen, who, like him, is a world-renowned sociologist. Still, Sennett’s relationship to his own field is complicated. He shies away from quantitative research, despises scholarly jargon, and likes to think of himself as an anthropologist of sorts or, even better, a nineteenth-century novelist. (He’s published three works of fiction.) Ethnography is his method of choice, and anyone who spends five minutes with him can’t fail to notice how much he loves conversation. (When interviewed, he’s often tempted to turn the tables and start asking the journalist questions.) It’s no surprise he’s gotten along well with French intellectuals. “Once,” he told me, “Michel Foucault invited me to a dinner party with the medievalist Philippe Ariès, who was very, very right-wing. I was nervous and asked Foucault: ‘What are we going to talk about?’



If you were a Communist in the 1950s and ‘60s, you never talked about politics, especially to little kids, for fear of the FBI.

And he said, ‘Well, anything—you just need to talk to him in a way where you feel that you really want to know what he thinks.’ That was such an interesting remark. I was still very young, but I remember thinking: ‘This is fantastic. This is what life should be like.’”

Sennett’s entry into sociology was entirely accidental. A talented cellist, he left home at 15 to earn his living as a performing musician. Four or five years later, he was training at Juilliard when a tendon problem, followed by a botched operation, cut his musical career short. A musician friend’s father, David Riesman, taught sociology at Harvard and invited him to give it a try. Something clicked. In the six decades that followed, Sennett wrote some twenty books.

In his most influential work, Sennett studies how capitalism and the city shape our sense of self and our ways of interacting with each other. His early books deal with identity, respect, cooperation, and public space; among his most recent work is a trilogy on our interaction with the material world, focusing on craft, cooperation, and the urban environment. If there’s a constant in Sennett’s work, it’s the concern that capitalism and the modes of being it imposes on us may harm our ability to live

If you really believe that something is true, you don't need to fight sectarian battles over it.

with ourselves and work with each other. While the increasing focus on competition undermines cooperation, he warns, the gig economy robs people of the ability to take pride in their work and create a meaningful narration of their own lives. Speaking of narrating lives, Sennet is now working on an autobiography that explores the connection between music and sociology. (This interview is abridged; for a full version, see the online edition at albvoluteer.org.)

Was it strange that it took you so long to find out about your family's role in the Brigades?

Less strange than you'd think. You see, most of my family was in the Communist Party. My mom was very dedicated—the whole reason I grew up in a Chicago housing project was that she was trying to organize black women. But if you were a Communist in the 1950s and '60s, you never talked about politics, especially to little kids, for fear of the FBI. Don't forget that McCarthyism was a form of light fascism. My mother was terrified that she would be indicted for sedition. The less we kids knew, the less we could tell. Of course, if my dad had been around, I'd probably picked up more.

When did your mother leave the party?

She never did. It left her. She was not happy when the Soviet Union collapsed.

A story like that of Eric Hobsbawm, the British historian.

Indeed. Eric was a wonderful friend and a wonderful writer, but his autobiography disappointed me. I sensed bad faith in the way he wrote about his own relationship to Communism. He had the most crystal-line memories of what it meant to be a Communist but didn't interrogate those memories at all. I'd expected him to a better historian of his own life.

Are you a better sociologist of yours?

(Laughs.) As a music student, I was just a garden-variety red-diaper baby. But when I left music I had to interrogate that—because obviously, there's a lot of naivete in the music world about authority, cooperation, and so on. This is precisely what I am dealing with in the autobiography I'm

writing now. But to answer your question: yes, I'm trying to be a better historian of myself than Eric was.

Your mother's Communism represented a radical break with the politics of her parents, White Russian immigrants who'd fled the Revolution. Although your work doesn't quite break with your family's politics in the same way, it does establish a distance. You've argued, for example, that public spaces and the public sphere serve for more than just political action. They are the place, you write, where we get to interact with, or even to know and understand, those who think differently than we do. That's a long way from the sectarian battles that marked much of the Communist tradition.

Absolutely. But here's a question for you. Do you think most Communists were really sectarian in terms of belief? Or was it's just that those beliefs were so tied up with their own sense of self that giving them up would have been too big a psychological loss? In his book *Autocritique*, Edgar Morin suggests that it's hard for people to give up their political convictions because it means they'd have to disinvest in themselves. Very few people, he says, are committed in a real ideological sense. I think there is a truth in that. If you really believe that something is true, you don't need to fight sectarian battles over it, because if someone else doesn't share your belief, that doesn't make it less true. But you are right that my own work is a reaction to those dynamics. That's also why I got so interested in conflict theory, in the notion of the public realm as a space of dissent rather than as a space of coming together. In my work, the public space is still political, but it's a different kind of politics. The question becomes: How do you live with somebody who's profoundly different?

I am wondering if recent developments in the United States have changed your thinking. A couple of days before the November elections, you wrote: "In the 1970s I thought the hidden injuries of class might heal in part through local, face-to-face interaction with people who are different. That hope doesn't make sense today. I've lost my empathy for the complex motivations that animate fear and reaction. The mantra of 'bringing the country together' loses any mean-

ing as the base hardens and shifts to the extreme right; instead, it has to be held to account for the criminal tendencies encouraged by its leader. The US isn't going to heal any time soon". That was shocking to read. I thought: "If even Richard Sennett has lost hope, we must be really screwed!"

It's true that I have changed my thinking. The Black Lives Matter movement really put its finger on the fact that there's a solid bedrock of violent racism in the US. This has always been there. Sometimes it's been silent; now it's very vocal. This phenomenon is hard for Europeans to understand, although there is racism in Europe, too. The US is just much more right-wing. The Right that I know best, which is the British Right, is basically the US Democratic Party.

Since your current book project has you looking back on your career, I am wondering about your own political shifts over time. At some point, you shifted to the right, but in the last couple of decades, you have moved leftward again. Have those shifts been a function of changes in temperament that come with age or were they responses to changes in the world around you?

I don't like thinking in terms of a left-right spectrum. It's too simple a tool that only serves to hide much more complex ways of thinking about politics. Take Green Parties: as we have seen in Germany and Scandinavia, a green-black alliance turns out to be perfectly workable. For me, what changed about 20 years ago is that I had a wake-up call about capitalism. It was something I hadn't written about. When I came back to doing sociology after a decade of trying to write novels, I found myself quite shocked by neoliberal versions of capitalism.

This is what drove me to write *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. I wanted to understand why this new capitalism is worse for ordinary people than the kind of corporate capitalism that had preceded it. I don't know if that means I turned to the left or right. But I certainly did become more energized politically. If anything, over the last 20 years I've become more radical in the sense that I returned to being a critic of capitalist labor.

You are concerned about the gig economy, or a world in which automation will do away with 15 or 20 percent of all jobs. Would something like Universal Basic Income be a solution?

