



"SOME MEN PUT IN THEIR LIVES"

Americans in the International Brigades, Spain 1936-1939

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**The long collection speech is done
And now the felt hat goes
From hand to hand its solemn way
Among the restless rows.**

**In purse and pocket, fingers feel
And count the coins by touch.
Minds ponder what they can afford
And hesitate--how much?**

**In that brief, jostled moment when
The battered hat arrives
Try, brother, to remember that
Some men put in their lives.**

**Paul Ryan,
American International Brigades veteran**

Quoted in Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field": An Inquiry into the Development and the Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971, p.89

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INTRODUCTION

During the twenty-two months between December of 1936 and October of 1938, some 3,000 Americans traveled to Spain under the auspices of the American Communist Party in order to join the Comintern-organized International Brigades defending the Spanish Republic. The Americans comprised a small contingent of the 35,000 foreigners who fought in the International Brigades, and the Brigades themselves represented only a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of men in the Republican Popular Army. Despite their small numbers and their brief existence as a fighting unit, the American volunteers have been a subject of seemingly endless heated controversy throughout the nearly six decades since the end of the Spanish war. They are probably among the most written about groups of 3,000 fighting men in American history.

The events of the American volunteers' service in Spain passed quickly from history to legend even while the war lasted. Both their admirers and detractors reacted emotionally to the men fighting in Spain. On both sides of the issue, observers distorted facts in order to support their own prejudices. Leftists and progressive liberals tended to see the volunteers as heroic and blameless, while conservatives decried them as a rabble of Communist stooges. In the years since, the persistence of disagreement over the volunteers' motives and accomplishments has been accompanied by the persistence of ideologically biased analysis. While this author cannot claim to be free from bias, this study attempts to assemble material from both sides of the issue in an effort to construct a more balanced account of the American International Brigaders.

The International Brigades were simultaneously a political symbol and a military unit. Both the political and military dimensions of the International Brigades

must be understood to understand their organization and subsequent history. The political element is what has sustained debate over the American volunteers, but concentrating exclusively on the volunteers' political motives and impact obscures their military function. Analysis of the volunteers has tended to focus primarily on their politics rather than their military performance, while histories of their military exploits often rely on narrative devoid of critical analysis. Either course fails to provide a complete account of the American volunteers' history. This study attempts to explain the intersection between the International Brigades' political and military functions; it also explores the consequences of that relationship for the American volunteers.

The military exploits of the American volunteers took place against a background of global ideological conflict between fascism exemplified by Germany and Italy on the one hand and socialist progressivism championed, however inappropriately, by the Soviet Union on the other; the democratic nations constituted the undecided majority in the conflict. The clash in Spain of the pseudo-fascist Nationalist rebels and the progressive Republican government moved people all over the world to react strongly to the seemingly local war. Seeking to capture the attention of the world's anti-fascists while preserving the Soviet Union's strategic interests, the Comintern organized the International Brigades to fight in the Spanish war.

When the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) called for volunteers to join the International Brigades, a small segment of American society responded. The American supporters of the Spanish Republic spanned a broad spectrum of liberal and leftist politics, but those who were willing to actually risk their lives in its defense came primarily from the leading elements of radical politics, primarily from the Communist Party. Without condemning the American volunteers for their affiliation with the CPUSA, the impact of the Party's leadership on the

American International units' composition, organization, and ultimate performance in both the military and political dimensions was substantial.

The combination of the Communists' political goals and the military realities of the war in Spain made the Internationals a unique fighting force. The Americans enlisted in an army in which ideological commitment was paramount. Commitment to antifascism was not only the volunteers' motive for fighting; in the eyes of the leadership, at least, it was also the Brigades' greatest military asset. The Americans and their multinational comrades probably would have traded their advantage in morale for the Nationalists' massive superiority in arms and equipment, but they fought courageously regardless. Probably 1,000 of the 3,000 Americans who went to Spain died there, paying the final price for their dedication to the cause. Though the record they etched with their sacrifice was one of defeat and frustration, the ultimate failure of the Republican cause did not diminish the efforts of the American Internationals.

THE WORLD REACTS

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE SPANISH WAR

From its outset, the civil war in Spain aroused intense international reaction. While an in-depth investigation of the spectrum of international response to the Spanish Civil War is beyond the scope of this study, a basic understanding of the international forces at work provides essential context to the experiences of the American volunteers. Backward Spain with its turbulent political struggles had long aroused the imagination of both radicals and conservatives all over the world. Spain, with its recurrent civil wars and *coups d'état* throughout the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries provided a sense of urgency to the sterile ideological debates of the rest of the world. With the overthrow of Spain's ailing monarchy and the declaration of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931, Spain became a powerful symbol for activists of all political persuasions; the outbreak of civil war galvanized opinion into intense international reaction.

The Spanish Civil War erupted on 18 July 1936 with a military uprising directed by a cabal of generals from which General Francisco Franco eventually emerged as supreme leader. On the surface the Spanish Civil War was a conflict between the rightist "Nationalist" rebels and the leftist "Republican" or "Loyalist" defenders of the established republican government of Spain. In truth, both sides were politically heterogeneous. The Nationalists included the Navarrese Carlists, ultraorthodox Catholic monarchists; the *Falange Espanola*, a semi-fascist party; and the rightist majority of the military. In addition, the Spanish Foreign Legion and the Moroccan ("Moorish") troops of the colonial army fought on the Nationalist side. The Nationalists were able to unite in their common desire for a centralized authoritarian state preserving the old class system. They appealed to reaction and religion, justifying their cause in the name of Spanish nationalism and Catholic

traditionalism. By contrast, the supporters of the Republic found themselves frequently working toward incompatible goals. Liberals and radicals, centralists and regionalists, libertarian Anarchists and authoritarian Communists all struggled to find a collective cause. The Republicans had no positive unifying ideology--while they supported the Republic, the only ideological label they could agree on was "anti-fascist." The Loyalists' disunity would frequently lead to internal conflicts within the Republican camp, ultimately hampering the war effort.¹

Historian Hugh Thomas argued that the Spanish Civil War was "the consequence of the working of general European ideas upon Spain. Each of the leading political ideas of Europe since the sixteenth century has been received with enthusiasm by one group of Spaniards and opposed ferociously by another, without any desire for compromise being shown by either side..." Hapsburg Catholicism, Bourbon absolutism, French Revolution-era liberalism, positivism, socialism, anarchism, communism, and fascism all had their Spanish adherents and opponents. The conflict of ideas kept unrest brewing in Spain while also keeping Europeans intrigued with the Spanish situation. When civil war once again erupted in July of 1936, the international fascination with Spain quickly led the rest of the world to become involved.²

While the world's intellectuals argued and debated, the clash of ideology in Europe played out on the Spanish stage. The interplay between the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, and the Western democracies shaped the reactions of each to the Spanish Civil War. The opposing forces of Soviet communism and German-Italian fascism each had a significant stake in the outcome of the war, while the democracies were more reluctant to take sides in the confusing struggle.

¹ Antony Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, New York (Peter Bedrick Books, 1983). pp.42-43, 48

² Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, revised and enlarged edition, New York (Harper and Row , Publishers 1977 (orig. pub. 1961) p.336

The war in Spain was important to the Soviet Union for a number of reasons. Worried by the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy in the mid-1930s, the Soviet Union attempted to strengthen its position by fashioning a strategy of collective security with France and Britain against the fascist nations. The 1935 treaty of cooperation with France, one of the USSR's few successes of collective security, might be rendered useless if France was threatened on three sides by fascist nations after a Nationalist victory in Spain. The war in Spain also presented some positive opportunities to the Soviets, for the Spanish conflict offered tangible proof of the fascist threat that could entice France and Britain into closer cooperation with the USSR. Stalin therefore chose to follow a very cautious policy toward the Spanish Republic. Throughout the war the USSR provided the vast majority of the Republic's arms, but the Soviets refused to risk intervening sufficiently to make a decisive impact on the course of the war. In part, Soviet hesitation stemmed from a desire to avoid alarming the democracies with the specter of onrushing communist influence. Stalin had more Machiavellian underlying motives, however. The continuation of the conflict preserved Soviet freedom of action while producing an international situation that would increasingly threaten Britain and France's Mediterranean interests. In the best-case scenario, the Spanish war might erupt into a general war involving France, Britain, Italy and Germany, in which the Soviet Union could remain neutral and pick up the pieces afterward.³

German motives for participation in the Spanish Civil War centered on strategic preparations for a general war. Hitler later said that he helped Franco in order, "to distract the attention of the western powers to Spain, and so enable German

³Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.338-340; Burnett Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.109 [hereafter cited as Revolution and Counterrevolution]; Walter G. Krivitsky, In Stalin's Secret Service: An Exposé of Russia's Secret Policies by the Former Chief of Soviet Intelligence in Western Europe, Frederick, Maryland (University Publications of America, 1985) orig. pub.1939. pp.80-81

rearmament to continue unobserved." He also saw an opportunity to gain a fascist ally, "athwart the sea communications of Britain and France." The threat posed by a Nationalist Spain to the Franco-Soviet security agreement must also have occurred to the Germans. In addition, a Nationalist government in Spain would ensure German access to Spanish iron ore and other strategic minerals⁴.

The Nationalists' appeal for help flattered Mussolini and offered potential gains for Italian security interests. On the heels of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, Mussolini saw Spain as another chance for a low-risk martial adventure to shore up the glory of his New Rome. In addition, the Italians hoped to gain air bases in Spain so that they could challenge British control of the Western Mediterranean.⁵

Ironically, the Spanish Civil War proved to be the factor that cemented the German-Italian alliance. Though Mussolini manifested a hostile attitude toward the "bourgeois" democracies in 1936, Italy's relations with Germany remained vague and undefined. The potential for Italy to move closer to the democracies than to Hitler continued until the events of the Spanish war drew Germany and Italy together. In the air of heightened tension in Europe following the outbreak of war in Spain, Germany and Italy found themselves helping the same side and discovered sufficient mutual interest to form the Rome-Berlin Axis.⁶

In sharp contrast to Germany and Italy, which intervened immediately in Spain, France and Britain both attempted to stay out of the conflict. The French Popular Front government of Leon Blum sympathized with the Republic and wanted to send weapons and aircraft, but British distaste for the conflict prevailed. Still weak from the First World War and alarmed by increasing German power, France relied on

⁴ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.356, 736

⁵ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.352-353

⁶ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.353

collective action with Britain to maintain its security and felt compelled to secure British support for any foreign policy initiatives.

The British were reluctant to act in Spain because they had long been more concerned with the menace of communism than that of fascism. Britain's conservative governments appeased Hitler because they feared that destroying Nazi Germany would allow the Soviets to consolidate their strength, free of the greatest threat to their security. Eventually, unchecked Bolshevism might overcome all Europe.⁷

Fearing Bolshevism, the British government felt little incentive to intervene in a conflict between a revolutionary Republic and authoritarian Nationalists. It preferred to pass off the war as a purely Spanish matter, ignoring German and Italian support for the Nationalists, and British reaction remained subdued even when Nationalist submarines began attacking British and neutral shipping in the Western Mediterranean.⁸ In fact, the Royal Navy allowed the Nationalists to route their communications between Morocco and Spain through Gibraltar, relayed intelligence reports of Republican shipping, and on one occasion used its ships to screen Nationalist-held ports from attack by Republican warships.⁹

To preserve unity of action with Britain, the French proposed a policy of "non-intervention" in which no arms sales or other help would be provided to either side in Spain. A Non-Intervention Committee including all the European countries but Switzerland was established in order to enforce the Agreement, but it was totally ineffective. Germany and Italy grudgingly agreed to the restrictions, as did the Soviet Union, although Germany and Italy were already violating the Non-Intervention

⁷ Bolloren, Revolution and Counterrevolution pp. 92-93

⁸ Beevor, The Spanish Civil War pp. 109-110 The submarines included both Italian boats given to the Nationalists and "legionary" craft in Nationalist service but retained by Italy and crewed by Italian sailors. The submarines apparently sank over 70,000 tons of shipping by the end of the war (Thomas 979).

⁹ Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, pp.48, 63, 112

Agreement when they agreed to its terms, and the Soviets had made up their mind to do so as well. In practice, the Non-Intervention Agreement was a farce. The only intervention it prevented was potential French aid to the Republic, while war material and military personnel from Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union streamed into Spain.¹⁰

German and Italian arms began to pour into the Nationalist zone in July of 1936, followed later by combat troops. The Italian Corps of Volunteer Troops (CTV), ostensibly composed of volunteers but actually made up in large part of Fascist militia conscripts, reached a strength of fifty thousand men. About five thousand Italians served in the Italian "Legionary Air Force" in Spain. Mussolini also sent to Spain about 660 aircraft, 150 3-ton Fiat-Ansaldo tanks, around 800 pieces of artillery, and a vast amount of other assorted ordnance. In addition, ninety-one Italian warships and submarines took part in the civil war.¹¹ Germany sent the "Condor Legion" of approximately one hundred combat aircraft, supported by anti-aircraft, anti-tank and armored units. At the height of its strength, the Condor Legion totaled five thousand men and was equipped with the newest German equipment, including early models of the Messerschmitt 109 fighter and the rapid-fire 88 millimeter anti-aircraft gun that would become famous in the Second World War.¹²

Fearful of alarming the democracies or provoking open hostility from Germany, Stalin nonetheless came to believe that Soviet interests in the preservation of the Republic required intervention by the USSR in violation of the Non-Intervention agreement. In contrast to the brazen participation of the Italians and the only slightly less obvious German presence, Stalin's caution and his interest in prolonging the war led to a more limited Soviet role in Spain.