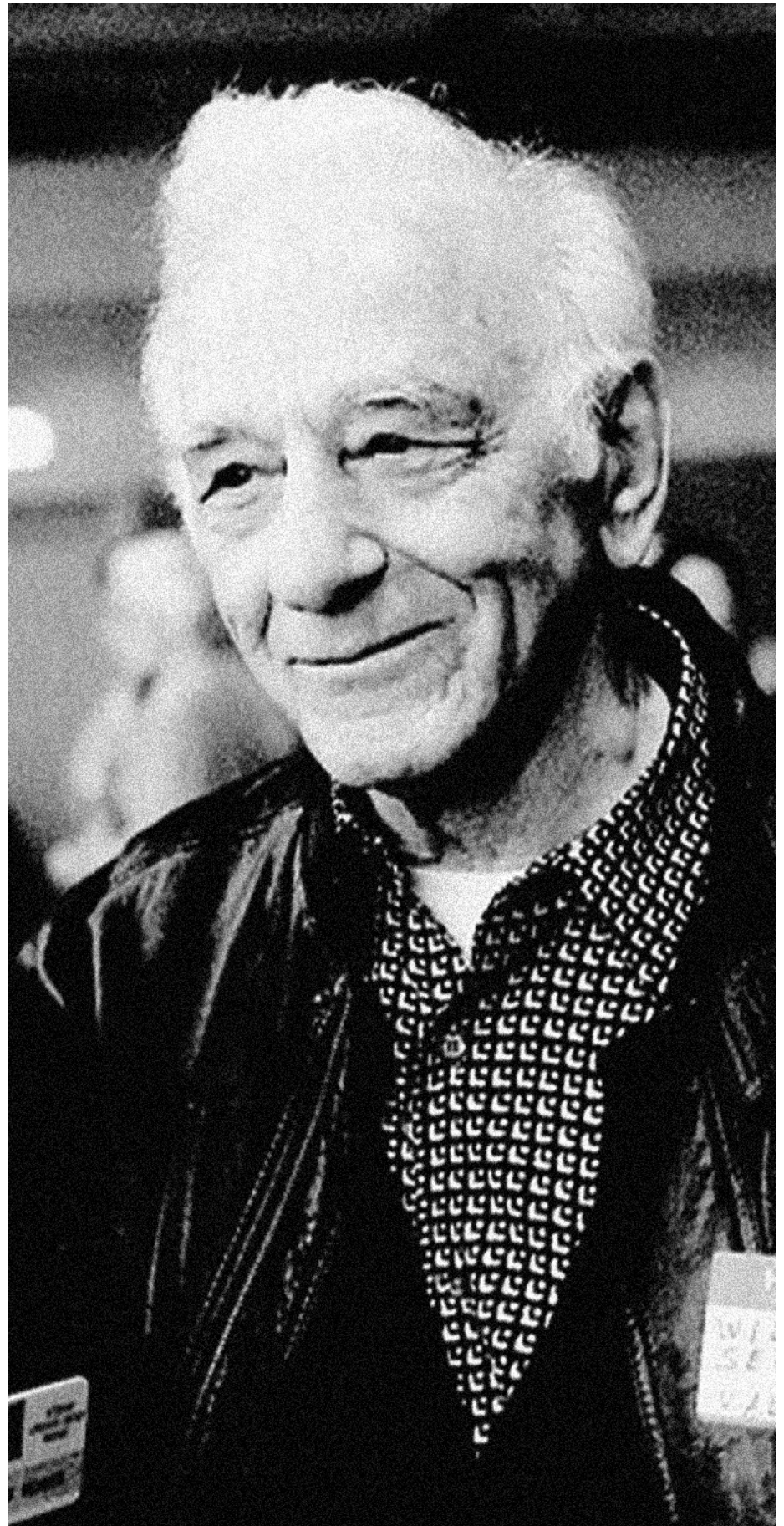
In my view, people need a kind of narrative that puts their lives together. Paid work did that even for working-class people. But it is psychologically much harder if you move serially through many different jobs. Of course, you can be supported by some kind of basic income. But I doubt that can replace the role paid work has played. If nobody needs you, and you're not really necessary to anybody else outside the family sphere, that's a kind of social death.

"People need a kind of narrative that puts their lives together."

Aren't you underestimating the creative force of the human mind? Would we weave a narrative regardless, even from a series of disjointed, serial job experiences, because that's what we do?

That may be true for a small elite. I'm not sure being a plumber and an electrician who has no union, no effective, communal ties, and who is just doing one plumbing job after another, is going to add up to something. One argument that's been made about this is that the community would replace labor as a site of working. That is quite an interesting idea. In very poor communities, like the ones I'm working with now through the United Nations, building a communal latrine, a middle school, or a health center is something that gives that kind of spine to people's experience. Speaking of the United Nations, this reminds me of my uncle Bill Sennett. Even though he had left the Party in the 1950s, he never became an anti-Communist and remained committed to democratic socialism. After his retirement, he became the publisher of the magazine *In These Times*, for example. Well, I started working with the United Nations long ago. That immediately raised his old-Commie hackles. For him, the UN was the wrong kind of international! A real international is built out of struggle and solidarity—not some massive bureaucracy. ▲

Sebastiaan Faber teaches at Oberlin College. For the full version of this interview, see the online edition at albavolunteer.org.



Sydney Harris, UK-born Veteran of the Lincoln Battalion

By Jerry Harris

Born in Leeds, England, Syd Harris ended up in a Chicago orphanage when he was five. Fifteen years later, he volunteered for the Lincoln Battalion. After the war, as a well-known labor photographer and journalist, he was targeted by the FBI. A former boxer, he also acted as Paul Robeson's personal bodyguard when the singer performed in Chicago.



Syd found himself alone, with two grenades, a gaping wound and unable to move.

My father, Sydney Harris, was born in Leeds in 1916 to working-class Jewish parents. His father had been a medic with the British army in World War I and suffered lung damage from mustard gas, and his mother died in the influenza plague in 1919. Traveling to America, his father put Syd in a Jewish orphanage in Chicago at the age of five, where he stayed until he graduated high school.

Leaving the orphanage in the middle of the Great Depression wasn't easy. Syd

began to box at the Golden Glove level, and when his stockyard foreman called him a "kike" Syd knocked him to the floor and got fired. Syd had begun to hear about fascism, its anti-Semitism and its threat to democracy. So, in 1937 he joined the Young Communist League and decided to volunteer for the Lincoln Battalion.

When Syd got on the bus for the trip to New York, Eddie Balchowsky came walking up, his arms around two girls and a bottle of Champagne in hand. Eddie was from a well-off Jewish family and had

been studying to be a concert pianist at the University of Illinois. But Eddie was on his way to Spain too, and so the working-class, orphan kid and the radical, privileged student were to become life-long friends. On their way to Communist Party headquarters in New York, Eddie heard someone playing Mozart from a second story window. Eyes bright with passion he turned to Syd, pointed to the window and said, "That's why I'm going to Spain!"

Syd and Eddie got to Spain in late November 1937. Eddie was assigned to scout for the Canadian Internationals and Syd stayed with the Lincolns. Syd grew up reading Rudyard Kipling and said at the training camp in Figueras it broke his heart to learn that Kipling was a big imperialist. But years later he still liked to quote the ending of *Gunga Din*. "You're a better man than I," said the British officer to the water boy *Gunga Din*. That's the lesson he took from the book.

Syd became a sergeant and fought at Teruel in the winter of 1937-38. But in the spring during The Retreats he was shot and captured in April, 1938. For a month the Lincolns had battled and retreated, first from Belchite, to Albalate, Caspe, and Maella. Finally, they tried to break through the fascist lines to reach the Republican held city of Gandesa. Failing to win, the Lincolns retreated to a hill overlooking a small valley.

Syd was ordered to take three men across the central valley road, up the facing hill to look over the heights and report back on enemy activity. But while separate from the battalion a company of fascist cavalry came riding through the valley. The Lincolns opened fire forcing the fascists up the

opposite hill riding straight towards Syd and his comrades. Firing from behind a tree he heard a rustling from behind. Quickly turning he saw a soldier on horseback aiming his rifle straight at his head. But Syd's quick movement spooked the horse into rearing, and when the shot went off it hit his ankle. Knocked off his feet he went tumbling down the hill smashing into a boulder with the cavalryman in quick pursuit. But to get a shot the fascist would have to expose himself to fire from the Lincolns and instead retreated up the hill. The battle was soon over and both fascists and Lincolns abandoned the area.

Syd found himself alone, with two grenades, a gaping wound and unable to move. As the sun was going down, he spied two women clothed in Spanish black walking down the road. One was an older woman and the other, Suzanne, just 17 years old. They were Republican supporters.

They promised to come back and as night set Suzanne reappeared with an orange and egg. By this time Syd was going into shock and shaking from the cold. Suzanne held him throughout the night, keeping him warm in her comforting arms. It was the first time Syd had spent the night in the arms of a woman. In the morning she went to seek help, but before she returned, Italian fascists appeared picking up the dead.

Spying Syd, they rushed up shouting, "You red bastard we'll kill you right here, you fucking Russian Bolshevik!" Syd cried out, "No, no I'm American from Chicago, Chicago!" Suddenly the shouting stopped. The Italian lieutenant cocked his head, "Chicago?" Syd replied, "Yes, for Christ's sake Chicago!" Suddenly a broad smile broke out on the lieutenant's face. He fired off his machine gun into the air, looked at Syd, and said, "Chicago, home of Al Caponé! Take him alive!"

Dragged into town Syd was thrown into a barn and fell into an exhausted sleep. A little while later he woke to shouts and kicks with German soldiers standing over him yelling, "You red bastard we're going to kill you right here, fucking Russian Bolshevik!" The Italians rushed in and an argument raged over who owned the prisoner. Lucky for Syd, in Italy's first victory over Germany since the Roman Empire they managed to expel the German troops.