¹⁰ Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, pp.120-121; Thomas 395

¹¹ Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, p.146; Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.978-979

¹² Thomas, The Spanish Civil War pp. 469-470

The political and logistical problems behind large-scale commitment of Red Army ground troops led the Soviets to focus on more discreet intervention, primarily sending war material and military "advisors." The first Soviet arms shipments only began arriving in Spain in October of 1936 due to Stalin's initial indecision and the elaborate network of front corporations through which the supplies passed in a vain attempt to conceal their origins and destination.¹³ Official Soviet reports published in the 1970s gave totals of between 600 and 800 aircraft, around 350 tanks, 1200 to 1500 artillery pieces, 500,000 rifles, millions of rounds of artillery and small arms ammunition (which were nevertheless rarely adequate for the Republic's needs), and a variety of miscellaneous military equipment.¹⁴ Accompanying the Soviet war material was a substantial number of Soviet officials and military advisors. Soviet military advisors, most of whom were staff officers or technicians, apparently never numbered more than 600 or so in Spain at a time. Due to frequent rotation, however, between two and three thousand advisors served in Spain.¹⁵ In an effort to prevent a major confrontation with Germany, Stalin ordered Soviet officers to "stay out of range of the artillery fire!"¹⁶ Soviet advisors frequently took direct command in the heat of battle, however.¹⁷

While Stalin refused to commit large numbers of Soviet personnel to combat roles, there were two Soviet combat units directly involved in the fighting. A Soviet armored unit, usually described as a brigade but allegedly greater in strength, comprised the bulk of the Republic's tank corps throughout the war. Likewise, a

¹³ Krivitsky, In Stalin's Secret Service, pp.84-87

¹⁴ Bolloten, Revolution and Counterrevolution, p.107-108 Hugh Thomas cites figures taken from Nationalist sources which are largely similar, though they claim 900 tanks and 1,000 planes (The Spanish Civil War, p.982)

¹⁵ Cameron Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.44; Soviet intelligence officer Krivitsky maintained that there were no more than 2,000 Soviet personnel in Spain at any time (In Stalin's Secret Service, p.95)

¹⁶ Bolloten, Revolution and Counterrevolution, p.108

¹⁷ Bolloten, Revolution and Counterrevolution, pp.306-307

Soviet air unit composed of about 1,000 pilots and support personnel under the command of a Red Air Force general operated the Soviet-made aircraft. Throughout the war, Republican generals and civilian officials had little authority over the air and armored equipment provided by the Russians; rarely did they know the strength of these units or where they were based until they were involved in operations. A Russian NKVD unit also traveled to Spain and was instrumental in the organization of the Republican political police apparatus, in addition to working behind the scenes to promote domination of the Loyalist government by the Spanish Communists.¹⁸

The creation of the International Brigades in the fall of 1936 was another element of Soviet aid to Spain. Rather than sending Soviet ground troops to Spain, Stalin took up the suggestion of European communist leaders that the Comintern actively recruit foreign volunteers to fight in Spain. Numerous foreigners were already fighting for the Republic, including several small all-foreign units. Approximately five thousand foreign volunteers fought for the Republic independent of its own army of foreigners, the International Brigades).¹⁹ While the exact date of the decision is unknown, the Comintern took the first steps in the formation of the International Brigades before the end of September.²⁰

The Soviet ministry of defense was probably involved in planning the operation from an early date, as the Soviets had experience using international units in the Russian civil war. At that time, many foreigners--some volunteers, others ex-prisoners of war left in Russia after the First World War--served in a variety of international formations within the Red Army. By enlisting international volunteers

¹⁸ Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, p.123; Bollothen, Revolution and Counterrevolution, pp.315-316

¹⁹ Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, p.98, 106-107,124

²⁰ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp. 452. Vincent Brome, The International Brigades: Spain 1936-1939, London (Heinemann, 1965) pp.14-15; Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, Inc., 1980 [first pub. 1969]). p.87

to serve the Soviet cause in Spain, Stalin saw a chance to duplicate a previous success while committing a minimum of Soviet manpower.²¹

Soviet authority in the formation of the International Brigades emerges in examination of the Brigades' command. Communists from around the world made up the Brigades' general staff: the Italian Communists Luigi Longo and Vittorio Vidali served as Inspector General and chief political commissar, respectively; the supreme commander was the tyrannical Frenchman André Marty; American leftist journalist Louis Fischer even got into the act, briefly serving as the Brigades' quartermaster. The general absence of experienced military leadership in foreign party ranks presented a problem, however. Stalin did not want to send Soviet officers to command the International Brigades. Fortunately, however, there was a substantial number of foreigners in the Red Army's officer corps. Many of these men had served in the first international units during the Russian Civil War; now Stalin impressed them into the International Brigades. All five of the original International Brigades were commanded by foreign-born Red Army officers when they first took the field.²²

While André Marty's general staff eventually degenerated into self-destructive paranoia, its early accomplishments in the organization of the International Brigades are impressive. The decision to form the Brigades was not finalized until late September. By early October, the staff had selected the desolate provincial capital of Albacete as its base and recruits began streaming in. Within twenty four days after the first recruits arrived in Albacete, the XI and XII International Brigades marched off to the front at Madrid, 1,900 and 1,500 strong. Mobilization in twenty-four days would be fairly impressive under most conditions; in light of the language barriers,

²¹ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.452-453;

²² Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.69-70

the lack of training, the unscheduled arrival of volunteers, and the inexperience of the staff, the rapid constitution of the Brigades is remarkable.²³

From their first action, the Internationals redeemed their convictions in blood. The XI Brigade entered the furious battle for Madrid on 8 November, the XII Brigade on the thirteenth. A third of the 1,900 man XI Brigade were killed in its first two days of fighting. By the time the battle ground to a bloody stalemate on 23 November, 1,600 of the 3,400 Internationals involved had been killed or wounded. Throughout the war, the Republican command counted on the discipline of the Internationals, throwing them into the most critical sectors time and again.²⁴

There were five more or less permanent International Brigades, each ostensibly composed of four 700-man rifle battalions, a machine gun unit, a mortar section, a scouting platoon, first aid station, and transportation elements. On paper, each brigade numbered about 3,500 men and was supposed to be able to operate independent of other units according to the Soviet "mixed brigade" doctrine current at the time. By the time substantial numbers of Americans had arrived in Spain, the Brigades had been further organized into the 35th International Division, composed of the XI, XIII, and XV Brigades, and the 45th International Division which contained the XII and XIV Brigades. The divisional organization included one or two Russian advisors, a medium caliber artillery battery (generally of obscure or ancient origin), and a cavalry squadron.²⁵

Through the course of the war, about 35,000 volunteers from 53 nations wore the red three-pointed star insignia of the Comintern's International Brigades. The volunteers were drawn largely working-class and most were communists. Their motives for volunteering were primarily ideological: they fought against fascism, for

²³ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.73

²⁴ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.480; Brome, The International Brigades, p.82

²⁵ Verle B. Johnston, Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, University Park, Pennsylvania (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p.83

communism, or in fewer cases, for freedom. Their fight was a personal one in many cases. The Italian and German Brigaders and many of the Eastern Europeans were exiles from their own countries and had yearned for the outbreak of a war against fascism; in Spain, they saw their chance to take the first step toward the eventual liberation of their own countries.²⁶ German writer and International Brigades officer Gustav Regler eloquently expressed the fervent sense of pride and duty that grew out of the Comintern's call to arms: "Out of the uncertainty of the military situation there grew the certainty of gladiators. Men dedicated to life again discovered the meaning of life.... The constant threat of death, which they laughed at or at least ignored, had restored their dignity."²⁷ One English communist volunteer probably summed up his International comrades' motivations for volunteering: "undoubtedly the great majority are here for the sake of an ideal, no matter what motive prompted them to seek one."²⁸

²⁶ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.455

²⁷ Gustav Regler, The Owl of Minerva: The Autobiography of Gustav Regler, New York (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959), p.284

²⁸ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.455

THE AMERICAN REACTION

The war in Spain affected the United States to a lesser extent than Europe, but among interested groups' reaction was nonetheless intense. Though most Americans remained relatively unconcerned with events in Spain throughout the war, some people demonstrated strong feelings on the Spanish situation. Insulated by the Atlantic from the realities of the Spanish war, Americans tended to see the war in simplified symbolic terms based on their own beliefs. Though public opinion tended to offer tepid moral support to the Republic, American opinion on Spain spanned the political spectrum.

While more Americans felt emotional ties to the Spanish Republic, substantial elements of American society supported the Nationalists. Franco's supporters ranged from far-right political groups to corporate America. Quasi-fascist groups saw the Nationalist rebellion as a long-overdue response to the rising tide of international communism. The real significance of the Spanish situation to these far-right organizations was as a mirror-image of the domination of the United States by Jews, foreigners and communists. The official newspaper of the "Christian Silvershirts" alleged that, "The Jewish Reds got into power in Spain by exactly the same processes that they have taken to get into power in the United States.... The Christian people of Spain rebelled... just as ultimately they've *got* to rebel here."²⁹

American Catholics sympathies for the Nationalists were of particular importance in defining the nation's reaction to the Spanish war. While a sizable minority of American Catholics supported the Loyalist government, the majority of the American church denounced the Republic as communist and anti-Christian. Rather than endorsing Spanish fascism, however, Catholics tended to ignore Franco's

²⁹ Allen Guttman, The Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War, New York (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962). pp.20-21

excesses. Though Church leaders enthusiastically endorsed Franco's bellicose Catholicism, American Catholics tended to support Franco because they believed that he was saving Spanish democracy from communist and anarchist domination. While Catholics' perceptions of Franco's intentions were mistaken, their support for the Nationalist regime constrained the U.S. government's freedom of action with regard to Spain.³⁰

Several American corporations provided critical support to the Nationalists, motivated by the desire to protect existing investments and to preserve the Spanish market from the anti-capitalist forces on the Republican side. The Texas Oil Company's aid to Franco had arguably the greatest direct impact on the course of the war of any action taken by Americans. In 1935, a centrist Spanish government had changed Spain's primary oil supplier from the Soviet Union to Texaco. When the Nationalist rising began in June of 1936, five Texaco tankers carrying thousands of tons of oil were en route to Spain. Texaco president Thorkild Rieber, a strong pro-fascist who went to Spain in August to visit the Nationalist generals, ordered the tankers to change course and head for Nationalist-held ports rather than deliver the oil to the legal government that had paid for it.³¹ Since the monetarily-poor Nationalists could not raise sufficient currency to pay for the oil, Texaco supplied millions of dollars worth of credit on the expectation of a Franco victory. The Nationalists eventually paid their bills and credit was renewed throughout the war. Standard Oil also supplied oil on credit to the Nationalists, though in smaller amounts than Texaco. In addition to oil, American companies provided much of the Nationalist army's transport. The Nationalists bought 12,000 Ford, Studebaker, and General Motors trucks, compared to only 3,000 from their German and Italian allies because

³⁰ Guttman, Wound in the Heart, pp.30-33

³¹ Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War: revised and enlarged edition, New York (Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977 [orig. pub. 1961]), p.417

American trucks were cheaper. A Nationalist official admitted in 1945 that, "without American petroleum and American trucks and American credit, we could never have won the civil war."³²

While support for Republican Spain tended to increase as one traveled further leftward on the political spectrum, the Spanish Civil War was nonetheless a central issue for many more moderate Americans as well. Adam Clayton Powell, John Dewey, and Reinhold Neibuhr were among many non-communist liberals who signed statements supporting the Spanish Republic as the receptacle of "the forces of democracy and social progress," "popular government, freedom of worship and separation of Church and State," and "our own traditions of education for democracy."³³ American liberals tended to see the Republic as the legal constitutional government of Spain rather than the latest front for advancing international Communism, . These politically aroused Americans decried the Administration's efforts to remain uninvolved since neutrality meant standing idly by as Germany and Italy enthusiastically supported the Nationalists.³⁴

American liberals responded to the war in Spain with an outpouring of emotion. Author Daniel Friedenburg reminisced that, "we--the liberals of our generation--conceived of Spain as the Armageddon where the forces of evil would be smashed and the world would finally turn to light and love.... We thought history was on our side." The war energized politically active liberals and became a burning issue that made the ideological struggle between freedom and fascism appear clear, vibrant and concrete. Significantly, however, liberals' emotional reactions to the war were not often accompanied by an accurate understanding of the realities of the Spanish situation. Most of the Republic's American supporters imagined it to be a pluralist,

³² Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.363, 417, 943, 975; Antony Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, New York (Peter Bedrick Books, 1982), pp.114-115

³³ Guttman, Wound in the Heart, p.81

³⁴ Guttman, Wound in the Heart, p.88

liberal democracy much like the United States, and they were ignorant of the revolutionary tensions throughout Spanish society and politics.³⁵

Following their largely liberal or leftist political leanings, American intellectuals supported the Republic. Many American intellectuals, like their European counterparts, had long been captivated by the Spanish people's struggle to overcome economic and social disadvantages. Spain's return to popular government in the Thirties had seemed a ray of hope as the rest of Europe moved towards fascism and un-reason. The "Spanish experiment" came to represent the battle for Enlightenment rationality in a world gone wrong. When the civil war broke out, the American intelligentsia saw it as a Fascist invasion bent on halting Progress in Spain. Dozens of college presidents joined hundreds of professors, writers and artists in signing petitions in support of the Republic. A flood of pro-Republican pamphlets, articles and books poured from engaged writers as Spain became the central cause for a generation of intellectuals. Even at the time, Spain was often referred to as "the last great cause" or the "last pure cause" because many intellectuals believed that victory or defeat in Spain would decide the fate of progressivism worldwide. For American intellectuals, Spain became the stage for an epic conflict between good and evil, leading large numbers to activism and some even to volunteer for the International Brigades.³⁶

The Spanish Civil War created substantial tensions within leftist political circles even though the vast majority of American radicals strongly supported the Republic. The war proved the undoing of the movement toward isolationism and pacifism among American leftists. The Socialist Party of the United States

³⁵ Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field: An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939", (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), p.136

³⁶ Stanley Weintraub, The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War, New York (Weybright and Talley, 1968) pp.8-12; Guttman, Wound in the Heart, pp.86-87; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.133-136

abandoned its long-held pacifist stance in the face of the evidence of incipient fascist aggression. Socialist leader Norman Thomas explained that, "I had to moderate my religious beliefs and my pacifism to a degree that I thought of war as an enormous evil--but in some cases a lesser evil than submission."³⁷ Thomas's passionate support for the Spanish Republic led to dissension within the party, particularly among those Socialists who thought Thomas naively uncritical of Communist activities in Spain and those who believed his retreat from pacifism premature.³⁸ Similar problems occurred in student organizations when the onset of the Spanish War changed their focus overnight from taking the "Oxford pledge" not to participate in any form of military service to agitating for greater American involvement in the war. The League Against Fascism and War quietly changed its name to the League for Peace and Democracy in 1937 after its Communist fellow-traveling leadership admitted that some wars were worth fighting. At least one Oxford pledge organizer actually joined the Lincoln Battalion and went to war himself.³⁹

American grassroots opinion on the Spanish Civil War leaned toward the Republic, though this support stemmed primarily from emotional factors and inaccurate perceptions of the Spanish situation. The Republic's political institutions vaguely resembled those of the United States, attracting more common Americans than Franco's Catholic-authoritarian rhetoric. The conduct of the war also influenced American opinion. While both sides commonly committed atrocities, the Nationalists' indiscriminate bombing of cities aroused significant American opposition. An important element in American opposition to the Nationalists was

³⁷ James C. Duram, Norman Thomas, New York (Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974) pp.30-31

³⁸ House Committee on Un-American Activities, "Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States--1938" Washington (United States Government, 1938)--testimony of Sam Baron, pp.2549-2552 [cited hereafter as HUAC--1938]

³⁹ HUAC--1938," pp.662-664;671; Guttman, Wound in the Heart, pp.111-114; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.124; Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1969]), p.74

American Protestants' prejudice against Catholicism. Opposition to Catholicism led many Protestants to blame the Spanish Church for the conditions that led to war, a belief leading to support for the Republic. Some traditionally conservative Protestant groups (including the Daughters of the American Revolution and a number of fundamentalist Protestant churches), provoked by Catholic activism for Franco, chose to support the Republic out of spite.⁴⁰

Despite the tendency of Americans to favor the Republic, underlying political factors ensured that grassroots support for the Loyalist government was never very strong. As the majority of Americans were not politically active, most people had little concept of the issues at stake and little concern. While the Spanish Civil War raged across the Atlantic, Americans were attuned to the continuing saga of the Depression and the New Deal. Popular opinion on international events remained rooted in a reinvigorated version of traditional isolationism. Americans' hopes for a just global order after the World War were crushed by the Depression and the rise of fascism. The belief in 1917 that America was fighting for democracy gave way in the Thirties to the suspicion that American blood had been shed to protect corporate interests and foolish Europeans. Senator Gerald Nye of North Dakota's investigations into the profits of munitions manufacturers and other corporations during the Great War intensified American disgust with war. Congress passed the Neutrality Act of 1935 in the aftermath of Nye's revelations. The Neutrality Act forbade American citizens to sell or transport military supplies to any belligerent nation once the President had proclaimed that a state of war existed. Americans had become profoundly reluctant to become involved in foreign affairs by the late 1930s, particularly if war threatened.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.116, 118-119, 140; Guttman, Wound in the Heart, pp.67-71, 79-80

⁴¹ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.122-124

The degree of disinterest in aiding the Spanish Republic was clear in a Gallup poll administered in February of 1939 (full results reprinted on next page). Despite the constant coverage of the Spanish war in the media, only 59 percent of Americans said that had been following the events of the war. Of those who had followed the Spanish war, 51 percent favored the Republic, but they comprised only 30.1 percent of the total sample. Only 39 percent of the informed individuals, comprising 23 percent of the total sample, believed that the Republic should be allowed to buy arms in the United States.⁴² While more Americans supported the Republic than the Nationalists, their support was weak and non-programmatic.

February 1939 Gallup Poll⁴³

Subjects were asked, "Have you been following the Spanish Civil War?"

Yes: 59.0 percent

No: 41.0 percent

Those who answered "Yes" were asked two more questions:

1. "Which side do you sympathize with, the Loyalists or Franco?"

	<u>%</u>	<u>% total sample</u>
Republican	51.0	30.1
Nationalist	19.0	11.2
Neither	21.0	12.4
No opinion	9.0	5.3

2. "Should Congress permit the Loyalists to buy war materials in the United States?"

	<u>%</u>	<u>% total sample</u>
Yes	39.0	23.0
No	49.0	28.9
No opinion	12.0	7.1

The response of the United States government to the Spanish Civil War was a pained attempt to avoid involvement. In a decision similar to that taken by Britain and France, the Roosevelt Administration adopted a policy of "moral embargo" on sales of war materials to both Spanish factions. While the Neutrality Act prohibited

⁴² Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.120

⁴³ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.328-329

Americans from selling arms to combatants, it applied only to international wars. In the case of civil war, as in Spain, the Act had no jurisdiction. Nonetheless, President Roosevelt asked American firms to respect the spirit of the act in regards to the Spanish situation until Congress could pass legislation guaranteeing American neutrality in civil conflicts. The President was greatly irritated when one firm defied him in order to ship a load of aircraft and spare parts to the Republic (the ship was stopped by a Nationalist cruiser en route, all the cargo confiscated and Spanish crewmembers executed). By 6 January 1936, Congress passed an Embargo Act prohibiting shipment of arms to either side in a civil conflict. Though the Embargo Act passed by a vote of 81 to 0 in the Senate and 406 to 1 in the House of Representatives, the Roosevelt Administration's policy attracted severe criticism.⁴⁴

Critics of the Embargo Act argued that, given the Nationalists' ability to obtain arms from Germany and Italy, this policy only negatively affected the Republic. Senator Nye, the most prominent champion of neutrality in the Congress, argued against the Embargo Act and ultimately abstained from voting for it because he felt that it only hindered the Republic. The inability to buy arms in the United States both limited the quantities of materiel available to the Republic and increased its dependence on the Soviet Union as its only significant supplier. Both during the war and after, even prominent Administration figures criticized the embargo. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles later railed that, "of all our blind isolationist policies, the most disastrous was our attitude toward the Spanish Civil War." The Roosevelt Administration had, in Welles opinion, made, "no more cardinal error" than it had in enacting the arms embargo.⁴⁵ U.S. Ambassador to Spain Claude Bowers was ardently opposed to the embargo, seeing it as evidence of the U.S. government's prejudicial policy toward the Republic. Eleanor Roosevelt was another

⁴⁴ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.362, 575

⁴⁵ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.111

opponent of the Embargo Act, though her position as First Lady demanded that she be more circumspect in her opinions.⁴⁶

Despite the pro-Republican sentiment in his Administration and his own moments of sympathy for the Loyalist government, President Roosevelt had good political reasons for maintaining a policy of inaction in the Spanish situation. Catholic opposition to the Republic was an important factor in Roosevelt's decision-making. Though he later confessed his regret for abandoning the Republic, Roosevelt felt that antagonizing the loyal Democratic Catholic voting bloc would have been politically unthinkable. Also at work was the United States' tradition of following Britain in foreign policy decisions. To repeal the embargo would have undermined the Non-Intervention pact in Europe, which the British saw as the only hope for preserving peace in Europe. Another political barrier to support for the Republic was the strength of isolationist feeling in America. While there was substantial support for the Republic in the United States, isolationist sentiment was powerful and enduring. For Roosevelt to have developed a more active policy in support of Republican Spain would have been to court political disaster with limited potential for political gain.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Claude G. Bowers, My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II, New York (Simon and Schuster, 1954), pp.288-293, 328, 336.

⁴⁷ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.114; Harold Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes, Volume II: The Inside Struggle 1936-1939, New York (Simon and Schuster, 1954). pp.390, 569-570. Ickes related that Roosevelt termed the embargo a "grave mistake" but hinted that the State Department had been behind it. Ickes privately lamented the incident as an unfortunate example of Roosevelt's habit of establishing policy in consultation with only "the particular Cabinet officer who is interested," rather than with the whole Cabinet.

THE CPUSA GOES TO WAR

While the description common during the Depression of the American Communist Party as "liberals in a hurry" was inaccurate in crucial respects, the Communist response to the Spanish Civil War, although much like the liberal reaction, was swifter and more purposeful. The Spanish Civil War became a powerful issue for the CPUSA, which assumed the leadership of the American anti-fascist movement. The Party's tireless activism on behalf of the Republic earned the admiration of a many people who had previously dismissed or criticized the Communists. By firing the imaginations of American liberals and presenting a focus for anti-fascism, the Spanish war provided an opportunity for the Communist Party to enhance its prestige in the United States to the highest level it would ever reach.

The Party's membership increased substantially during the Spanish Civil War, though it never approached mass-party status. Many new members joined during the war, attracted by the Party's leading role in the popular Republican cause. Party membership in January of 1936 stood at 30,386; in January of 1937, the Party had 37,682 members; and in January of 1938 it counted 54,012. Clearly, membership had increased substantially, to the high water mark of the Party's numbers; but even at its largest, The CPUSA's membership comprised only a tiny fraction of the American population. Moreover, a large number of party members quit the Party even as its total membership increased. During 1936, for example, 25,148 new members joined the party, but 18,302 (59 percent of the membership in January) let their membership lapse. Similarly in 1937, 30,272 new members joined, but 13,942 left. Only 38 percent of the membership in 1938 had been in the Party more than two years. The high turnover rate can be partially attributed to the Party's sudden popularity: many new members joined and, dismayed to find out that the Party's leadership in the

romantic anti-fascist crusade stemmed from the extreme discipline and hard work of its members, quit or were expelled soon after.⁴⁸

Despite their limited numbers, the American Communists exercised significant influence during the Spanish war. The small number of party members obscured the political power wielded by the CPUSA. Though few labor unions counted a majority or even a sizable minority of Communists in their ranks, Party "fractions" often exercised influence in union policy far beyond their numbers due to the Communists' effectiveness at infiltrating leadership positions and their high level of organization. By 1938, 40 percent of the unions in the rapidly growing CIO were led by Communists or under substantial Party influence.⁴⁹

The growth of Communist "front" organizations in the second half of the 1930s provided another important source of the CPUSA's influence. Following the Comintern's Seventh World Congress in 1935, international Communist parties were ordered to seek accommodation with mainstream elements in their home countries in order to advance the Soviet collective security strategy. This "united front" tactic involved two courses: open cooperation between Party members and non-Communist organizations; and the so-called "united front from below," in which Communists infiltrated non-Communist organizations and worked to politicize the membership.⁵⁰

The American party adopted a "democratic front" program in response to the Comintern's directions. It involved support for President Roosevelt and the New

⁴⁸ Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field:" An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), pp.142-144; Harvey Klehr, The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade, New York (Basic Books, Inc., 1984) pp.153-154, 157-158

⁴⁹ Klehr, Heyday of American Communism, pp.223-224, 232, 235, 238-240; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.144

⁵⁰ Subversive Activities Control Board, Herbert Brownell, Jr., Attorney General of the United States, Petitioner v. Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Respondent: Recommended Decision, Washington, D.C. (United States Government, 1955). [cited hereafter as SACB, Recommended Decision] pp.16-18

Deal, a strategy which was very successful in eliminating the pariah status that the Party had earned during an earlier period of hard-line, class struggle agitation before the Seventh Comintern Congress. Where the Party had once derided America's capitalist development, during the democratic front it explored American history and tried to draw parallels between Marxism and traditional American icons. Though this often went to unintentionally ridiculous lengths, the Party's new focus produced positive results. Freed from its dialectical rhetoric, the CPUSA was able to cultivate substantial contacts with mainstream progressives. Despite the small number of enrolled Party members, a host of student groups, peace organizations, civil rights coalitions and assorted political and social clubs all looked to the Communist Party for direction (though sometimes unknowingly due to the presence of Party members in their leadership).⁵¹

The softening of the Party's rhetoric occurred amid favorable conditions for expansion of Communist influence. While America during the Thirties was not as radicalized as the often-heard "Red Decade" label implies, the economic chaos of the Depression had led to unprecedented dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic status quo among the hardest hit poor and in intellectual circles. The rise of organized labor during the decade provided new ground for the direct spread of Communist influence. In addition, the often violent struggle for unionization radicalized many industrial workers. The adoption of the democratic front followed fortuitously after the Communist abandoned attempts to create independent Communist-led unions. The Party began to use its considerable organizational talents to address more mainstream issues and experienced substantial gains as a result.⁵²

⁵¹ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.150-151; SACB, Recommended Decision, pp.16-18; Klehr, Heyday of American Communism pp.13, 373-374

⁵² Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1969]) pp.53-56, 75-77; Klehr, Heyday of American Communism, p.225; John Gates, Story of an American Communist, New York (Nelson, 1958), pp.35-37

Amid the domestic upheaval of the Depression, the rise of fascism abroad created the issue that the CPUSA rode to prominence. The Party's new-found acceptance of liberal democratic institutions quieted some of mainstream America's criticism of the Communists, but this change of course produced an essentially passive effect that had a limited impact on Party membership and influence. The CPUSA's forceful denunciation of fascism soon proved to be the Communists' most powerful appeal, however; it had many admirers and brought substantial numbers of new members. When the Spanish Civil War erupted, it provided the Party with a compelling issue around which rising anti-fascist sentiment crystallized.

The CPUSA was able to assume leadership of the movement to save the Republic because it enjoyed numerous advantages over potential rivals. The mainstream parties wanted no part of the Spanish war because it was too divisive an issue to build a national electoral coalition around, leaving the issue for more radical organizations. The Communists faced little effective competition from the American Socialist Party or other left-wing political groups because the CPUSA was the best-funded, best-organized, most-disciplined radical organization in the United States. Unlike its rivals, the Party had millions of dollars to spend on organizing and propaganda. Though the Party did not receive money from the Comintern for its normal operating expenses during the late 1930s, the financial resources and international prestige of the Third International were applied to promote Communist leadership in the pro-Republican movement from the start. In addition, the Party was able to draw on numerous wealthy sympathizers for large cash contributions in emergency situations. The CPUSA's financial advantages were only part of the story, however. The Communists were generally the hardest working, most effective organizers on the American political scene. When the Party turned its attention to the

Spanish Civil War, it immediately began to take concrete steps to establish an organizational framework to champion the Republican cause.⁵³

The first major front organization assembled for the Spanish war was the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, founded after a pro-Republican rally in New York on 1 October 1936 in order to raise money for medical supplies for the Loyalists. The Medical Bureau's contributors were largely liberal, mainstream Americans who were generally unaware of the Party's control behind the scenes. Within months, the Medical Bureau had raised over a hundred thousand dollars. It bought surgical supplies, medicines, ambulances, and paid to send American doctors and nurses to the Republic. While its rhetoric suggested that its aid would go to help widows, orphans and other helpless victims of the war, the Medical Bureau was from the first primarily dedicated to improving the Republican Army's battlefield medical care.⁵⁴

As large numbers of independent organizations supporting Republican Spain came into being following the organization of the Medical Bureau, the Party decided to centralize the nation-wide wave of pro-Republican feeling by forming the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy in November of 1936. The North American Committee, which eventually merged with the Medical Bureau, was essentially a clearinghouse for the vast range of small groups at work in support of the Republic. Its primary activities included raising money for the Republic, campaigning against the Embargo Act, and organizing its galaxy of subsidiary organizations. The latter included a group called the "American Friends of Spanish

⁵³ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.152

⁵⁴ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.154-156 The State Department recognized the military importance of the Medical Bureau's mission and attempted to prevent the first contingent of medical personnel from getting passports to Spain, noting that the presence of skilled doctors and nurses would have a greater military impact than an equal number of men in arms. The government relented after it realized that denying the Medical Bureau personnel was inconsistent with policy permitting the Red Cross and other charitable organizations to send medical personnel to Spain, however.

Democracy," a "Social Workers' Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy", a "Negro Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy," and a multitude of other groups organized along a variety of lines--ethnic, geographical, employment-related, and so on.⁵⁵

As with the Medical Bureau, most of the North American Committee's contributors were liberals who were unaware of the extent of its Communist connections. The prominent Communist role in support of the Republic was well-publicized, and most of the non-Communist contributors would have been aware of their presence in the movement. They were not aware that the Communists had founded the organization or that it was acting with the assistance and direction of the Comintern, however. The Popular Front strategy demanded that the CPUSA maximize non-Party participation in the pro-Republican movement in order to further the Comintern's ultimate goal of collective security. While many progressives would have contributed to the North American Committee if it had been an openly Communist organization, the Party concluded that the wide liberal participation it sought would be easier to achieve if the Communists maintained the appearance that they were a leading element in a broadly-based organization rather than the masterminds of the movement.

The popular appeal of the Party's fervent anti-fascism had a significant effect beyond simply increasing membership. The large numbers of new members joining the CPUSA during the Spanish Civil War clearly illustrated the popular appeal of the Party's fervent anti-fascism, but the growth of the Party came primarily as a result of its abandonment of the militant strategy of previous years. For the hardline veteran Communists in the Party, the Popular Front was just another tactical shift, but many

⁵⁵ Alan Guttman, The Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War, New York (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p.120; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.157-159; Klehr showed that the North American Committee was successful at fund-raising, raising over \$90,000 between May and August of 1937; almost \$48,000 of this money ostensibly went to cover the Committee's overhead, however. (Heyday of American Communism, p.478). It is perhaps more likely that this money went into the Party's accounts or was sent to foreign Communist parties.

of the thousands of Americans who flocked to join the CPUSA or became sympathizers during the Spanish Civil War took the Party's new rhetoric very seriously. Though they might be criticized for being credulous, these earnest individuals gave the CPUSA an aura of idealism that it had never had before or since.⁵⁶ The Party's brief period of idealism coinciding with the Spanish war provides a critical explanatory element to the story of the Americans who volunteered to risk their lives in defense of the Spanish Republic.