Syd was sent to a prison hospital in Bilbao where he spent four months. While there the Spanish authorities were letting a German doctor experiment on the patients. In a letter Syd wrote, the "fascist hospital reminded me of the slaughter and butcher houses back home...Injections were given only to the Internationals to 'make your blood better'." After two died and a third went out of his mind the prisoners rioted and tore up the ward, and the hospital administration finally removed the German doctor.

Syd was sent to the prisoner camp for Internationals at San Pedro de Cardeña. As the 700 prisoners lined-up for review a colonel led them through salutes to fascist Spain. The last was a straight-arm salute to Franco. But instead of shouting Franco the men let out the cry, "Fuck You!" The colonel looked sternly at the men, and then smiled. "Otra vez!" "Fuck You!" "Uno más!" "Fuck You!"

Syd turned to the guy next to him, "What the hell is going on?"

"The colonel doesn't speak English, and to him fuck you sounds like Franco with an English accent."

A colonel led them through salutes to fascist Spain. But instead of shouting Franco the men let out the cry, "Fuck You!"

But life at the prisoner of war camp was anything but easy. Syd recounted his experience writing:

"Cold cement floor full of holes, broken stairs, thousands of mice, rats and vermin of all kinds... As we drove in we received our first view of what was later was to be a daily occurrence: a sergeant with a long leather reinforced twisted cane-whip, lashing out among a group of men. We all had our share of beatings from shell shocked sergeants who didn't even try to give any reasons in explanation of their actions. Too many of us bear scars from sticks, rifle butts, fists or boots, they used them all. They got a genuine pleasure and joy in making and seeing us as miserable as possible.

"Always hungry, unable to concentrate, to exercise, lying on louse- and flea-ridden mattresses all day waiting for a ladle full of beans and two rotten sardines. Clothed only in pants, shirts, and slippers in a cell with damp and windy climate; no wonder ten of our comrades died and most of the others were sick all the time. Three water taps for seven hundred men to wash themselves, their clothes, and plate in...planning for the day when once again we could be MEN. Freedom. Liberty, how we appreciate those words now.

"But in the midst of that feeling comes the thought of our comrades, especially those from the countries dominated by fascist, who are still in national Spain. Always picked upon to receive the worst treatment by the guards they have the courage, self discipline, and intestinal fortitude that belongs to men convinced of the righteousness of their actions and a deep and everlasting love of liberty and democracy. May the day be soon that they also can once again breath the fresh air of liberty and freedom for which they sacrificed so much to defend, until then Salud comrades."

When he went to Spain Syd was still not an American citizen, and so was released with the Canadian Internationals. He returned to the US by way of Toronto, married Rose Fine, and became a well-known labor photographer and journalist. He served as head of the Lincoln's Veteran's Lodge and often organized security for Paul Robeson when he sang in Chicago, acting as his personal body-guard. During the McCarthy period the FBI threatened to deport him back to the UK, but Syd held strong, remained politically committed and active, and became a US citizen in 1957. He named his first son Paul after Robeson, his middle name Aaron, after Aaron Lopoff. Lopoff was Syd's commander in Spain who he described as the "bravest man he ever knew." After five sons, his last child was a girl. He named her Suzanne. ▲

Historian Jerry Harris has co-edited **Chronicles of Humanity: The Photography of Sydney Harris**. His latest book is **Global Capitalism and The Crisis of Democracy**. This story was first published in **No Pasarán**, the magazine published by the **International Brigade Memorial Trust (United Kingdom)**.

WHAT HAPPENED TO MAURICE WOLF?

By Colleen Darby

Colleen Darby never met her uncle, who died in Spain five years before she was born. A reconstruction of his life and the circumstances of his death.



Photo 1



Photo 2

Maurice Wolf Friedman was born in 1918 in San Francisco, California. His mother (my grandmother) was Stella (Wolf) Friedman and his father (my grandfather) was Isidore Friedman. Stella came from a German Jewish immigrant family. She was born and grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. Isidore came from a Russian Jewish immigrant family. He and his family immigrated to San Francisco, California in around 1910. My grandparents met in San Francisco and had three children. Paula was the first, Maurice the second and Muriel (my mother) the third.

My grandparents were involved in Communist Party activities in San Francisco, most probably as members. Young people attending the Young Communist League (YCL) School stayed at their flat sleeping on the living room floor. When my father (Richard Eldridge) came to San Francisco from his home in San Jose (50 miles south) to attend the School he stayed at their flat and met my mother in about 1936. They married in 1939.

Maurice, my uncle, died in 1938 and I was born in 1943 so I never met him. All throughout my childhood I was reminded of

him by my mother and grandmother who spoke with great love and affection for him. I remember being told that he was determined to go to Spain to fight fascism. This photo of Maurice (1) was on our living room wall as I grew up.

Maurice completed the 10th grade in high school. I guess he was not interested in school or he would have completed high school (12th grade) and graduated. He was a member of the YCL and a merchant seaman by trade. The National Maritime Union was being organized by merchant seamen at about this time and a lot of these men went to fight in the Spanish Civil War (see *Death in the Olive Groves*, American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, by Arthur H. Landis). For this reason, I imagine that when Maurice joined up he was with his comrades. He is on the left in photo (2).

On January 12, 1938 he set sail for France from New York on the Aquitania in order to join the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and fight in the Spanish Civil War. When he arrived in France he was arrested. After a jail sentence he was scheduled for deportation but escaped. We think he probably enlisted in Paris at the Interna-

tional Brigade headquarters there, where the young men were interviewed and given medicals. With the assistance of comrades in France he crossed the Pyrenees on foot to arrive in Spain.

His name is found on a list for the training base at Tarazona: "Company 1 of Battallion (sic) of Instruction No. 5 of the Base at Tarazona (de la Mancha)" It is dated 14th March 1938 when they were moved up to Batea, 250 miles north. He is listed as "Friedman, Maurice, (aged) 21, Americain. Anti-Gas." "Anti-Gas" refers to his training in gas warfare protection. This is the same company and the same time as Alvah Bessie, which makes Bessie's book *Men in Battle* and the associated Notebooks compelling reading.

I grew up with the knowledge that Maurice died in the Battle of Ebro but this is not possible because that battle took place from May to September 1938. The date and location of his death puts him in the battle known as the Great Retreat. Alvah Bessie writes extensively of this battle in *Men in Battle*, pages 78 to 127, as does Arthur H. Landis, *Death in the Olive Groves*, Part III. The Lincoln Battalion lost most of its personnel killed, captured or missing when Fascist forces punched through the Republican lines and drove to the sea cutting the Republic in two. The remnants of the Battalion gathered on the far side of the Ebro River where they

were joined with an influx of young Spanish conscripts and went on to fight the Battle of Ebro.

Maurice is listed as missing in action near Batea on 1st April 1938 in documents that reside in Moscow, copied by Alan Warren (see below) and given to me. Most men in this battle disappeared at Gandesa so this list probably puts him as missing towards the start of the Retreat rather than at the crossing point on the road between Gandesa and Corbera where Robert Merriman, commander of the Lincoln Brigade, was captured and later executed.

My mother wrote an inscription in Maurice's book *The Literary Digest 1927 Atlas of the World and Gazetteer*, which says: "Maurice Friedman died in Spain – April 2, 1938 – Democracy so that Spain might live." I now have this book. He might not have been interested in school, but he certainly was interested in finding out about his world.

His family were destroyed by the news of his death. Both my grandmother and my mother never really recovered. In 1986 when my mother was giving an interview regarding Maurice's life she broke down crying at the start and could not carry on. This was always her reaction when she spoke of him.



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7

Sam and I came across Alan Warren, who does research into members of the International Brigade, because we are members of the International Brigade Memorial Trust (IBMT). In April 2010 we went to Spain for a tour arranged by Alan for the purpose of telling us what he had found out about Maurice and showing us the region around Batea and Gandesa where Maurice probably died. It is not clear whether he died on 1st or 2nd April 1938. It seems reasonable, given the account of the chaos and bloodshed in the region by Alvah Bessie, that either date could be correct and that he could have died anywhere in the general region of Batea and Gandesa. There are mass graves being unearthed all the time in this area and it is quite possible that one of these is his final resting place.

The Great Retreat started on 9 March 1938 with a rout at Belchite, about 150km southwest of Lleida and 125km northwest of Gandesa. Alan's research so far has led him to the conclusion that Maurice was not at Belchite, mainly because his name is not on the

XV brigade lists of that period. On 19 March, a large group of men joined the XV brigade as reinforcements from the temporary headquarters about 2km west of Batea, see photos below. The assumption is that Maurice arrived at the front with this group, described vividly by Alvah Bessie (Notebooks, pp. 16-24).

There are very few landmarks to the course of the Great Retreat that still exist today. A lot of work in finding the places that Alan took us to was done by comparing photos from the time of the Great Retreat with the terrain today. The outline of the hills remains the same so buildings can be situated quite accurately in the terrain. Alan has a large collection of photos from that period and was able to show us how the landmarks are verified from the terrain. The identification of landmarks on the course of the Great Retreat had only been done in the previous year. There is still a lot of work to be done.

We spent a full day following some of the course of the Great Retreat. We did not go to Belchite because it would have taken a 4-hour return trip in the car. We decided, since the weather was so fine, to spend the time looking at sites of interest closer to our base at Gandesa. We started with the Estado Mayor which was the HQ of the Lincoln battalion between 18th and 26th March 1938. The group of 125 reinforcements including Alvah Bessie, and possibly Maurice, arrived here on 19th March 1938. There are many photos taken here and the likeness of the building and terrain are unmistakable, even though the building today is partially in ruins. A lot of these old photos have Robert Merriman, and others, standing in front of the building (4). We looked south to see El Manyol, the hill where the men worked building trenches and also rested, waiting to be called to join the battle (5). We then went to Batea, about 2km east. We visited the old theatre, now a cultural centre, where Bessie and comrades took refuge one rainy night (Notebooks, p.20) (6).

We then travelled north on the Nonaspe road to find Vente de Sant Juan, a set of buildings on a dirt road that has been identified as one used as a first aid station and Estado Mayor. It was the final place where the XV Brigade established headquarters in the Great Retreat and was used from 27 to 31 March 1938. It is the location of the great limestone washed house that Bessie writes about. We walked up a path in back of the house and viewed the terrain (7). The main purpose of stopping here was to observe the location of enemy actions. An ammunition dump was blown up here so that it would not fall into the hands of the Nationalists who were closing in.

We then drove northeast towards La Fatarella, stopping occasionally to look at the terrain and to see where it matched with the old photos and accounts of the Great Retreat. At this point (1 and 2 April 1938) the Republicans cut across country because travelling on the main roads was too hazardous. In fact, much of this time they were travelling through fascist lines.



Photo 11



Photo 12

The plan was that they would head east towards the Ebro, cross it and regroup on the other side. We stopped at a dirt road which is identified from photos as one they would have used as they went cross country and at a hill where they stopped, dug trenches and rested. En route, Alan pointed out a wind turbine where a mass grave was uncovered during construction.

Next, we went to the location where we could look back and see the route that the fleeing Republicans would have taken towards the Ebro with Gandesa just to the south and Corbera just to the north (11). We stopped again to look at the terrain and to see the valley that they fled down heading to the main Corbera-Gandesa road. They would have to cross this road to get to the Ebro and safety. A lot of the men fled right towards Gandesa where they were mown down. Some made a break, left for Corbera and were either killed or captured there. There were bodies found all over this area, in caves and by the sides of roads.

We then travelled to the point on the main road where some men tried to cross (12). Looking back you can see the route they came down, and looking across the road you can see that the terrain falls away into a ravine where men fell as they crossed the road. This point was reached around 1am in the early hours of 2 April 1938. Only 45 out of 350 men finally arrived on the other side of the Ebro at Mora d'Ebro, 22 miles away.

During these few hours that we traced this route, listening to Alan read first-hand accounts of the chaos of fleeing through fascist lines, it became obvious to me that we will probably never know exactly what date Maurice died, 1 or 2 April, or exactly where he died, closer to Batea or closer to Gandesa. It is enough now to know that we have visited the area, seen where he was and have an understanding of what this 21-year-old man must have experienced in his last hours. This was a most moving and emotional experience for us. We remembered Maurice, his mother, father and sisters, and his great commitment to fight fascism, with tears and hugs.

In September 2013 we visited Alan Warren again in Barcelona. He told us of Anna Marti who has done a lot of the research with him on the retreat and the surrounding area. They know that on 1-2 April 1938, 50 Americans were executed in a field by the petrol station on the road to Corbera in Gandesa. They have evidence that the bodies are buried in two nearby fields. Excavation may take place but it will be expensive. Alan asked me if I was interested in the contents of these mass graves—in particular, whether Maurice might be buried there. My answer was as before when Alan mentioned the possibility of finding Maurice in a mass grave near Corbera. It is enough for me to know approximately how and where he died. I know he is under the ground somewhere around or between Batea and Gandesa and I think he should rest there without being disturbed. I know he died with his comrades fighting fascism. I am proud of that memory.

In October 2015, Sam and I again travelled to Gandesa, this time to visit the Camposines memorial near La Fatarella for a ceremony commemorating those who died fighting fascism in the region of the Ebro during the Spanish Civil War. Earlier that year I was contacted by Alan Warren telling me that the Catalan regional government had agreed to put Maurice's name on a plaque at the memorial, all I had to do was apply. I was thrilled and sent off immediately for the forms.

It was all approved and, on the day, 17 October 2015, we went to the memorial, saw his name on the plaque (13, 14) and went to the ceremony. It was all very moving for both of us. We were overcome by the amazing and wonderful knowledge that finally Maurice was going to be remembered for sacrificing his life fighting fascism and defending democracy in a foreign land. My mother and grandmother, who wept whenever he was spoken of, would have been so grateful to know this. ▲

See the online edition for additional images, as well as a list of references and links.



Photo 13

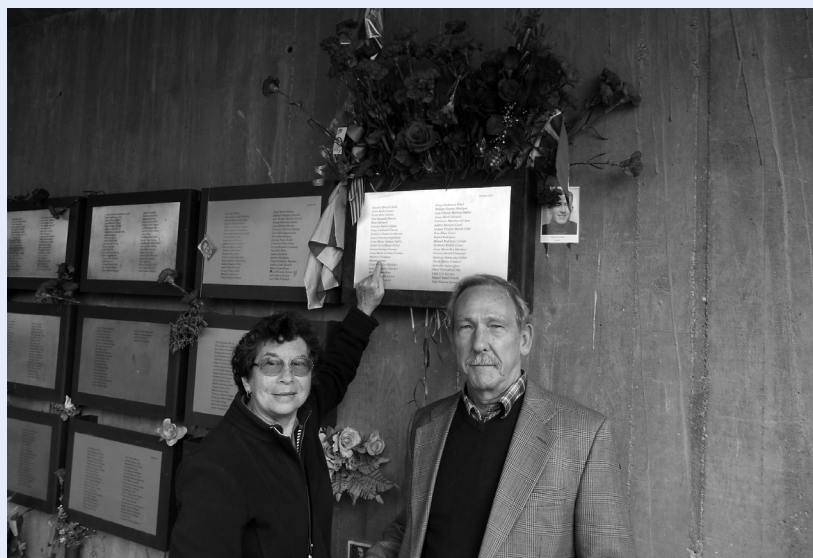


Photo 14

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SALARIA KEA'S IRISH HUSBAND?

By Mark O'Sullivan

Salaria Kea, the only woman among the close to 100 African American volunteers who left for Spain from the United States, married an Irish ambulance driver. Who was John O'Reilly?

On December 11, 1937, the Baltimore Afro-American published a brief note under the headline "NY Nurse Weds Irish Fighter in Spain's War," by Langston Hughes: "Miss Salaria Kea of Harlem, charming nurse at one of the American hospitals in Spain, was married on October 2nd to John Joseph O'Reilly, ambulance driver from Thurles, County Tipperary, Ireland. Her husband was one of the first international volunteers to come to fight on the loyalist side in Spain and was for several months in the trenches. Recently, he was transferred to hospital service."