The Party took the first steps to building an American contribution to the International Brigades during the battle for Madrid in November of 1936. The news of the Internationals' heroic stand fired the imaginations of American supporters of the Spanish Republic, providing fertile ground for the Party's fledgling recruiting effort. During the early days of the recruiting campaign, the Party focused the vast majority of its recruiting efforts within the Party organization.

Recruiting for Spain among Party members was a relatively simple process. At Party gatherings, word was circulated for members interested in volunteering for Spain to contact the functionary responsible for recruiting. Party publications such as the Daily Worker and New Masses constantly preached the importance of the fight in Spain, though they generally refrained from outright appeals for volunteers in order to avoid publicizing the Party's involvement in recruiting.⁵⁷

Party discipline was an important element of recruiting for Spain among American Communists. Some Party sections pressured their rank-and-file to volunteer, exploiting the sense of duty prevalent among Party members by stressing the American party's obligation to provide volunteers for Spain. The Maritime Section of the Party was notable for its use of pressure tactics; based on the number of seamen and related workers who volunteered, these tactics appear to have been quite

⁵⁶ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.150-151

⁵⁷ SACB, Recommended Decision, pp.20, 22

successful. Occasionally, the Communist leadership actually ordered party members who were in disfavor to volunteer in order to rehabilitate their standing in the Party, an assignment known as a "control task." More often, however, the Party ordered members who were eager to fight in Spain not to volunteer. Party members who were successful organizers or placed in key unions or other organizations were frequently not allowed to volunteer because their domestic activities were too important to the Party to risk losing them in Spain.⁵⁸

By the end of November 1936, a substantial number of men had already volunteered. The Party's hurry to establish an American presence in Spain led it to concentrate in its areas of greatest strength. New York's status as the largest port on the East Coast and the base of the CPUSA's strength made it the natural center of the recruiting campaign. New Yorkers were a substantial majority in the ranks of the American Internationals throughout the early months of the recruiting effort. Over a hundred recruits were already on hand doing military drill every night in a Party-connected New York social club when out-of-town recruits began to appear in the middle of December. These men came primarily from Boston and Philadelphia, both strong Party centers. The CPUSA paid for the out-of-towners to stay at the 34th Street YMCA while it worked on arrangements for the recruits' transportation to Europe.⁵⁹

The early recruits came from largely proletarian backgrounds, again reflecting the Party's source of support. Strikes on the New York waterfront and in the garment industry, both areas of substantial Communist influence, left a substantial number of Party sympathizers without the worry of losing their jobs if they left to fight in Spain. Similarly, a bitter strike among East Coast seamen had left many sailors jobless and

⁵⁸ SACB, Recommended Decision, pp.20, 25, 37

⁵⁹ Cecil Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. New York (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969) pp.4-7

rootless. Very few men volunteered for Spain because they could not find work, but their unemployment was a motivating factor because they had less to leave behind. Over a third of the volunteers in Spain in February of 1937 were seamen or waterfront workers, and the majority of the others came from other working-class backgrounds. A substantial fraction of the remaining volunteers were New York Jews attracted to the Party by its anti-fascist stance.⁶⁰

The Party made the final arrangements for the first group of recruits in mid-December of 1936. A gruff Polish-American seaman named James Harris was chosen as the unit's military commander on the basis of his experience as a U.S. Marine non-com and more suspect claims to service as a Red Army advisor in China. Phil Bard, an asthmatic Party organizer from the Cleveland district, was named political commissar. Bard was responsible for maintaining discipline during the journey to Spain, after which Harris would take over. The proletarian Harris was quite popular among the men despite (or perhaps because of) his nearly unintelligible rantings, while the rank and file derided the intellectual Bard. Shortly before Christmas, the Party selected eighty of the best recruits for the first group to travel to Spain. The men were given fifty dollars to buy supplies at a New York military surplus store owned by a Party sympathizer, and identical black suitcases to carry their gear. Unlike the vast majority of the European units, which were named after favorite revolutionaries of the various national groups, the CPUSA decided that the first American International battalion would be named the "Abraham Lincoln Battalion" in keeping with the Party's red-white-and blue rhetoric during the Popular Front period.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.5; Cameron Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.287-288

⁶¹ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.7

The Americans arrived at New York harbor on 26 December, 1936, traveling in squads of eight men with strict instructions not to mingle with other squads in order to maintain secrecy. Four men had second thoughts at the last moment, leaving seventy-six men unobtrusively carrying matching suitcases to board the French liner *Normandie*. Bard's lack of authority emerged soon after the ship left port. The men were supposed to avoid drinking alcohol and mixing with other passengers; unfortunately, a large group of perceptive young French women from the famed *Folies Bergères* discerned the Americans' mission and proceeded to express their sympathy effusively. Historian Cameron Stewart described the remainder of the trip as a "sea-going bacchanal, " which drove Commissar Bard to distraction.⁶²

Upon their arrival in Le Havre on New Year's Eve, the Americans breezed through French customs despite their identical suitcases full of military uniforms. They traveled by train to Paris on 2 January 1937, then on to the town of Perpignan in the Pyrenees hours later. After crossing the open border between France and Spain, the volunteers waited in a castle overlooking the Catalan town of Figueras for two days. Then they traveled by slow trains across half of Republican Spain to the International Brigades headquarters at the remote provincial capital of Albacete. After two days in Albacete, during which the Lincoln Battalion was officially enrolled in the International Brigades as the 17th Battalion of the XV International Brigade, the men traveled by truck to the village of Villanueva de la Jara to begin training.⁶³

After arriving in Villanueva de la Jara, the Americans were cut off from the outside world. Commissar Bard, who had stayed in Albacete to serve as the Americans' representative to the general staff, found that Albacete had no respect for

⁶² Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, pp.8-9, 11; Stewart , *Summoned to the Eternal Field*, p.238

⁶³ Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left*, p.33; Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, p.23 The Lincoln Battalion would later be renumbered as the 58th Battalion, but it never left the XV International Brigade.

the "bourgeois" Americans and was too busy rushing men to the front at Madrid to pay attention to a minor paper-shuffler of the amateurish CPUSA. The Americans' training at Villanueva was rudimentary. Very few rifles were available, and the two machine guns on hand would have been obsolete in the World War. James Harris, promoted to captain, seemed to have little idea of how to impart his military knowledge to the men; while he had knowledge of basic small-unit tactics, he appeared better-suited to his former role as a Marine non-com than to commanding a battalion.⁶⁴

For all his faults, Bard had constituted a link with American party authority during the Atlantic crossing; now that he was away at Albacete, the men at Villanueva disintegrated into political bickering. The seamen, the toughest and most cohesive group, decided that they wanted to make up the machine-gun company called for in the Lincoln Battalion's organizational table. They dubbed themselves the "Tom Mooney Company" after a long-imprisoned San Francisco labor leader, and picked who would be allowed to join. The Mooneys were a cohesive group with excellent morale, but their exclusiveness irritated many of the men who were not allowed to join.⁶⁵

Cutthroat competition for Bard's vacant post as political commissar meanwhile threw the battalion's leadership into chaos. The men lined up on either side as battalion secretary Philip Cooperman struggled against Marvin Stern, a former soccer player at New York's City College. Stern eventually won out and promptly decided to place Captain Harris under arrest on unspecified charges. Harris retaliated by ordering Stern's arrest for insubordination only to find that the International Brigades' command structure gave commissars authority over military

⁶⁴ Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, pp.27, 30

⁶⁵ Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, p.23; Roy B. Hudson, "True Americans: A Tribute to American Maritim Workers Who Fought for World Democracy in the Trenches of Spain," New York (Waterfront Section, Communist Party, 1939) pp.6-10

officers. A battalion committee eventually mediated the dispute, installing a troika made up of Cooperman, Stern, and a third man representing the committee to fill the commissar position. Alarmed by the disorder, the CPUSA authorities in New York sent an aging Philadelphia Party hack named Sam Stember to take over as commissar in late January. Thereafter, the American Party tightened its control over officer and commissar appointments.⁶⁶

New recruits from the United States continued to pour into Villanueva, increasing the disorganization in the battalion. The geographical character of the Lincoln Battalion broadened, as men from industrial cities like Cleveland, Detroit and Milwaukee joined the predominately Eastern initial contingent. A group of exiled Cuban revolutionaries led by Rafael Armas joined the battalion, greatly enhancing its ability to communicate with the local population. A group of Irishmen disgruntled with serving with the British Battalion also joined the Lincolns and formed their own section, though their inability to muster enough men required the adoption of numerous American recruits who were promptly given Gaelicized names like "O'Greenberg" and "O'Goldstein."⁶⁷

The arrival of Robert Merriman at Villanueva in late January added new complications to the Lincoln Battalion's leadership situation. Merriman, a 27-year old former graduate student and teaching assistant in economics at the University of California at Berkeley, arrived in Spain from the Soviet Union. He had allegedly been studying Soviet collective farms when his conscience called him to Spain. Some Lincolns suspected that Merriman had actually been studying at the Lenin Institute in preparation for a high-level position in the CPUSA and concluded that he was a Comintern agent sent to take command of the Lincoln Battalion. Others accepted his professed non-Communist idealism at face value. In truth, Merriman

⁶⁶ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.24-30

⁶⁷ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.37; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.26

was a very close Communist sympathizer who applied for membership in the Spanish Communist Party during the war; he seems to have had considerable difficulties in locating and joining the Lincoln Battalion, however, which casts doubt on the assertion that he was on a Comintern mission. Whatever the truth of Merriman's background, the Lincoln leaders reacted to the mysterious circumstances surrounding his arrival by treating him with a great deal of deference. As a result, Merriman was installed as battalion adjutant and began to assume many of Harris's command duties by virtue of his ROTC experience at the University of Nevada.⁶⁸

Merriman took over the training program and attempted to impart his modicum of military knowledge to the battalion, but circumstances continued to produce frustrations. The shortage of weapons made practicing dismantling and cleaning them difficult, as well as making firing practice impossible. There were even problems in teaching small unit tactics: the Americans had made some headway learning to advance in 8-man squads when a French observer from Brigade arrived and proceeded to force a hopelessly complicated 12-man system upon them. As February began and a Nationalist offensive at the Jarama River threatened the critical road between Madrid and Valencia, most of the 400-some Lincolns had still never fired a weapon. Mooney Company commander Douglas Seacord, a U.S. Army veteran who was normally the most competent officer in the battalion, drank himself into a stupor when he realized that the woefully unprepared battalion would soon be called to the front.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Volunteer for Liberty Vol.I-26, 13 December 1937, p.4; Peter N. Carroll, Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Stanford, California, (Stanford University Press, 1994) pp.92-95. Sandor Voros, American Commissar, New York (Chilton Company, 1961), p.357; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.32-34, pp.45-46

⁶⁹ Carroll, Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, p.95; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.27,

BAPTISM OF FIRE

JARAMA

The Americans were ill-prepared for the ordeal that awaited them in their first action. When the 428-man Lincoln Battalion started for the front for the first time in February of 1937, the group of 76 men that had arrived in Spain first had received only five weeks of rudimentary training. Only on the day of departure did the Americans finally receive rifles, ammunition, grenades, and helmets. Their rifles were handed to them still coated in packing grease. The six water-cooled Maxim machine guns issued to the machine gun company appeared to be relics of the World War and jammed frequently.⁷⁰ As they marched to the front, the Americans received permission to stop and fire five rounds each into a hillside; most of them had never fired a rifle before.⁷¹

When the Nationalists threatened to cut the Madrid-Valencia road near the Jarama river in early February 1937, the newly-arrived Americans were pulled out of training and rushed to the front. Two trucks carrying about twenty men and the battalion records took a wrong turn en route to the front and ended up behind Nationalist lines, where they were captured. Presumably, the men in the trucks were shot, the usual fate of the Nationalists' International prisoners at that point in the war. After camping briefly behind the lines, the Lincolns moved up to forward positions on 18 February. They sustained light casualties from harassing fire during the next three days before moving to new positions. The Mooney company discovered that

⁷⁰ Cecil Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, New York (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p.48

⁷¹ Edwin Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in Spain in the International Brigades, New York (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939), p.31; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.36-37

their machine-guns were totally unreliable. The men were temporarily reassigned as riflemen while their guns went to the rear for extensive reconditioning.⁷²

On the night of 19 or 20 February, Robert Merriman took over command from James Harris in strange circumstances. Among veterans who were present two factions developed--one supporting Merriman's side of the story, the other Harris; the result was that the record remains muddled regarding the particulars of Harris's ouster. Harris apparently led the Lincolns in an abortive nighttime march toward the Nationalist lines. Merriman's supporters claimed that Harris had lost his mind, muttering cryptic phrases and seeing imaginary Fascists. The pro-Harris faction argued that Harris was attempting to take advantage of the darkness in order to probe the weaknesses of the Nationalist lines. Whatever the truth of the matter was, Merriman took over and Harris disappeared from the battalion. Two Lincolns claimed that they met Harris months later in Murcia, site of a International Brigades hospital in southern Spain; he was babbling and incoherent. His name was not mentioned anywhere in The Book of the XV Brigade or the Volunteer for Liberty. Volunteer for Liberty editor Edwin Rolfe (who was sympathetic to the official line) claimed that Harris was transferred to another unit "Just before they [the Lincolns] were ready to go..." to the front. Other accounts contradict this statement, however. Writer Cecil Eby related that some volunteers believed that a Polish-American inmate held at the International Brigade prison near Chinchilla was actually Harris, but there is no corroborating evidence to support their claims. Historian Cameron Stewart interviewed two veterans who stated that Harris asked for a transfer to another unit

⁷² Peter N. Carroll, Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Stanford, California (Stanford University Press, 1994) p.98

after Jarama and was killed while serving with a Polish battalion. The truth of Harris's fate remains a mystery, however.⁷³

With the leadership controversy abruptly halted by Harris's disappearance, the Lincoln Battalion returned to the business of fighting the Nationalists. The Lincolns went "over the top" for the first time in the afternoon of 23 February, advancing a few hundred yards in no particular formation before being pinned down by heavy machine gun fire. They suffered around 20 dead and 40 wounded before they were able to make it back to their trenches after dark.⁷⁴

On 26 February, around 70 new arrivals joined the Lincolns waiting in the trenches. This group had been rushed straight from the Brigades' Albacete administrative center without a moment of training. On 27 February, the Lincolns' divisional commander, a Red Army officer of Hungarian birth known in Spain as "General Gal" (actually Janos Galicz) ordered a foolish attack against heavily fortified Nationalist positions on a tactically insignificant hill called Pingarrón. Colonel Vladimir Copic, the Croatian-born Red Army officer who served as the XV Brigade's commander for most of the war, did not contest Gal's decision even though it was evident that the hill was virtually impregnable to infantry assault; Copic was primarily concerned with saving himself throughout his service in Spain, a cause he felt was best served by unswerving loyalty to his superiors. Nearly everything went wrong from the start. Armor and air support failed to materialize, and the Spanish battalion that was supposed to attack on the Lincolns right flank scrambled back to their trenches after a brief advance. Ignoring Lincoln commander Robert Merriman's pleas to call off the assault, General Gal ordered the Americans to press the attack at

⁷³ Volunteer for Liberty Vol.I-26, 13 December 1937, p.4; Sandor Voros, American Commissar, New York (Chilton Company, 1961), p.357; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.32-34, 45-46, 119; Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion, p.30).