John Joseph O'Reilly was born in Thurles, County Tipperary on March 29, 1908, the third of four sons. His father was a labourer who fought with the Royal Irish Regiment during World War I. By his own account, John left Thurles for the first time at the age of fourteen to live and work on his widowed aunt's small farm on the Tipperary/Waterford border. The intention was that he inherit the farm, but he found the remote rural life stultifying. At the age of twenty, he went to England in search of work. Soon, he would join the Irish Guards regiment of the British Army—"Not," as he recalled, "out of any particular inclination to be a soldier but simply because it was a paying job." He had signed up for a seven-year period but served three years before deserting. There followed five years of travelling between England and Ireland working as a building labourer and a tannery worker.

Over time, his political allegiances evolved from a narrow nationalism to Republican socialism. There is no evidence that he was ever a member of the IRA, although he was probably a member of the Sinn Féin party. He joined the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in 1934 during a concerted push for unionization in his hometown that was resisted fiercely by local employers. He left Ireland for the last time in mid-1936 never to return.

When recruitment for the International Brigades began in September 1936, O'Reilly was working in a brickyard in Oxford. He regularly attended public meetings in the university common, many of which focused on the situation in Spain, and he came upon a newspaper advertisement seeking volunteers. It seems that he travelled to Spain in December 1936, joining the No. 1 Company of the Marseillaise Battalion in the XIV Brigade. On Christmas Eve 1936 this battalion set out for the Córdoba front. The No. 1 Company was led by a controversial though effective officer, George Nathan, who had served with the notorious British Auxiliaries in Ireland. He was assisted by IRA veteran, Kit Conway from the Glen of Aherlow in County Tipperary. The Company's task was to capture the strategic town of Lopera and ended in failure. Seven Irish volunteers died and many were wounded. In all, 300 members of the battalion died and 600 were wounded.

As the Battle of Jarama proceeded, he volunteered for service as an ambulance guard at Morata close to the battlefield. For almost three months he remained in this role, helping to ferry the wounded from the front-line to the reception area in Morata to the hospitals in the vicinity among which was the American No. 1 Base Hospital at Villa Paz where Salaria would become head ward nurse. It was here that John and Salaria met in late April 1937. Salaria, newly arrived in Spain, was in the first flush of enthusiasm at this liberating if hazardous experience. Disillusionment on the other hand darkened O'Reilly's perspective.

O'Reilly describes how he "wasn't able to take his eyes off her." Salaria professed to have had no idea of his infatuation. O'Reilly had within two weeks prevailed upon his superiors at the 15th Brigade headquarters to transfer him to Villa Paz. There, he worked as an attendant in the general wards. In an unpublished memoir, Salaria speaks of his quiet, efficient and detached presence. Soon, however, she discovered he was writing poems about her.

Salaria was, at first, reluctant to consider O'Reilly's advances given the potential long-term difficulties of a mixed-race marriage. She was in the end, however, won over by the sincerity of his pleading. They were married on October 2 in the nearby village of Saelices. Throughout

that summer of courtship, the couple were more concerned with duty than with romance. The American Hospital received wounded and convalescent volunteers from battles at Brunete, Belchite and beyond as well as providing much-needed medical services for the local population. In addition, Salaria worked with AMB mobile units closer to the front. After the wedding, she served at the Teruel offensive and the counterthrust by the fascists. She became detached from her unit in the chaos of retreat and was briefly jailed by Republican political police grown paranoid with fears of desertions and fifth-columnists. In March 1938, the hospital at Villa Paz was evacuated and staff transferred to Vic, a large convalescent hospital 45 miles north of Barcelona.

Within weeks, a group of AMB volunteers including Salaria suffering from what would now be termed post-traumatic stress disorder, were sent back to the U.S. Six months were to pass before the couple were able to make contact again and, even then, only by correspondence. During this time, O'Reilly continued to work at the Vic hospital. Conditions there had deteriorated due to overcrowding and an unsafe water supply. In mid-September an outbreak of typhoid devastated the hospital population. In October 1938, he was repatriated to England. Such was his emaciated state on arrival at Victoria Station in London, he was hospitalised by health authorities for three weeks and then spent some time living in a small refugee camp in Surrey.

He arrived in New York on board the SS Samaria on August 22, 1940. His occupation was listed as leather-splitter which related to his tannery work. In New York, he found employment with the IRT subway which hired so many Irish workers, it was commonly referred to as the Irish Republican Transit.

In early 1943, at the age of 35, John O'Reilly was drafted and assigned to the 82nd Engineer Combat Regiment.



Training took place at Camp Swift, Texas. The regiment sailed for North Africa in November 1943 and on to Frome in Somerset where they were billeted until the D-Day invasion. The 82nd landed at Omaha Beach ten days after D-Day. The bodies of dead GIs still lay on the sands awaiting transport. Over a period of 11 months, the regiment supported the Allied advance southwards to within 12 miles of Paris and then eastwards across northern France, Belgium. At the Battle of the Bulge in mid-December 1944 they operated for a time as frontline infantry. Their ultimate destination in mid-April 1945 was the city of Magdeburg, 95 miles from the German capital. On May 6, 1945, operations ceased and they began the long journey home.

The Second War Powers Act of 1942 had provided for the expedited naturalization of non-citizens serving honourably in the Armed Forces. Applicants were exempted from many of the routine requirements. In all, 13,587 such overseas naturalisations took place among which was that of John O'Reilly. He received his Certificate of Naturalization in Paris on May 28, 1945

almost five years after his original application.

For Salaria and John, the post-war years began with tragedy. Their only child born in 1946, died after three days. Complications during the birth left her unable to conceive again. In addition, the couple experienced, as many International Brigade veterans did in the McCarthy witch-hunt era, harassment from the FBI. Salaria had long since distanced herself from the Communist Party and, over time, became deeply invested in her religious faith. She remained, however, committed to the ideal of racial equality. Having studied for a B.A and M.A in nursing, she worked as a nursing tutor and played an important role in the desegregation of the nursing profession at several New York hospitals. Meanwhile, O'Reilly moved on from his manual work at the IRT to become a

Transport Police officer.

The couple's greatest struggle, however, lay in the stark realities of a mixed-race marriage in America. Until the mid-1950s the couple lived in a "neutral," mainly Jewish area. Later they moved to a house on Grace Avenue, the Bronx, which in time they would be pressured to leave because of racial attacks and intimidation. In 1973, they moved to Akron, Ohio, where Salaria had grown up and where her married brothers and their families lived. During these years, Salaria suffered increasing mental health issues and was eventually diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

John O'Reilly took care of his wife through these difficult years for as long as he was able to. When he died on December 31, 1986, Salaria had already forgotten who he was. She died on the May 18, 1990. They had met at Villa Paz—the House of Peace—and now they lay in peace side by side in Glendale Cemetery, Akron. ▲

[See the online edition at albvollunteer.org](http://albvollunteer.org) for an extended version of this article.

Remembering Aking Chan, a Chinese Volunteer in Spain

By Nancy Tsou

A found manuscript in the Basque Country leads to a surprising correspondence.

In 1937, Aking Chan, a young man from Shanghai, went by himself to join the militia in Asturias to fight fascism in Spain, disregarding the fact that he did not know this foreign land or its language. After two months of fighting, he was captured by the Franco army and imprisoned in San Pedro de Cardena. Lincoln veteran Lou Ornitz had a fond memory of him, as recorded in Carl Geiser's book *Prisoners of the good fight*.

Last fall, we received a letter from Begoña Ariznabarreta, revealing that her father, Luis, had fought with Chan in the same squad of the Basque Army against Franco army and together they were captured and imprisoned.

Perhaps many people do not know who the Chinese brigadista Chen Agen (aka: Aking Chan) is. More than eighty years ago, he was one of the 12 Chinese volunteers who participated in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). But he was the only one directly from China. His experience was full of legends.

What did Begoña know about Aking Chan?

Begoña, or Bego for short, who lives in the Basque Country in northern Spain, was forced to stay at home because of the pandemic. Unexpectedly, she found a manuscript left by her late father. She estimated that this manuscript was probably written by her father in 1979, recalling his participation in the Spanish Civil War. She found that two articles were peculiar. They were about "a Chinese in the Basque army."

During the Spanish Civil War, in the minds of the Basques, the Chinese seemed to be people from another planet. Why was there a Chinese participating in the Basque army? Bego immediately searched the Internet. She was pleasantly surprised to find that Laureano Ramirez translated our book



Chinese Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, which she bought and studied right away.

"When I saw the name of Chen Agen in table of contents, I immediately turned to his chapter and read his story. I clearly realized that he was the same Chinese brigadista who appeared in my father's writings," Bego wrote.