⁷⁴ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.53; Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1968]), p.43

all costs. From the moment they left their trenches around noon, the Americans were raked by a relentless barrage of Nationalist machine gun fire. They stubbornly tried to inch forward, but their efforts were futile. When night fell, the survivors blundered back to their trenches. Of the 400-some men who had begun the attack, between 80 and 100 effectives remained at nightfall. General Gal and André Marty were disgusted with the failure of the attack, seeing its failure as justification for their low opinion of the Americans.⁷⁵

The exact number of casualties suffered in the Pingarrón attack is debatable. Edwin Rolfe cites 127 killed, 200 wounded out of 500 men who began the attack, but this last figure seems inconsistent with the 428 he cited as making up the battalion when it left for the front . Adding the 70 new arrivals gives 498, but this ignores the casualties sustained on the 23rd. Historian Rosenstone cites 300 casualties; Eby cites Herbert Matthews figures of 127 killed and 175 wounded and Jarama survivor and sometime Lincoln Robert Gladnick's claim of 80 effectives. Sandor Voros claimed that 377 effectives began the attack, 153 of whom were killed on 27 February. The controversy illustrates the difficulty of compiling any exact figures from the jumbled accounts of survivors, a pervasive problem in piecing together the history of the American volunteers.

After the fiasco at Pingarrón, the Lincolns were a shambles. Many men had deserted, though most later sheepishly returned to the lines unquestioned by a numbed battalion staff.⁷⁶ The Pingarrón attack had taken place after the Nationalist thrust had been blunted, however, so the Jarama front had basically stabilized by the end of February. Former U.S. Army non-com Martin Hourihan took command of the Lincolns in early March of 1937 after Merriman was wounded and his adjutant killed

⁷⁵ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.44, p.45-49; Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion, pp. 31, 53-57; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.62-64; Voros, American Commissar, p.362.

⁷⁶ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.65-66; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.49

at Jarama in late February. Despite the Communists' low opinion of his political dedication, Hourihan continued in command during a period of relative inaction before being removed to XV Brigade staff in April. Commissar Sam Stember, who had hid behind the lines during all the action at Jarama, was repatriated to the United States during this period.⁷⁷

The CPUSA realized after the Lincolns' poor performance at Jarama that the "ninth-floor generals" and low-level party rejects that it had sent to Spain could not provide adequate military leadership. In addition to the deficiencies of military leadership in the lines, the absence of any CPUSA heavyweights to represent the Americans at the Albacete base meant that the foreign Communists in the general staff could go on ignoring the Americans' problems. The Party recognized the failure of its half-hearted effort and moved quickly to rectify the situation.

Ohio CPUSA organizer Sandor Voros had twice asked his superiors for permission to volunteer for the Spanish war, but was refused because the Spanish struggle was less important to the Party than his work organizing in the United States. After Jarama, however, Voros was ordered to Spain by the Party central committee. A party official told him, "The party is in trouble, Voros. All that stuff you've heard about the heroic Lincoln Brigade in the Daily Worker is crap. If the truth comes out and the enemies of the party pick it up we're going to have a tremendous scandal. The truth is that the Lincoln Brigade mutinied the first day it was sent into action, and had to be driven at pistol point into attack. The comrades in Spain are completely demoralized. They want to come home and many of them are deserting." Since the Spanish war had become a central issue for the party, the Party realized that it would have to part with some of its better personnel in order to improve the quality of leadership of the Lincolns. Twelve party veterans were sent to Spain immediately

⁷⁷ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.155; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.70-72, p.122

following Jarama, among them Voros, Young Communist League officer Dave Doran, and eventual Politburo member Steve Nelson.⁷⁸

While the younger CPUSA stars entered the combat forces during the spring of 1937, aging Politburo member Robert Minor joined the International Control Commission at Albacete (the Brigades' supreme administrative body). Theoretically, the presence of the high-ranking Minor should have reduced Albacete's discrimination toward the Americans. Unfortunately, Minor was of little help to the Americans in the field. Voros observed that Minor had "caught the bug... he became convinced that he was a master strategist and a military genius...." Instead of looking out for the interests of the American volunteers, Minor busied himself submitting unsolicited and useless battle plans to the Spanish Communist Party.⁷⁹

While the newly-arrived party warhorses were immediately placed as commissars or officers, the experience of Jarama nevertheless largely ended the practice of choosing military leaders based on political considerations. The party redoubled its attempts to find men who had prior military experience. These men were often accelerated into officer training programs once in Spain, but few were initially placed in high-level command positions. After Jarama, most of the American commanders were promoted after distinguishing themselves on the battlefield. Such men were usually better equipped to lead than Merriman and his subordinates had been at Jarama. Nonetheless, all but a few had little applicable command experience.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Voros, *American Commissar*, pp.269-271; Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, pp.105-106

⁷⁹ Voros, *American Commissar*, p.310; Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, p.105

⁸⁰ Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field:" *An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), p.314. A prime example of the shortage of experience is the case of Vernon Selby, a West Point graduate and veteran of combat in Central America. Though Selby was arrested in Barcelona after deserting in the spring of 1938, the Brigade command quickly returned him to duty on the Lincoln Battalion staff where his knowledge was greatly needed. (Eby p.228)

The Lincolns left their trenches only once between March and June. They saw little action, however, as the front had stabilized. New recruits from the U.S. filled the battalion roster back to around 400 men. Battalion commander Hourihan was replaced by Oliver Law, whose African-American ethnicity was of great propaganda value to the Party's efforts to recruit American blacks to Communism. Also a U.S. Army veteran, Law's record remains a matter of debate. Though Law had as much previous military experience as Hourihan, his appointment as commander bore the marks of the Party's machinations. Some Lincolns alleged that Law was a panicky incompetent despised by most of the men. While Hourihan had led a squad through the attack on Pingarrón without casualties, Law appears to have stayed behind in the trenches. The official line, however, denounced these accounts as products of isolated racists and portrayed Law as a capable military leader.⁸¹

The Lincolns' demoralization began to abate as they waited at Jarama. The influx of new recruits from the United States diluted the core of demoralized survivors of Jarama. The coming of spring also improved the Lincolns' spirits. They played Ping-Pong and baseball immediately behind the lines, sheltered from Nationalist fire by an intervening rise. The arrival in May of CPUSA veteran Steve Nelson as ranking commissar was a substantial factor in the rehabilitation of the Lincolns. His authority in the Party strengthened his position both with the men and in his dealings with the International Brigade command on their behalf, but Nelson's personality was his most valuable asset. A natural motivator, Nelson worked tirelessly to build up morale and became probably the most popular and effective of the American leaders during his short time in Spain.⁸²

With the restocking of the Lincoln Battalion complete, the continuing stream of American recruits in the spring of 1937 necessitated the formation of additional

⁸¹ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.152; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.122,134

⁸² Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.154; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.94, 117

American units. The second American battalion was christened the "George Washington Battalion" in the proper Popular Front spirit, but only after the CPUSA directly ordered its men to abandon their drive to name it after Tom Mooney. Mirko Markovicz, a Croatian-American who spoke more Croatian than English, took command of the Washington Battalion in March of 1937. While Markovicz was ostensibly just one more ex-seaman in the ranks, he was also apparently a Comintern agent well-known to American authorities. The Washington's commissar was a Chicago Communist named Dave Mates.⁸³

In late June of 1937, the continuing stream of American volunteers led to the formation of a third American battalion; because the proponents of "Tom Paine Battalion" and "Patrick Henry Battalion" were deadlocked, the battalion's Canadian minority's choice of "MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion" (after two 19th century fighters for Canadian independence) won out. About one third of the men of the MacKenzie Papineau (Mac-Pap) were Canadian, but the Americans continued to outnumber them throughout the war. American Robert Thompson took command, joined by Ohio Party organizer Joe Dallet as commissar.⁸⁴

After the poorly trained Lincolns' failure at Jarama, the American functionaries at Albacete sought to make the newly formed Washington and MacKenzie-Papineau Battalions the best-trained in the Loyalist army before sending them into combat. Both units were held back from the front and put through far more intensive training programs than the early Lincolns. Despite Steve Nelson's success in re-energizing the Jarama veterans, the CPUSA prohibited the "demoralized elements" of the Lincoln Battalion from visiting the recruits of the newly-formed

⁸³ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.116, 137, 142n; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.288,311

⁸⁴ Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion, p.137; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.192

Washington Battalion during the training program in order to prevent their alleged defeatism from contaminating the newcomers.⁸⁵

To implement its new emphasis on training, the CPUSA staffed a training camp at the village of Tarazona de la Mancha near Albacete. Major Allan Johnson, a ranking New York Communist official who passed as the Party's military expert on the strength of his service as a U.S. Army quartermaster in the Philippines, commanded the camp. Unlike the short period of political indoctrination and unstructured maneuvers that passed for training before Jarama, new recruits went through a lengthy course of physical fitness and tactical training. Under the watchful eye of Major Johnson and Captain Merriman, who was convalescing from his Jarama wound, the Washingtons trained from April to mid-June of 1937. After the Washingtons left to prepare for the Zaragoza offensive in June, the Mac-Paps continued to train until mid-September.⁸⁶

By the end of 1937, the Brigade Commissariat claimed that the days of untrained recruits being rushed to the lines were over. With Major Johnson and other officers with "practical active-service experience" giving a "lengthy and comprehensive course of training in modern warfare," the Americans were thought to be well-prepared for action. While the new recruits' training was certainly greater than that of the early volunteers, experience proved that there was little way to prepare them for the furious fighting ahead of them, however.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.117

⁸⁶ Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion, pp.143-144; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.120, 169

⁸⁷ Book of the XV Brigade, Madrid (XV Brigade Commissariat of War, 1938), p.225

THE SECOND FRONT

RECRUITING AND TRAVEL TO SPAIN

During the course of the war, some three thousand Americans chose to back up their commitment to the Spanish Republic by volunteering for the International Brigades. There has been a persistent but totally mistaken belief that the International Brigades somehow spontaneously arose from groups of idealists who happened to make their way to Spain individually and form an organized military hierarchy. In truth, the Communist International authorized and financed an international recruiting network that supplied the manpower for the Brigades. Immediately following Stalin's decision to form the International Brigades, the Comintern began assigning manpower quotas to the various national Communist Parties. The Comintern knowingly assigned unrealistically high quotas, but the CPUSA threw its back enthusiastically into the recruiting effort nonetheless.⁸⁸

When it became clear that the war in Spain would not end quickly or easily, the CPUSA realized that it would have to expand its recruiting efforts beyond Party circles. The Party turned the task over to its little-used "underground section." While most of the European parties had well-developed networks of operatives available to engage in illegal activities, the American Party had little call for underground tactics due to the relatively low level of political repression in the United States. As a result, the underground section of the CPUSA was actually a motley collection of trusted party veterans called from other duties when need arose rather than a full-time, dedicated organization. The Party turned to the underground section when the need

⁸⁸ R. Dan Richardson, Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War, Lexington, Kentucky (University Press of Kentucky, 1982), p.32

to recruit for Spain arose because, despite the operatives' inexperience, it was nonetheless composed of the Party members best-equipped for the job at hand.⁸⁹

Far from being the broadly-based anti-fascist movement that many of its supporters would later claim, the recruiting operation was thoroughly dominated by the CPUSA and closely supervised by the Communist International. At a National Committee meeting of the CPUSA in 1936, Party leader Earl Browder outlined the Comintern's orders: the American party, like the other national Communist parties, had been assigned a quota of volunteers for Spain and must work tirelessly to fulfill its share of the obligation. Fred Brown (born Ferrucci Marini), an Italian immigrant assigned by the Comintern as its representative to the American party, took control of the American recruiting operation. As a Comintern official and a highly respected figure in the American party, his leadership of the recruiting effort follows logically. Brown's right-hand man in the recruiting organization was A.W. Mills (actually a Soviet national named Samuel Milgrom). The Party Central Committee frequently discussed the recruiting and organization of the American International Brigades contingent, reiterating the Party's focus on the issue. The participation by high-level Party authorities and international Communist officials in the recruiting process is evidence of the importance of the operation to the American Party and of the degree of Party control over recruiting.⁹⁰

Party control of the recruiting process was nearly total. Frank Meiser, a member of the recruiting apparatus described it as, "under strictest Party control." The Central Committee assigned quotas of volunteers to each Party district. In many

⁸⁹ Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field:" An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), p.198

⁹⁰ U.S. Subversive Activities Control Board, Herbert Brownell, Jr., Attorney General of the United States, Petitioner v. Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Respondent--Recommended Decision. Washington, D.C., 1955 [cited hereafter as SACB, Recommended Decision.], pp.20-21; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.199

cases, the District Organizer took direct charge of the local recruiting effort. In some larger, more active districts where the District Organizer had too many other responsibilities, a high-ranking subordinate acting with the total authority of the organizer led the operation.⁹¹

The process of recruiting men for the International Brigades was too expensive for the CPUSA's usual cash flow, but the Party was able to cover the expenses by utilizing new sources of money. The cost of maintaining the recruiting organization and supporting volunteers until they reached Spain came to perhaps \$100,000, while steamship tickets to France for 3,000-odd volunteers probably cost around \$400,000. Though the CPUSA outwardly appeared to be in financial straits throughout the Thirties, the Party maintained secret accounts which it could draw on in time of need. In addition, there were a substantial number of rich Communist sympathizers who the Party could call on to donate large sums in an emergency such as the Spanish war. The Party's control over the front organizations that collected for humanitarian relief efforts allowed it to siphon off some of these funds as well, though this practice had to come to an end when the Department of State began keeping close track of the financial records of organizations aiding Spain in May of 1937. Though the CPUSA devoted substantial resources to funding the war effort, Party veterans agreed that the majority of the money came from the Comintern.⁹²

While the early contingents of volunteers consisted overwhelmingly of Communists, the Popular Front strategy and mounting losses in Spain led the Party to recruit non-Party members. In contrast to the straightforward approach taken within the party, external recruiting efforts were rather complex. The primary problem involved was the illegality of the recruiting process. Volunteers could be punished under several federal laws, but gaping loopholes existed. Americans stood to lose

⁹¹ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field p.199

⁹² Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.200-202

their citizenship if they took an oath to serve the Spanish Republic, but the Republic recognized the unique situation of the Internationals and waived the oath required of Spanish soldiers. Under another law, Americans could be punished for enlisting to fight in a foreign war on U.S. soil by a fine of \$1,000 or more and up to three years in prison. This law was toothless against the volunteers since they could argue that they did not actually enlist until they arrived in Spain. After 12 January 1937, the State Department attempted to halt the flow of volunteers by demanding that passport applicants swear that they would not go to Spain. This was meant to expose volunteers to prosecution for perjury, but it proved useless. Since virtually all International volunteers traveled to France first in order to avoid the Nationalist blockade, they could claim that they had not made the decision to go to Spain until after they completed their passport application. While volunteers were relatively safe from prosecution, recruiters were in constant danger. Their activities clearly took place on American soil, subjecting them a fine of at least \$1,000 and possibly up to three years in prison.⁹³

The legal dangers inherent in the recruiting process led recruiters to approach non-party volunteers very cautiously. The CPUSA's sometimes melodramatically conspiratorial proceedings stood it in good stead in the recruiting effort, making it difficult for government agents to infiltrate the Party itself; recruiters could be reasonably sure of the trustworthiness of other Party officials and of Communist recruits. Non-party volunteers could very easily be police infiltrators, however. While recruiters maintained contacts in union fractions and front organizations throughout the war, the Party shifted the focus of the recruiting effort into specific recruiting fronts in order to distance itself from the legal and political heat of the

⁹³ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field pp.182-183

recruiting process while still making contact with prospective volunteers outside of normal Communist circles.⁹⁴

After 27 December, 1936, the American Society for Technical Aid to Spanish Democracy (ASTASD) was the center of the recruiting organization. The ASTASD was a very thinly-concealed front for the recruiting apparatus. The ASTASD was ostensibly just an obscure member organization of the North American Committee, described by one of its Communist directors as, "a clearing house and information center for those American experts who wish to volunteer for work in Spain." The organization outwardly claimed to recruit technical experts and skilled workers to help Republican Spain modernize its factories, but did not try very hard to maintain the fiction. The ASTASD's own literature included summons to "expert machine gunners" among advertisements for various industrial specialists in order to prevent particularly obtuse readers, who might otherwise mistake the organization's stated purpose for its true objectives, from wasting recruiters' time.⁹⁵

There have been allegations that recruiters promised technical jobs to some volunteers, tricking them into traveling to Spain where they were impressed into the International Brigades against their will. Several government investigations turned up men who had returned from Spain claimed that ASTASD literature promising them factory jobs had enticed them to enlist, only to find out that their actual work involved a rifle and bayonet. It seems extremely unlikely that this happened at all, however, and was almost certainly unintended. Deserters in Spain who contacted U.S. embassy or consular officials were usually refused help on the grounds that they had put themselves in harm's way; if a deserter could convince the government that he had been shanghaied into the International Brigades, however, he might be able to solicit the government's aid. The ASTASD did little to conceal its purposes, as the

⁹⁴ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.203-204

⁹⁵ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.203-207

advertisement for machine-gunners noted above illustrated. Perhaps more importantly, sending unwilling conscripts to Spain would have been a waste of the Party's money. Since the CPUSA's stinginess with its funds was legendary, the possibility that it would encourage recruiters to trick men into serving in Spain is remote.⁹⁶

The hand of the Communists behind the ASTASD was often blatantly obvious. The ASTASD's national headquarters in New York was in the offices of the Party publication New Masses. While a few non-Communists sat on the organization's board of directors, the working officers were all Party stalwarts. Efforts at distancing the Party from the recruiting process were very limited. At the Milwaukee office of the ASTASD, potential volunteers met a recruiter named Mr. Brown who directed those he deemed trustworthy to the local Communist Party headquarters. There they met with the same man, now serving as a party official by the name of Comrade Seacat.⁹⁷

In May of 1937, a recruit who deserted in Paris went to the authorities with details of the ASTASD's involvement in recruiting for the International Brigades. The resultant publicity led the CPUSA to disband the ASTASD, as it no longer provided even the modicum of cover that it once had. In its place the Party quickly formed a new front organization, the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (FALB). The FALB took over its predecessors recruiting functions immediately. Unlike the ASTASD, however, the FALB actually performed its publicized function in addition to recruiting. The FALB was supposed to parlay sympathy for the American volunteers fighting in Spain into logistical support, a task it performed handily on the side. By the end of July 1937, the FALB had raised sufficient funds to

⁹⁶ House Un-American Activities Committee, Investigation of un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Volume 11, Washington D.C. (U.S. Government, 1939) [cited hereafter as HUAC 1939]; testimony of William Ryan pp.6812, 6814; Stewart pp.206-207

⁹⁷ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.204; HUAC 1939, testimony of William Ryan, p.6813

send thirty tons of food, cigarettes, clothes, and other goods to the volunteers in Spain. The FALB was also supposed to be responsible for the repatriation of wounded Americans, though many veterans claim that the organization brushed off their attempts to seek its aid.⁹⁸

The FALB was a much more public organization than its predecessor. With widespread publicity, the FALB grew from relatives and personal friends of volunteers to a relatively broadly-based national organization. The organization spread to include seventeen local chapters in large cities across the United States, giving it nationwide exposure. The FALB eventually numbered nearly 50,000 members, each paying yearly dues of \$1. Behind the scenes, however, the Party was still in firm control. The shadowy A.W. Mills was its "National Organizer," pulling the puppet strings behind the front of prominent liberal sponsors and board members (who included such diverse luminaries as Albert Einstein, James Cagney, Helen Keller, Jack Dempsey, Duke Ellington, and Upton Sinclair). The FALB's Popular Front pretenses could be amusing: its fundraising efforts included such less-than-Bolshevik activities as the marketing of greeting cards, "New Yorker Soda," moonlight dinner cruises on the Hudson River, basketball games, and country retreats. There was even a "Junior FALB," joined by children who wrote to Daily Worker comic strip character "Little Lefty." All told, the FALB's array of fundraising projects generated at least \$375,056 (the amount reported to the Department of State). The broad geographic reach of the FALB proved helpful in attracting recruits and donors from across the country, and its legitimate activities distracted from its

⁹⁸ House Un-American Activities Committee, Investigation of un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Washington D.C. (U.S. Government, 1938) [cited hereafter as HUAC 1938] pp.567-568, 570, 573; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.209

underground functions. The FALB remained the central recruiting front for the remainder of the war.⁹⁹

In order to avoid infiltration by law enforcement agencies, recruiters refused to deal directly with unfamiliar men. Initial conversations with non-Party prospectives were very vague. The recruiter tell the potential volunteer that he "might" be able to put the person in touch with someone who could get a man to Spain, while attempting to learn whatever he could about the individual's background. Often, the recruiter would attempt to verify the background information through the Party fraction in the prospective volunteer's union. Recruiters also required all non-Communist recruits to present character witnesses. Prospective volunteers who passed this initial screening process then went before a Party selection committee for further review. Only those who passed all the Party's scrutiny proceeded to Spain.¹⁰⁰

The protective measures had the unintended effect of essentially thwarting any attempt to recruit substantial numbers of non-Communists. Recruiter Joseph Wald stated later that, "almost every guy who volunteered was known by at least some people in the Left. If someone was unknown in left-wing circles, we'd be pretty suspicious." Recruiter William Bailey agreed, noting that, "for a person with no left-wing contacts, it would have been extremely difficult for him to get off the ground."¹⁰¹

Despite all the precautions, an FBI agent known in the Party as Edward Pelega made it through the recruiting process. Ironically, he rose to company commissar and fought at Jarama. Vincent Userra, a U.S. Army veteran who eventually rose to

⁹⁹ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.208, 211, 213; HUAC 1938, pp.569-570, 573; HUAC 1939, pp.1999-2000

¹⁰⁰ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.231; HUAC 1939, testimony of William Ryan, pp.6813-6814; HUAC 1938 Volume I, testimony of Abraham Sobel, pp.728-729

¹⁰¹ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.244

adjutant of the Lincoln Battalion, may also have been an infiltrator. Lincoln commander Milton Wolff came to suspect Userra after seeing him conversing with Army Intelligence officers several years later during the Second World War.¹⁰²

Aside from isolated incidents, however, the precautions taken by the recruiters were largely effective in preventing infiltration of the recruiting process. There was only one major police crackdown on recruiters. It took place in Detroit in 1940 after the end of the war; all the suspects were released amid a storm of protest led by the CPUSA. Throughout the recruiting process, the Party's secretive atmosphere and disciplined membership contributed helped maintain security. A highly significant factor in the success of the operation was the government's tolerant attitude toward the recruiting process, however. The loopholes in the existing laws made recruiting easier, and attempts to enact stricter legislation died in Congress. Even when the laws were applicable, the government was lax in enforcing them. The explanation for the government's inaction lies in domestic political conditions. The recruiting operation was an embarrassment to the federal government's official non-intervention policy. Since the recruiting effort was ultimately of limited military significance, the U.S. government preferred to ignore it rather than draw attention to the problem by attacking it. In addition, the Administration was well aware that the CPUSA could mobilize shrill support from substantial numbers of Americans who believed that recruiting was noble rather than criminal. As the government's policy toward the

¹⁰² Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.244 Stewart concealed Pelega's true name in order to protect his privacy, which leads to a small controversy over his identity. In his 1994 book Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994) Peter N. Carroll alleged that Edward M. Horan, an FBI and police informant after 1940, was also known as "Palega" (pp.186, 304) It seems difficult to believe that Horan and the Pelega mentioned by Stewart can be the same person, however. Stewart's source claimed to have fought at Jarama, while Horan did not leave for Spain until late September of 1937 according to his testimony before the Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB, Recommended Decision p.27) Had Horan and Pelega been the same person, it seems highly unlikely that Stewart would not have been aware of the discrepancies between the two accounts.

Spanish Civil War was largely defined by domestic political expediency, it made more sense to avoid the recruiting issue than to confront it.¹⁰³

The government's forced indifference was fortunate for the CPUSA, because the Party's leaders were often over-eager to publicize its achievements in forming the American International units. While the Party sought to limit its direct legal responsibility in the recruitment process by operating through the front organizations, Earl Browder in December of 1937 openly admitted the Communist Party's activity in the recruiting process and announced that open recruiting for Spain would begin shortly thereafter. Cooler heads seem to have prevailed, however; open recruiting, which would probably have been too much for the U.S. government to tolerate, was never actually implemented.¹⁰⁴

Once they passed the screening process, a number of additional steps lay between new volunteers and Spain. The next step was a physical examination administered by a party-connected or sympathetic doctor. These examinations were usually quite thorough, since the Party did not want to pay to send a man to Spain who would be unable to fight.¹⁰⁵ After the physical, the volunteers had to apply for passports. For some, this was a relatively simple process despite the State Department's attempts to hinder the recruiting process. The recruiting organization paid for the application fee and the required photograph. Most volunteers presented a cover story of some sort when asked their reasons for traveling abroad. One of the

¹⁰³ R. Dan Richardson, Comintern Army p.40; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.260-262

¹⁰⁴ Volunteer for Liberty Vol. I no.27, 20 December 1937, "U.S. Communists Recruit in Open" p.12

¹⁰⁵ HUAC 1939, testimony of William Ryan, pp.6814-6815, 6916; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.232-233. There is some controversy about the thoroughness of the exams, however. In Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, author Peter N. Carroll revived stories that a man with a wooden leg fought in Spain, as did others with serious medical conditions; he concluded that the medical examinations were "perfunctory" (pp.65-66). The tone of Carroll's work leads this author to look upon his allegations with skepticism, however, particularly since the sources of these statements are uncited. The wooden leg story seems to have been around at least since Alvin Halpern's testimony before the HUAC in 1938, but there has been little evidence to corroborate this rumor.

most popular covers was that of students traveling to the Paris Exposition. This story nearly tripped up one seaman who misspelled the word "student" on his application, but the official in charge winked at his mistake. The Passport Office attempted to keep track of the number of volunteers, eventually assembling a list of over 1,500 passport applicants suspected of traveling to fight in Spain; by and large, though, there was little the government could do.¹⁰⁶

The substantial numbers of minors and aliens who attempted to enlist experienced more substantial problems with the Passport Office, however. Regulations required minors to have their parents' consent to travel abroad, which was often impossible to secure when the destination was the Spanish battleground. Some minors adopted the identity of an older relative or friend in order to circumvent this problem, exposing themselves to punishment for perjury. Many minors' dreams of fighting in Spain ended at the passport office, however. A few resident aliens had valid foreign passports, but most had to rely on subterfuge. They could claim citizenship without documentation by signing an affidavit corroborated by two witnesses, which the Party was happy to supply. A popular cover story to explain the missing documents was to claim that one was born in San Francisco before 1906, when the fire following the 1906 earthquake destroyed the city's records. Other aliens adopted the names of dead infants culled from old newspaper obituaries. Both of these strategies were crude and easily exposed under scrutiny, but they frequently achieved the immediate purpose of securing passage to France. Apparently few aliens intended to return to the United States, so the probability that their flimsy misrepresentations would be discovered was unimportant.¹⁰⁷ .