So did Bego's father fight the Spanish Civil War with Aking Chan?

Bego seemed to anticipate my question. She went on to write, "He participated in the Civil War with my father in Asturias, in the same squad as the Basque Brigade."

This news made me very excited, since Aking Chan indeed participated in the war in Asturias! Bego's letter also revealed that her father and Chan not only fought in the same squad, but also encountered similar experiences. She wrote, "Aking Chan was captured together with my father and also

locked up in a concentration camp." More than eighty years have passed since the Spanish Civil War broke out. Yet a Spanish fighter's descendant is looking for me to provide information about a Chinese comrade in her father's manuscript. This warmed my heart, and I immediately replied to her letter:

"From your letter, we know that your father and Aking Chan, who was two years older than him, were not only on the same squad, but also held together as prisoners of war. To our comfort, your father finally came out of prison alive. However, Aking Chan's fate remains unknown." I told Bego that we continue our research on Chinese and Asian volunteers who participated in the Spanish Civil War. "I hope you can share with us your father's manuscript about Aking Chan, so that we can add fragments of Aking Chan's life in Spain, through the eyes of his comrade—your father."

I received Bego's reply the next day. She was very happy to contact us. She said that this was a topic that moved her because her father had kept talking about the Spanish Civil War during his lifetime. And now she found that her father had missed his comrade Aking Chan. This remembrance touched her. "It would be very exciting for my brothers and me to meet Chen's descendants, and give them a copy of my father's manuscripts." Bego wrote affectionately, "I know this is very difficult to do, but we will make some attempts to find them." ▲

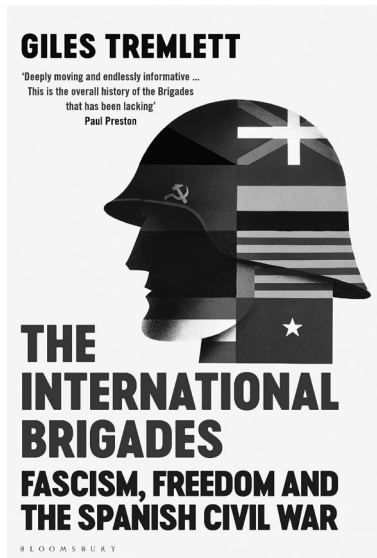
Continue reading this article in the online edition of *the Volunteer* at albavolunteer.org

*Nancy Tsou is co-author, with Len Tsou, of **Los brigadistas chinos en la Guerra Civil: La llamada de España (1936-1939)** (Madrid, 2013).*

Book review

The International Brigades: Fascism, Freedom and the Spanish Civil War, by Giles Tremlett. 696 pp. London: Bloomsbury. \$30.

Reviewed by Adam Hochschild



Consider the obstacles faced by the volunteers from around the world who rushed to help defend Madrid in the perilous autumn of 1936, when Franco's Nationalists almost captured the city. An order might come from brigade headquarters in German, be passed on in Serbo-Croatian, and be incomprehensible to an infantryman who spoke only French. Furthermore, that volunteer may have been issued unreliable ammunition for his rifle, from which he had the chance to

fire only a few shots in hasty training, and then come under friendly fire from malfunctioning artillery shells that fell short. And all this when facing an army equipped with a flood of weaponry from Mussolini and Hitler. But the International Brigades troops fought on nonetheless.

They came from 65 countries all told, according to Giles Tremlett, the Guardian correspondent in Spain and author of this authoritative new study. He estimates that at least 20% gave their lives. The first members to leave for the front received their rifles only two days before, and the first seven to die were "four Hungarians, a Greek, a Yugoslav and one of a number of volunteers who were deemed 'stateless.'" Most likely, they did not all have a language in common.

Before Tremlett's welcome book, there had been no full-length, unbiased history in English of this extraordinary facet of the Spanish Civil War: the roughly 35,000 volunteers from across the globe who came to Spain to defend its democratically-elected government. Tremlett makes use of a vast array of material, including some from the Nationalist side; his source notes and bibliography alone run to 124 pages, a rich resource for future scholars.

Tremlett gives us the Brigades warts and all: he does not stint in describing the incompetent, the paranoid, and the martinets among their commanders, from the notorious André Marty on down; or the shooting of prisoners and deserters; or the way so many Brigade veterans ended up in key positions in the repressive postwar regimes of Eastern Europe. I did not previously know, for instance, that Brigade vets commanded the Stasi, the East German secret police, for almost all of its existence. It's a sobering reminder of the mixture of loyalties that brought people to Spain, and of the way a person

who plays a heroic role at one point in history can play a thoroughly unsavory one a decade or two later. We've seen reminders of that recently, in the lives of people like Jacob Zuma in South Africa or Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar.

Nonetheless, this is still an inspiring story, especially for the world we are living in now, with authoritarian strongmen on the rise on nearly every continent, and a recent narrow escape from being fated to have four more years of an odious one of our own. Even though they failed in the end, the volunteers of 1936 had a sense of international solidarity in fighting against these sinister forces that has no exact parallel in our own time.

The International Brigades is not always an easy book to read. Conscientious about telling almost every facet of the story, Tremlett floods the reader with a dense cascade of names—of commanders, units, foot soldiers. It is something of a relief when he threads through several late chapters the poignant story of the British volunteers Nan Green, a nurse, and her doomed husband George, taken from her memoir and Paul Preston's excellent book of portraits, *Doves of War: Four Women of Spain*.

Tremlett's account is, inevitably, even more complicated because Spanish soldiers were integrated into the Brigades as the war went on. He includes useful tables of the numbers of foreign volunteers and where they came from, but the book could have greatly benefited from a multipage chart showing the five International Brigades, their constituent battalions, their commanders, and how these changed over time. Also, Tremlett has not been well served by his publisher in the book's maps, which sometimes show towns and cities not referred to in his text, and all too often don't show towns, rivers, mountain ranges, and regions of Spain which are mentioned. One map even shows a section of the front line without indicating which army is on which side. I hope these things will be corrected in a later edition.

This is a book for someone who already has a good grasp of the Spanish Civil War, such as can be had from one of the thorough overall histories by Preston, Hugh Thomas, or Antony Beevor. Tremlett assumes you know the basics about the causes of the war and the alignment of forces behind the Republicans and Nationalists. He does not really pull his camera back to provide a wider view of world politics until the withdrawal of the Brigades from combat in late 1938, against the background of the appeasement of Hitler, the Munich agreement, and the descent of Europe towards the wider war that would begin only months after the one in Spain ended.

As a comprehensive history, *The International Brigades* is a good corrective for English-speaking readers, since all too often our knowledge of the war comes from books by or about the American, British, and Canadian volunteers. But all Anglophones together were only a small proportion of the Internationals, less than one in six. And none were refugees from fascism, as was the case with German and Italian volunteers and many of those from Eastern Europe. The "Italian Civil War" between Mussolini's Italians and Internationals who included many Italian volunteers on the battlefield at Guadalajara in early 1937 was great fodder for correspondents at the time. But one of the many memorable vignettes Tremlett has unearthed is of German volunteers at the battle of Brunete the same year, engaged in a nighttime shouting match of insults with Germans in the Nationalist trenches. It is a reminder that Spain was not the only divided country at this time; in one way or another, most of Europe had similar fissures. And indeed, so did much of the world. Jawaharlal Nehru, who visited the "gallant men" of the British battalion,

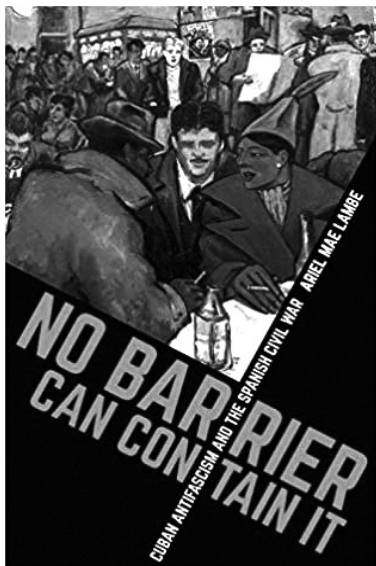
saw in their commitment an echo of his own in the long battle for Indian independence.