¹⁰⁶ HUAC 1939, testimony of William Ryan pp.6814-6815; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.233

¹⁰⁷ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.234-235

After the volunteers secured passports, they usually to New York City. The recruiting organization sent virtually all volunteers, including Canadians, to New York. The primary method of travel was by bus, with tickets provided by the recruiting organization. Once in New York, the recruits checked in at the Ukrainian Workers' Club on Second Avenue (site of chief recruiter Fred Brown's office) or at one of the local Party offices. The recruiting organization paid to house groups of volunteers awaiting embarkation, generally placing them in local YMCA's or in cheap hotels on New York's Lower East Side. In the early days of the recruiting effort, the volunteers went through marching drills and other largely useless martial activities at the Ukrainian Workers' Club while they waited. The recruiters abandoned this largely useless activity after it began to attract the interest of the police, however. The Party later tried to create another training program at vacation camps owned by Party members in upstate New York, but police scrutiny soon forced its cancellation.¹⁰⁸

Once enough volunteers had assembled in New York, the recruiting apparatus made final preparations for their departure. Group size varied widely: one group numbered only 18 men, while some numbered over a hundred. The weight of anecdotal data suggests that 70 to 100 was a common size, however. Travel arrangements were made through World Tourists, a New York travel agency that was actually a front for the Soviet government's Intourist organization. As World Tourists provided a valuable "drop" for Soviet spies in the United States, the Soviets' willingness to risk its exposure for the sake of the International Brigades indicates the importance of the recruiting effort to the Soviet government. Shortly before embarkation, recruits were often issued \$50 to spend at a New York army-navy surplus store owned by a Party sympathizer. Many of the early recruits arrived in

¹⁰⁸ HUAC 1939, testimony of William Ryan pp.6817; HUAC 1938, testimony of Abraham Sobel pp.731, 736; SACB, Recommended Decision p.27; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.235

Spain looking like members of the AEF in 1918, wearing World War-era uniforms, helmets and carrying vintage equipment.¹⁰⁹

The recruiting organization selected a leader for each contingent of volunteers prior to their departure. The group leader acted with the authority of the Party and was responsible for maintaining discipline on the sea voyage to France. The volunteers were supposed to avoid congregating together and act like tourists, but the nature of their voyage was usually blatantly obvious to other passengers. While subsequent groups did not repeat the drunken orgy of the first contingent, attempts to pass off volunteers as tourists remained farcical.¹¹⁰

Arrival in France provided the volunteers with new challenges. Generally, Americans landed in Le Havre and went through customs inspection. French customs authorities were relatively lenient toward the American volunteers even when their purpose was obvious, as many of the inspectors were Popular Front sympathizers. The French government's requirement that individuals entering the country provide proof of their ability to support themselves posed a potential problem, however. Initially, the French required that incoming foreigners have at least fifteen American dollars. In order to meet this requirement, the American recruiting organization entrusted each contingent's group leader with sufficient funds to distribute to the men. The leader issued this money just before debarkation, then collected it as soon as the group cleared Customs and turned it over to officials of the American recruiting apparatus on hand. The French later raised the requirement to \$100 American

¹⁰⁹ HUAC 1939, testimony of William Ryan pp.6819, 6821; SACB, Recommended Decision pp.22-27; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.236-237; HUAC 1938, testimony of Alvin Halpern p.751

¹¹⁰ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.238; HUAC 1939, testimony of William Ryan p.6818; SACB, Recommended Decision p.27

dollars, but the system continued to function despite the greater burden on the recruiting organization's cash supply.¹¹¹

After arriving in Le Havre, the volunteers waited in shabby hotels until the central International Brigades recruiting office in Paris could clear room for them. They then by boat or train to Paris. The recruiting headquarters was located in a large warehouse on the Rue Mathurin-Moreau. The building bustled with activity as coordinators from each of the national Communist parties represented in the International Brigades rushed back and forth attempting to find lodging and eventual transportation to the border with Spain for their charges.¹¹²

The CPUSA representatives were in particularly difficult circumstances in Paris, which created problems for the American recruits. The French Communists, who oversaw the underground railway in France, resented the American volunteers. The frequent complaints of the Americans were partly at fault. More importantly, the CPUSA's pathological stinginess forced the French to assume part of the costs of maintaining the Americans in France even though the American party was supposed to be responsible for them. The CPUSA's chief representative for much of the war spoke very little French, which compounded the Americans' problems with the French party. As a result, Americans often languished in Paris hotels and rooming houses for some time while the CPUSA coordinators struggled to arrange transport to Spain. While they waited in Paris, some of the volunteers--particularly those who were slated to be commissioned as officers--went before another screening committee to ascertain their political reliability.¹¹³

The journey across the French border was the final obstacle to be overcome en route to Spain. Travel to Spain was relatively easy while the French border remained

¹¹¹ HUAC 1938, testimony of Alvin Halpern p.750, testimony of Abraham Sobel p.733; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.238-239

¹¹² Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.238-239

¹¹³ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.238-240

open in the early days of the war. Recruits from dozens of nations from Paris to the French border town of Perpignan on a train that came to be known as "the Red Special, " often serenading well-wishers at the stations along the way with the "Internationale" sung in a babel of different languages. In Perpignan, they boarded buses which took them across the border to the Catalan town of Figueras.¹¹⁴

A small number of Americans to Spain by boat from Marseilles or other French ports near the border. Interference from multi-national sea patrols enforcing the Non-Intervention Pact and the threat of lurking enemy submarines made the sea voyage dangerous, however. The water route was abandoned after the steamer *Ciudad de Barcelona* , carrying several hundred Internationals, was torpedoed off the Spanish coast near Barcelona on 30 May 1937.¹¹⁵

The French closed their border with Spain on 20 April 1937 in order to comply with the Non-Intervention Committee, greatly complicating volunteers' trip to Spain. French attempts to halt the flow of volunteers were rather halfhearted: though one veteran recalled that the volunteers' movements in southern France were "pretty obvious," only 100 or so of the 3,000-odd American volunteers spent time in French jails. Despite its distaste for the Non-Intervention Agreement, however, the French government felt that it had to make a semblance of enforcing it at the border. With the sea route cut off as well, small groups of volunteers had to sneak over the Pyrenees on moonless nights in order to avoid the French border patrols. The limited number of open passes and dark nights forced the International Brigades headquarters in Paris to piece together an intricate system for coordinating the arrival of groups of volunteers at the border. Some men had to wait for weeks for an opportunity to cross the border. Once the time arrived, groups of Americans joined other waiting

¹¹⁴ Robert Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War*, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980) pp.32-33; Cecil Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, New York (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) pp.13-14

¹¹⁵ Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left*, p.128

contingents of Internationals for the harrowing journey across the mountains. Led by professional smugglers hired by the French Communist Party, bands of volunteers climbed in single file at break-neck speed up treacherous mountain trails. The tiring journey took almost all night, but fear of apprehension by the French authorities cut rest stops to a minimum. Men who fell back or were injured were often left behind to avoid risking the whole group's capture. By sunrise, however, the exhausted volunteers would be across the border and descending to the valleys on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees.¹¹⁶

As the volunteers made their way down from the mountains, trucks would arrive to carry them to the nearby town of Figueras. While the men waited for transportation further south, the International Brigades authorities who oversaw the transport process kept them confined to the Brigades base at fifteenth-century Castillo de San Fernando rather than risk the largely-Communist volunteers interacting with the Anarchist locals; the command's fears were two-sided: the volunteers might get into confrontations with the Anarchists or, worse yet, they might gain insight into the political turmoil of the Republican zone.¹¹⁷

After a stay of at most three days, the volunteers boarded trains that slowly wound their way southward almost 350 miles to the International Brigade headquarters at the provincial capital of Albacete. When they arrived at Albacete, the men invariably filed into the courtyard of the old civil guard barracks to hear an address by International Brigades overlord André Marty. Few Americans understood a word he said. After more speeches by various other Brigades functionaries, the men lined up by nationality to be photographed for their military identification papers.

¹¹⁶ Antony Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, New York (Peter Bedrick Books, 1983) p.202; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.128-129, 130-132; Steve Nelson, The Volunteers, New York (Masses and Mainstream, 1953) pp.68-77; Alvah Bessie, Men in Battle: A Story of Americans in Spain, New York (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939, 1954) pp.19-23; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.249-250

¹¹⁷ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.133

They filled out questionnaires on their personal background and were issued uniforms, which came from a *melange* of different nations. Some Americans who had arrived in surplus doughboy fatigues felt embarrassed to be wearing the uniform of the world's most capitalistic nation, but discovered after abandoning them that their new uniforms rarely fit.¹¹⁸

The volunteers usually surrendered their passports to the Brigade authorities on arrival, which eventually created problems and a rather bizarre sidelight. There is some debate as to the circumstances surrounding the collection of passports. Both Robert Rosenstone and Cecil Eby stated that the authorities claimed that the passports were collected for safekeeping. Cameron Stewart, on the other hand, claimed that the volunteers were told straight out that their passports were being taken to prevent them from deserting. In any event, many volunteers did not have their passports when the International Brigades were disbanded in September of 1938. After long wrangling, the State Department finally agreed to admit men without passports to the United States under emergency re-entry papers. There are rumors that a few unfortunates could not prove their American citizenship and were refused entry, however. The State Department's caution regarding the volunteers' papers was not unjustified. Soviet intelligence officer Walter Krivitsky revealed in 1939 that Soviet officials collected the passports of Americans killed in Spain and sent them to Moscow for use by NKVD agents traveling abroad. The U.S. government acted quickly when this information emerged, drastically changing the format of American passports and sending a list of those known to be missing to U.S. diplomats worldwide. Canada did not take these precautions, however, and a number of Canadian passports were later used by Soviet agents. In the most celebrated instance, a Catalan named Mercader apparently entered the United States in September of 1939 using the altered passport

¹¹⁸ Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, pp.17-21; Sandor Voros, *American Commissar*, New York (Chilton Company, 1961) pp.312, 315-316; Bessie, *Men in Battle*, pp.46-47

of a dead Canadian volunteer. After receiving a tourist permit in New York, he to Mexico where in August of 1940 he murdered Stalin's old foe Leon Trotsky with an ice axe.¹¹⁹

The vast majority of the 3,000-some American volunteers were mustered into the XV International Brigade, which eventually included the 57th (British) Battalion, the 58th (Lincoln or Lincoln-Washington) Battalion, the 59th (all Spanish) Battalion, and the 60th (MacKenzie-Papineau) Battalion. The Lincoln, the Washington, and the MacKenzie Papineau Battalions were all predominantly American at their creation. About forty Americans, among them Commissar John Gates, served in a multinational 20th Battalion that fought on the southern front between April and June of 1937. Thereafter, this battalion returned to Albacete and its surviving members were divided up among other International units.¹²⁰

In addition to the infantry units, several other units contained American volunteers. About seventy or eighty Americans served in the John Brown Artillery Battery, which was stationed on the Toledo and Levant fronts for about a year after its formation in April of 1937. Sandor Voros, who served with the unit in its early days before being transferred to the International Brigades staff, stated that the battery, "did not possess a single gun, not even for training. It had no instruments, no artillery tables, nothing but its name to signify it as an artillery unit."¹²¹ The unit eventually

¹¹⁹ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.20; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.138; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.255-257; Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1938 Volume I: General, Washington (United States Government Printing Office, 1955) pp.284, 298, 304-305 317; Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War: revised and enlarged edition, New York (Harper and Row, 1977 [orig. pub. 1961]), p.574; Walter G. Krivitsky, In Stalin's Secret Service: An Exposé of Russia's Secret Policies by the Former Chief of the Soviet Intelligence in Western Europe. orig. pub. 1939; republished Frederick, Maryland (University Publications of America, Inc., 1985), p.95

¹²⁰ Verle S. Johnston, Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, University Park, Pennsylvania (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), pp.86-87

¹²¹ Voros, American Commissar, p.321 Apparently, there was also another primarily English-speaking battery with a substantial number of Americans--the Second Battery. Information on this unit is limited to a passing reference in the Volunteer for Liberty (Vol.II no.35, 7 November 1938--"American Volunteers in Spain," p.9)

received a few Krupp guns made in 1870, but it continued to lack tractors to pull them. A majority of the men were foreign-born Americans who, like Voros, had served in the artillery in the conscript armies of their homelands.¹²² A handful of Americans served in a primarily Czech anti-aircraft and anti-tank battery between late 1937 and the mass retreats of April 1938.¹²³ About a hundred Americans served as truck drivers and mechanics in the First Transport Regiment of what became the V Army Corps.¹²⁴

After the administrative details were concluded, the volunteers to join their units. For the majority destined for the infantry, that meant boarding trucks bound for the American training base at Tarazona de la Mancha, where the CPUSA's instructors trained infantry recruits. Though the training period increased substantially as the war went on, most of the new recruits did not learn the realities of the Spanish war until they came under fire for the first time.

¹²² Voros, p.321, Steve Nelson, The Volunteers, New York (Masses and Mainstream, 1953), p.89

¹²³ Ben Iceland, in Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, eds., Our Fight: An Anthology of Writings by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Spain 1936-1939, New York (.Monthly Review Press with the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1987), p.232

¹²⁴ Volunteer for Liberty, Vol.II no.35, 7 November 1938--"American Volunteers in Spain" p.9

COMMUNIST DOMINATION

From the very beginning of the war, the American battalions of the International Brigades were stocked with members of the Communist Party. In this, they conformed to the pattern of the other International units. Even in the Italian battalions, which were the most politically heterogeneous in the Brigades, Communists constituted a majority. In the other national units, Communists played an even greater role. The Comintern's role as the creator and chief financial supporter of the International Brigades gave Communists great control over the Brigades. The American Party followed the pattern of other national parties by dominating the ranks and the leadership cadres of the American units.

Though some American liberals heeded the recruiters' call, the vast majority of the men of the Lincoln, Washington and MacKenzie-Papineau Battalions were Communists or Party supporters. Though supporters of the volunteers have since downplayed the number of Communists in the ranks, veterans and recruiters agreed that Communists made up the great majority of the battalions. Veterans interviewed after the war thought that between 60 and 80 percent of their fellows were Party members. Recruiters believed that between 80 and 90 percent of the men they recruited were Communists. The high percentage of Communists should not be at all surprising, especially considering the difficulty that non-leftists had in establishing their credentials to recruiters.¹²⁵

Of those volunteers who were not Communists, many were close sympathizers. Veteran William Bailey claimed that most of the non-Communist volunteers were "so far-left in their thinking that all they were doing was cheating the

¹²⁵ Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field:" An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), pp.290-291

Party out of its dues by not joining." Sandor Voros supported this assertion, stating that the average recruit was "either a Communist or a close Communist sympathizer."¹²⁶

It is somewhat surprising that there were few non-Communist leftists among the volunteers. One factor contributing to the under-representation of non-Communist leftists was the Party's desire to keep its opponents from interfering with its control of the International units. The screening committees strove to weed out recruits thought to be hostile to the Party, which was as likely to include its supposed "Trotskyist" rivals in the leftist spectrum as right-wingers. Another factor was non-Communist leftists' mistrust of the CPUSA. Most people who were active in radical politics had too much experience with the Communist Party's ruthless treatment of its opponents to place themselves at the Communists' mercy in Spain. A few American Socialists enlisted in the International Brigades after the American Socialist Party's amateurish attempt to recruit a "Eugene Debs Column" imploded; they underwent considerable abuse, however, justifying others' fears. In addition, a handful of "Wobblies" from the venerable International Workers of the World joined up. These individuals' anarchic indiscipline frequently landed them in the guardhouse. Their small numbers and the disorganized, bohemian attitudes meant that they posed little threat to the Communists, however, so they escaped serious punishment.¹²⁷

Though the Comintern's command to defend Soviet interests provided the primary impetus to the formation of the American International units, the CPUSA had secondary motives of its own. Bill Lawrence, a Party spokesman and Albacete base commissar, opined during the war that, "Our Party, though making terrific sacrifices

¹²⁶ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.296

¹²⁷ Louis Fischer, Men and Politics: An Autobiography, New York (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941) p.405; Stewart pp.295-296; Steve Nelson, The Volunteers, New York (Masses and Mainstream, 1953), p.114

[in Spain] is at the same time developing marvelous cadres."¹²⁸ The CPUSA saw the Spanish experience as an ideal means through which to transform its members from halfhearted Marxists to hardened revolutionary fighters dedicated to the movement. In addition, the recruitment of non-Communists into the Party-dominated battalions was a useful means of gaining new Party members. The commissars of the American units adopted the slogan "Every member of the Brigade a member of the Communist Party," and worked to make it a reality.¹²⁹

The CPUSA enforced its authority over the American units through the commissar system. In keeping with the Comintern origins of the International Brigades, the command structure followed the Soviet model of a military hierarchy with a parallel political commissar system. The Communists claimed that the commissar system was necessary in Spain because of the revolutionary nature of the Spanish conflict. They saw parallels with the Russian revolution in the Republic's reliance upon the questionable loyalty of military and police officers of the old regime, and the fact that the Republic was forced to pit untrained men against the trained troops and foreign mercenaries of the Nationalists. Brigade Commissar John Gates argued that the commissars were not representatives of the Communist or any other political party, but were rather, "subordinate to the government and charged with the duty of subordinating the political differences among the soldiers to the common goal of victory."¹³⁰