More than anything else, this book is a reminder of the tremendous odds against which the Internationals fought. They sometimes had to dig trenches with helmets and bayonets when there were no shovels. In the long retreat in the spring of 1938, when they ran out of grenades the desperate volunteers pelted the enemy with rocks. They all too often could only wield weapons dating from before the First World War, while from the skies they were attacked by Hitler's newest Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters or Stuka dive-bombers. And even some veterans who survived would face, after the war, concentration camps in France, death in Stalin's purges, or blacklisting in the United States and some other countries. Yet few survivors regretted that they had gone. I remember, more than 50 years ago, meeting an American vet, George Draper, and asking how he looked back on the war. He began by saying, simply, "I wish we'd won." ▲

*Adam Hochschild is a member of ALBA's Honorary Board and is the author of ten books, including **Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939**.*

No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War, by Ariel Mae Lambe. University of North Carolina Press, 2019. 310 + xvi pp.

Reviewed by Kevin A. Young



Cuba sent more volunteers to defend the Spanish Republic between 1936 and 1939 than any other Latin American country – about 1,000 people. That number was a much higher proportion by population than the 3,000 who came from the United States and about ten times as many as from Mexico, whose government was the only in Latin America to support the Republicans. The scale of Cuban involvement reflects the deep resonance of the Spanish antifascist struggle

in Cuba at the time. Ariel Mae Lambe's *No Barrier Can Contain It* explores the origins and impacts of antifascism in Cuba, stressing the importance of the Spanish struggle for domestic Cuban politics.

Lambe's focus is on the period 1934-1940, which began with a right-wing military coup by Fulgencio Batista and ended with Batista's election and the enactment of a surprisingly progressive Constitution in 1940. Lambe counters the view of many scholars that Batista's crushing of a 1935 general strike led to dormancy and demoralization on the left. Instead, progressive Cubans shifted their focus to the international level. They drew parallels between European fascism and the dictatorship, repression, and U.S. imperialism they faced at home, seeing "antifascism as a

continuation of their fight for a new Cuba." As they sent soldiers, support personnel, and material donations to Spain, they kept alive their hopes for a "New Cuba."

The Spanish cause inspired such solidarity largely because of Cuba's close historic ties to Spain, which had colonized the island until 1898. Cuban antifascists associated their own quest for a New Cuba with progressive Spaniards' fight for a "New Spain." A common language and the presence of Spanish emigres in Cuba facilitated communication. Unfortunately, Ethiopians had garnered somewhat less solidarity when Mussolini invaded their country in October 1935. Whereas the Spanish cause eventually drew broad support in Cuba, outrage over Ethiopia was limited to a smaller circle of Black Cuban activists and non-Black leftists. Several factors seem to explain this difference: the lack of migrant networks connecting Cuba and Ethiopia, the fact that Ethiopia was conquered more quickly, and the implicit racism that led to more concern for a European people.

Lambe's chapter on the volunteers who went to Spain examines their motives, the means of recruitment, and the political uses of martyrdom. Most were recruited by the Cuban Communist Party, though not all were party members. Lambe devotes special attention to one prominent Cuban activist, Pablo de la Torre Brau, who was killed on the battlefield in December 1936 and posthumously heralded as a martyr by the Cuban left. Here I wanted more detail on the demographics of the Cuban volunteers: their racial composition, their class, their urban versus rural origins, and so on. It seems like most volunteers came from the cities. But rural Cubans also had a tradition of militancy, as exemplified by the 1933 insurgency when workers had occupied dozens of sugar mills and plantations. I imagine the sources did not allow Lambe to be more specific.

The following chapter offers a more detailed portrait of participation in the donation drives organized by Cuban antifascists, including Torriente's widow Teresa "Tete" Casuso. In contrast to the volunteers who fought in Spain, Casuso and other organizers billed the donation campaign as a nonpartisan work of charity. That framing elided the nature of the opposing forces in the war, but it may have helped the campaign attract more contributions from "moderate" Cubans. Lambe uses financial records to show that donations of money, food, and clothing were very widespread across the island. A broad swath of Cuban society showed concern for Spain, at least enough to donate.

The ideological diversity of Cuban antifascism is a recurring theme throughout the book. The anticommunist Casuso symbolized the more centrist members of the coalition, which also included Free Masons and a wide range of other non-left organizations. The multifarious Cuban left was itself composed of anarchists, Communists, Trotskyists, and others. Despite plenty of conflict among these latter groups, Lambe argues that antifascism was a powerful unifying force that tempered the left's tendency toward internal division.

By the end of the decade, the antifascism initially spearheaded by leftists had spread to include more and more sectors of society. The opportunistic Batista came to see the political benefits of embracing antifascism. To win over working-class voters he also agreed to allow modest social reforms and a relatively progressive constitution. His surprising alliance with the Communist Party, which he had previously outlawed, helped deliver him the 1940 election. In return for new freedoms the party leaders moderated their own platform, as most Communist parties of the Popular Front era

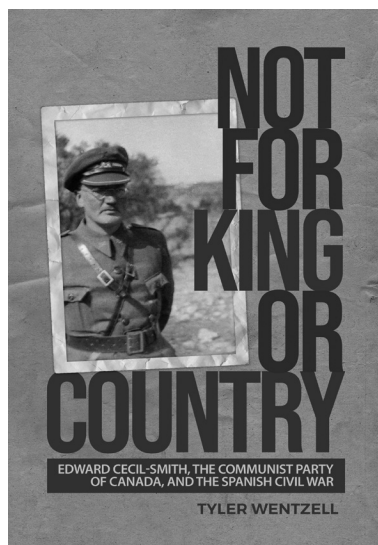
did. In contrast with many prior accounts, Lambé's interpretation of the Batista-Communist alliance stresses Batista's vulnerability, the political power of Cuban antifascism, and the role of transnational politics in shaping domestic Cuban developments.

No Barrier Can Contain It is an important contribution to Cuban history and to our understanding of the Civil War's global reverberations. Its emphasis on the relationship between transnational antifascism and domestic political struggle is novel and raises questions for future research on the Civil War years in other countries. ▲

Kevin A. Young is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is the author of among other works Blood of the Earth: Resource Nationalism, Revolution, and Empire in Bolivia (2017) and most recently a co-author with Tarun Banerjee and Michael Schwartz of Levers of Power: How the 1% Rules and What the 99% Can Do About It (2020).

Not for King or Country: Edward Cecil-Smith, the Communist Party of Canada, and the Spanish Civil War, by Tyler Wentzell. University of Toronto Press, 2020. 386 pp. \$32.95.

Reviewed by Chris Brooks



inaccuracies while providing a well-researched account of Cecil-Smith's life. Wentzell notes that he came to regard his subject as both "a man of his times and someone quite extraordinary" and walks the reader through Cecil-Smith's life: from his formative years as the son of missionary parents in China; education at the Chefoo boarding school; first employment in Shanghai; and his move to Canada in his late teens. During the Great Depression, Cecil-Smith joined the Canadian communist party in 1931.

Cecil-Smith's party standing combined with military experience in China and Canada made him a good choice to become an officer in Spain. By the age of twenty-five, Cecil-Smith attained the top non-commissioned rank in the Canadian non-active Militia Engineer Corps. Wentzell reinforces Sergeant Major Cecil-Smith's credentials by citing his selection as the Sergeant Major for an Infantry training school, a billet that in most cases was filled by an active-duty non-commissioned officer. These credentials tapped him for Officer

Training School shortly after arriving in Spain.

Cecil-Smith is remembered as a well-respected but little loved military leader. Wentzell explores Cecil-Smith's path through Officer Training School, company command in the Washington Battalion, and his appointment as adjutant commander, and commander of the Mac-Paps. Wentzell's description of the battles of Teruel, Seguro de los Baños and the first stage of the Retreats is among the best I have read. Especially noteworthy is Wentzell's account of Cecil-Smith's deployment of the Mac-Paps for the assault on the first hill at Seguro de los Baños.

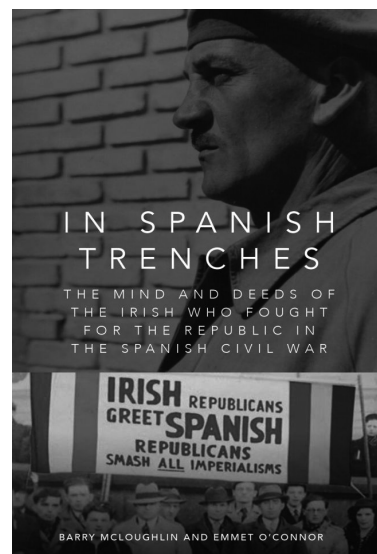
Wentzell also discusses Cecil-Smith's career post-Spain including his work as a journalist and his brief service with the Canadian Army during WWII. One area that Wentzell was unable to provide insight was Cecil-Smith's decision to leave the Canadian Communist party. Wentzell notes that he was unable to find a clear reason for the break. Cecil-Smith appears to have simply "drifted away" from the party about twenty years prior to his death in 1963.

Not for King or Country also includes excellent maps for Teruel and the first stage of the Retreats. This book will sit well alongside the best of the growing collection of books on Canadian participation in the Spanish Civil War. ▲

Chris Brooks is an ALBA Board member and manages the online volunteer database.

Spanish Trenches: The Minds and Deeds of the Irish who Fought for the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War, by Barry McLoughlin and Emmet O'Connor. University College of Dublin Press, 2020. 400 pp. \$35.

Reviewed by Chris Brooks



Touted as the "definitive study of the Connolly Column," McLoughlin and O'Connor's *In Spanish Trenches* delivers a robust account of Irish involvement in the Spanish Civil War. The book is a rich source of information on the Irish volunteers providing valued context that enables the reader to better understand the motivation of those volunteers. *In Spanish Trenches* interweaves three storylines: Irish Politics in the 1930s; the contribution of Irish volunteers in the International Brigades; and the important role played by Frank Ryan in both Ireland and Spain in supporting the Republican cause.

The book changed how I approached the topic. Instead of "why were there so few Irish volunteers?" I asked myself "how did Ireland manage to send as many volunteers as it did?" McLoughlin and O'Connor identify 247 Irish-born International Brigade volunteers

of whom 25% came directly from Ireland. This was a significant accomplishment considering the overwhelming pro-Franco stance of the Catholic church within Ireland. The small Irish Communist Party (CPI) was ill-equipped to provide either significant numbers of volunteers or other support to the Spanish Republic. Despite the obstacles, the CPI banded with other left-leaning parties and associations including the Left Book Club, Spanish Aid Committee, and Progressive Publications Society, to form a loose coalition supporting Republican Spain. These groups raised funds for relief supplies and attempted to sway public opinion toward the embattled Loyalists.

In Spanish Trenches examines the Irish volunteers both collectively in the text and as individuals in the appendix. The appendix provides the name of the volunteer, place of birth, domicile, political affiliation, arrival in Spain and fate. McLoughlin and O'Connor also examine the day-to-day experiences and battles in which the Irish participated. Their examination spans the entire period of Irish activity, from the formation of the British No. 1 Company in 1936 to the withdrawal of the Internationals in September 1938.

McLoughlin and O'Connor also give attention to some of the controversial incidents involving Irish volunteers in Spain. For example, the decision by some Irish volunteers to transfer from the British battalion to the American Lincoln battalion just before Jarama and the execution of Irish machine-gunner Maurice Ryan, who was accused of firing on his own men during the Ebro Offensive. In these incidents the authors present the events from multiple perspectives identifying underlying causes and context that led to the decisions made.

McLoughlin and O'Connor consulted Irish, British, German, Russian, and Spanish archives while researching the book. They provide an extensive bibliography and concise footnotes. Yet, some small errors did slip through. For example, in one part of the book, Oliver Law is identified as the commander of the George Washington battalion. Law commanded the Abraham Lincoln battalion, a fact cited correctly later in the text. This small misstep does not detract from the overall scholarship of the work. The book also includes well-chosen photographs and maps that support the text.

McLoughlin and O'Connor's research uncovered new archival evidence regarding Frank Ryan's trial. Ryan, the "acknowledged" leader of the Irish in Spain, was captured, tried and convicted by a Nationalist court martial and sentenced to death for "adherence to the rebellion." A non-communist and practicing Catholic, Ryan accompanied one of the first contingents of Irish to arrive in Spain. He distinguished himself during the Battle of Jarama by rallying the shattered remnants of the British battalion and leading them back to their original battle position. Shortly thereafter Ryan left Spain on a speaking tour for Republican Spain in Ireland. When he returned, he was appointed editor of *The Book of the XVth Brigade*. During the Retreats Ryan was captured in the ambush of the British battalion at Calaceite. McLoughlin and O'Connor's research uncovered documents dealing with Ryan's incarceration and trial that provide a better understanding of the decision to hold Ryan long after the release of most international prisoners.

In Spanish Trenches presents sufficient new material to inform both longstanding students of the Spanish Civil War as well as those who are reading about the war for the first time. ▲

Shirley Katz Cohen (1926-2020)

While growing up in New York City, I was fortunate to have various strong, intelligent, and politically committed women in my family. One of the most impressive of these women was my "aunt," Shirley Katz Cohen (actually the sister of an aunt), whose presence at family dinners and special events had a distinctive influence on me. A long time contributor to and supporter of ALBA, we just learned that she also left us a generous bequest. Her death in March 2020 at age 93 embodies the passing of an entire generation for whom the Spanish Civil War and the broader struggle against fascism were life defining causes.

Born and raised in the Bronx, Shirley attended Evander Childs High School, graduated from Hunter College in 1946, and then went on to earn a Master's degree in education from Columbia. Summers at Camp Kinderland helped to shape her progressive ideals. She taught mathematics for over 30 years at the High School of Performing Arts (now LaGuardia High School), where she cultivated lifelong friendships with colleagues and students. She was active in the original New York City Teachers Union and remained a committed trade unionist all her life. She was an



outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War, and among other causes, she supported Planned Parenthood and the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel. She was a cultural activist as well. A lifelong speaker and student of Yiddish, she hosted an annual Yiddish "Sing A Long" that she and her husband Martin hosted in their Upper Westside apartment. The couple attended ALBA's annual event regularly.

Shirley's wit, bright smile, and fierce intelligence lit up every event she attended.

A brilliant conversationalist, she loved to argue about politics, the future of Yiddishkeit, women's liberation, family disputes, the latest fiction she was reading—always with passion, insight, and humor. She followed closely the transition we made from VALB to ALBA. She would quiz me closely, always focused on how to best preserve the legacy of the volunteers and how to educate young people today about their idealism and sacrifice.

Truly a woman of valor, Shirley Katz Cohen's memory will always be a blessing.

—Daniel Czitrom

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Continued from page 2.

Phillip, most of Hughes' journalistic works for the Baltimore Afro-American are gathered in the Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs, vol. 9 (University of Missouri Press, 2002). This volume also includes a report for Nation, one for Volunteer for Liberty (which initially was a radio speech for EAR Madrid radio station), and further essays on Spain from the Langston Hughes Papers Collection at the Beinecke Library. If you can access the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database through an academic institution, you'll also be able to download scanned copies of these articles from the Afro-American archives (the reports were always accompanied by pictures that Hughes sent from the front).

The Beinecke Library at Yale University holds a stunning collection of Hughes' works, including manuscripts and drafts of these articles. I know they've been digitalizing plenty of archival content during the pandemic, you might want to have a look: <https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/11/resources/969>

Besides, as you mention, these articles were translated into Spanish by Javier Lucini and published in BAAM (2011). In this volume, Maribel Cruzado Soria did a wonderful job with the translation of Hughes' poems on Spain. Here you'll also find the translation of the last chapters of I Wonder as I Wander (1956)—Hughes' second autobiography—where he tells of his experience in wartime Spain (with hindsight, 20 years after).

I am also attaching a very interesting paper by Josh Roiland (2013) that approaches Hughes' works for the Baltimore Afro-American from the literary journalism perspective, I hope you enjoy reading it.

Let me know if I can be of any further assistance, Hughes' works on Spain are absolutely fascinating.

Best,

Alba Fernández Alonso
Universidad de Burgos

Dear Alba,

Thank you so much for your time and extreme generosity in sharing with me Langston Hughes' work, as well as the paper by Josh Roiland. I can't wait to read about Hughes' experiences in Spain, and learn more about this fascinating, singular time in our history. A few years ago, I discovered Claude McKay's Amiable with Big Teeth at our local library (the book itself discovered just a few years before!), and it set me on my own course of discovery about the early fight against fascism, and the men and women who lived and died for something greater than themselves. Thank you again.

All my best,

Phil Mazzone

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