In order to maintain discipline and loyalty to the Republican cause, the Communists argued that it was necessary to give ongoing political education in a

¹²⁸ U.S. Subversive Activities Control Board, Herbert Brownell, Jr., Attorney General of the United States, Petitioner v. Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Respondent--Recommended Decision. Washington, D.C., 1955 [cited hereafter as SACB, Recommended Decision.], p.83

¹²⁹ Dan Richardson, Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War, Lexington, Kentucky (University Press of Kentucky, 1982), pp.93-94, 201

¹³⁰ The Book of the XV Brigade, Madrid (XV Brigade Commissariat of War, 1937), pp. 217-220; John Gates, American Commissar, New York (Nelson, 1958), p.47

central role in the formation of the People's Army. The XV Brigade Commissariat's Book of the XV Brigade argued that, "Commissars are an integral part of the Army. Primarily their role is to inspire their unit with the highest spirit of discipline and loyalty to the Republican cause and establish a feeling of mutual confidence and good comradeship between Commanders and men."¹³¹ The Communists believed that making their farmers- and workers-turned soldiers understand the political dimensions of the struggle was the key to victory, and that giving political agents a primary role in the command process would help to achieve that goal. In practice, the men selected as commissars were Communists almost without exception and followed the Party line in their motivational efforts. Lincoln veteran William Herrick, a Communist himself at the time he went to Spain, testified to the Subversive Activities Control Board that every political commissar in the American units that he had contact with was a member of the Communist Party of the United States.¹³²

Not only the commissariat but also the military leadership of the American battalions was overwhelmingly Communist. Sandor Voros wrote that, "almost all leadership posts and positions of responsibility, beginning with *cabo* [corporal] were held by Party members. Exceptions occurred, but not often."¹³³ The highest-ranking Americans in Spain were virtually all Communists, among them: James Harris, Oliver Law, Mirko Markovicz and Milton Wolff, Lincoln commanders; Steve Nelson, Dave Doran and John Gates, XV Brigade Commissars; Robert Thompson, Mac-Pap commander; George Watt, Lincoln commissar; Joe Dallet and Saul Wellman, Mac Pap commissars.¹³⁴

¹³¹ The Book of the XV Brigade, p.217; pp.217-220

¹³² SACB Recommended Decision, testimony of William Herrick p.43. FBI agent Edward Pelega was theoretically an exception, but he owed his commissar position to his infiltration into the Party's membership.

¹³³ quoted in Cameron Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.314

¹³⁴ SACB, Recommended Decision p.32, p.45; Edwin Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in Spain in the International Brigades, New York (Veterans of the Abraham

The Party's practice in the early days of the war of making leadership appointments directly from New York had significant unintended effects. Those party functionaries who were pre-assigned as commissars or military commanders came to be known as "ninth floor generals" or "12th Street commandos," references to CPUSA's 12th Street headquarters building in New York and its ninth-floor Politburo chambers.¹³⁵ Political reliability was the primary criterion taken into account in the selection process, but the Party favored men from its ranks who had prior military experience in addition to solid political credentials.¹³⁶

There was little way to determine the validity or applicability of candidates' alleged service except in the crucible of Spain, however; in practice, the results of choosing the battalion's officers from across the Atlantic proved unfortunate. Edward Pelega, the FBI infiltrator who served as a Lincoln Battalion commissar, recalled that, "I attended meetings of commissars where we planned military affairs with an eye for maintaining Party domination in the Lincoln Brigade...."¹³⁷ A "Little Politburo" composed of Communist military officers and commissars functioned in Spain. Its purpose was to integrate the Party's political goals with the American battalions' military organization and operation. This entailed controlling promotions and

Lincoln Brigade, 1939), p.29 Brigade Adjutant Robert Merriman could probably appear on this list as well, but his political status was somewhat nebulous despite his Communist sympathies.

¹³⁵ This group included Lincoln quartermaster Al Tanz, base commissar Phil Bard, Lincoln commander James Harris, and commissar Steve Nelson, among others. Major Robert Merriman was a curious case. Merriman was never clearly proven to be a Party member, but his appointment as Lincoln adjutant upon his arrival in Spain from Moscow and the speed of his eventual rise to become the highest ranking American military officer in Spain were signs that he was well-connected with the Communist hierarchy of the Brigades. (SACB Recommended Decision, p.45)

¹³⁶ Cameron Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.315. An incomplete roster of veterans compiled by Stewart revealed the emphasis placed on prior military service in selecting officers: of 22 men known to have U.S. Army experience, 7 became officers; 1 of 7 Navy veterans; 1 of 5 Marine Corps veterans; 4 of 8 men who had served in National Guard units (the higher numbers may also reflect the CPUSA's attempt to infiltrate National Guard units in the mid to late Thirties); 1 of 2 men with R.O.T.C. experience; 2 of 10 men who had served in foreign armies. In assessing these numbers, it is important to remember that they only reflect those veterans known to have prior military service; nonetheless, the fact that 16 of 54 men with such experience gained officer rank provides substantial anecdotal evidence of the importance placed on military service.

¹³⁷ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.314

determining to what units men would be assigned, in addition to outright political proselytizing in the ranks.¹³⁸

Party discipline was a significant force behind the leadership of the American units. As noted previously, a number of Party members were sent to Spain against their will in order to regain the Party's good graces. In Spain, men who spoke out against the Party line were warned by the leadership to keep their views to themselves. Occasionally, such individuals were disciplined immediately. Trusted Party members read the men's incoming and outgoing mail as well, in order to maintain the Party line both internally and externally. Men who continued to cause problems for the command were often confined to labor battalions at the front (which were occasionally sent into the areas of heaviest combat during battle) and detention camps for "*inutiles de guerras* " behind the lines.¹³⁹

While Communist terror was a significant force in the International Brigades as a whole, the CPUSA's disciplinary efforts did not approach the heights of paranoia reached by André Marty and his associates. Marty's morbid fear of Trotskyist-Fascist spies in the ranks led to the execution of around 500 Internationals during the course of the war and the imprisonment and interrogation of many more. Despite Marty's dislike for the Americans, however, he confined his predations largely to the German and Eastern European units. In the American units, very few men were executed. The arduous post-war investigations of Federal investigators hostile to the CPUSA turned up only eight names of men said to have been executed, and four of these appear to have been shot for desertion. Even during the spring 1938 retreats, there was only one execution for desertion. While there may be a few undocumented

¹³⁸ SACB, Recommended Decision: testimony of William Herrick, testimony of Edward Horan, p.43

¹³⁹ Subversive Activities Control Board, Recommended Decision: testimony of William Herrick pp.37-38, testimony of Robert Gladnick, pp.38-39; Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1969]), pp.310-311

cases, there is little evidence of large-scale political executions in the American units.¹⁴⁰

Unfortunately, though the Party succeeded in gaining a few converts among volunteers who were non-Communists when they went over, the net effect of the CPUSA's domination of the American units was disastrous. Veteran Sidney Levine recalled that the Party's "mismanagement in Spain was terrible," an opinion supported by most other veterans contacted by historian Cameron Stewart. By promoting unqualified men to leadership positions and interfering in military decision-making, the Party undermined its own cause. The end result was a limited relaxation of Party control. Edward Pelega noted that, "[since] the XV Brigade kept getting cut up all to hell, some guys moved into command posts on the basis of need or ability, despite Party aims."¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.309, 373-375

¹⁴¹ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.314 (Levine and Pelega material);

THE MEN WHO VOLUNTEERED

"[The Americans'] ... human material was deplorable. The combatants were Negroes from Broadway, Chinese from the ports of New York and Los Angeles, gangsters from Chicago and militants from the Communist sections of Philadelphia. This battalion also included American Indians. For enlisting, each man was given a large sum of money--some four hundred dollars at least."

-Nationalist pamphleteer Adolfo Lizon Gadea, 1940¹⁴²

"[The volunteers] many of them Communists, some pure adventurers... some idealistic democrats, some World War veterans and others mere youths, office boys, clerks, and farm hands, have taken up arms for Spain."

-Time magazine, 3 October 1938¹⁴³

While the International Brigades were probably the CPUSA's most effective tool in its Popular Front propaganda campaign, the men who actually volunteered did not reflect the strategy's success. Though the image of the volunteers as typical Middle-American youths has been very resilient, the ranks of the American International units were never the cross-section of America that Party publicists made them out to be. The American volunteers tended to come from the core constituencies of the Communist Party rather than from the nation at large. Since perhaps 80 percent of the American volunteers were Party members or close sympathizers, the demographics of the men who went to Spain naturally reflected the areas of the Party's strongest support.

The composition of the American International units has been a subject of debate since their formation. While it is clear that the volunteers were neither the mercenary melting-pot conjured up by the febrile Nationalists nor the wide-eyed

¹⁴² Cecil Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, New York (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p.9; Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1969]), pp.97, 390 Rosenstone includes part of the passage and a more complete citation of its source than Eby.

¹⁴³ "Exit," Time, Vol.32, 3 October, 1938, p.19.

Midwestern farm boys and college students that Party sources painted them as, the specifics of their backgrounds continues to arouse controversy. There have been two main attempts to establish the demographics of the American volunteers: one by Robert Rosenstone, published in 1968 in Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War; the other by Cameron Stewart in an unpublished 1971 doctoral dissertation, Summoned to the Eternal Field. Rosenstone based his findings on a roster of 1,804 names; in some cases, he had substantial information on the veteran in question, in others no more than the name itself. Stewart catalogued 2,626 names, once again with varying amounts of information on each. Stewart focused his research on the background of the volunteers rather than their exploits in Spain. Not only is his sample larger, he unearthed greater amounts of information on more volunteers than Rosenstone. As a result, this author tends to support Stewart's conclusions when they differ with Rosenstone's.

While the majority of the American volunteers were between twenty-one and twenty-eight years of age, their youth has been frequently exaggerated. Though there were fewer World War veterans among the Americans than among their European comrades, the notion that most of the American volunteers were youths seems mistaken. The majority of the Americans were in their twenties, but the substantial portion who were not were almost all older. Rosenstone's numbers place 67 percent of the volunteers between 20 and 29 years of age, but his findings are based on a sample of only 291 men.¹⁴⁴ Stewart reaches substantially conclusions from a sample of 1,758. Stewart found 58.7 percent of the men between 21 and 29, but 39.6 percent were 30 or older.¹⁴⁵

Table 1: Rosenstone age data

¹⁴⁴ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.372

¹⁴⁵ Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field:" An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), p.280

<u>AGE</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
Under 20	7	2.4
21-24	115	39.2
25-29	84	28.6
30-34	43	14.7
35-39	19	6.5
Over 40	23	7.9

Table 2: Stewart age data

<u>AGE</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
Under 21	30	1.7
21-24	418	23.8
25-29	615	34.9
30-34	325	18.5
35-39	184	10.5
40-44	110	6.3
45-49	52	2.9
50 and over	29	1.4

The tendency towards older men is somewhat surprising in a military unit, but there are a number of potential explanations. The Party's search for men with prior military experience favored older men. While few World War veterans joined, older men were more likely to have had time to join one of the American services. On a more philosophical level, Stewart suggests that older men, "whose youthful idealism had atrophied into a despairing cynicism engendered by years of frustration were less worried about throwing away their future" than young men may have been.¹⁴⁶

When examining the Americans' occupational backgrounds, there are areas of agreement and of controversy. Both Rosenstone and Stewart agreed that the volunteers tended to be working class men, many from union backgrounds. The Party's efforts to organize unions in the face of violent opposition from management and government had earned the respect of many workers. The heated and sometimes bloody confrontations with strikebreakers and scabs had built up a working class culture that perceived labor-relations in the context of violent conflict. The CPUSA encouraged this identification, repeatedly denouncing fascism as the last-ditch effort of capital to destroy labor's growing organized power. The Spanish conflict was

¹⁴⁶ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.281

presented to American workers as a war between unionized labor and international capital's fascist mercenaries.¹⁴⁷

Many American workers enlisted in the International Brigades in order to defend the gains of their unions by defeating fascism before it came to the United States. The struggle for industrial unions had created a radical atmosphere among American workers, but it never produced a truly revolutionary consciousness. While there were some hard-core revolutionaries among them, most of the volunteers believed that the struggle for workers' rights and well-being in America was being won using relatively peaceful means. Rather than seeing service in the International Brigades as training for a coming revolution back home, most of the volunteers felt that victory in Spain would halt the spread of fascism before the United States had to experience similar violence. Mac-Pap volunteer Leo Gordon expressed an oft-repeated sentiment when he wrote in August 1937, "After all, it's only a matter of time before there will be very little choice as to what sector one will be able to handle a rifle. Before long, Spain may be the quietest spot on the globe."¹⁴⁸

Both Rosenstone and Stewart agree that seamen were the most numerous occupational group among the volunteers. This can be attributed in part to their transitory lifestyle, physically active lifestyle, and easy access to transport. More important, however, was the Communist party's influence in the maritime unions. The Communists were behind the National Maritime Union, which brought them substantial membership among maritime workers. Many of the seamen who volunteered had fought in the bitter seamen's strike during the winter of 1936 and 1937 and were left unemployed as a result. The Waterfront Section of the Communist Party claimed that over 500 seamen went to Spain, a statement supported

¹⁴⁷ Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left*, p.98

¹⁴⁸ Leo Gordon, personal letter 26 August 1937 reprinted in *Our Fight: Writings by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Spain, 1936-1939*, ed. Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, New York (Monthly Review Press with the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1987), p.196

by Stewart and Rosenstone's findings. Veterans consulted by Stewart agreed that seamen constituted the "predominant group" among the volunteers.¹⁴⁹

Other unions also contributed substantial numbers of men to the International units. The small fur industry workers' union in New York sent around fifty men to Spain, probably the largest percentage of its membership sent by any union. Significantly, the CPUSA had outright control of the furriers' union and a large percentage of the membership was Communist.¹⁵⁰ Numerous members of the steelworkers' union formed by the Party in the Mahoning Valley fought in Spain; the numbers may be somewhat inflated by the substantial number of the union's Party organizers who joined the Internationals, including Commissar Joe Dallet and Commissar John Gates.

The greatest point of disagreement over occupation between Stewart and Rosenstone centers on the number of college students among the volunteers. The belief popular during the war years that large numbers of Americans had been students gained semi-official status when historian Hugh Thomas wrote in his definitive 1961 book The Spanish Civil War that, "Alone of the Brigades, a majority of the Americans was composed of students."¹⁵¹ Rosenstone's data show 79 students out of the 447 men whose occupations he discovered; the only larger occupational group was the 89 seamen. Extrapolating from his data, Rosenstone maintained that there should have been a total of about 500 students among the 3,000 or so Americans who fought in Spain.¹⁵² While Rosenstone accounted for other occupations that he believed left-wing and Communist publicists were likely to have emphasized (making

¹⁴⁹ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.367-368; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.287-288, 310; Roy B. Hudson, "True Americans: A Tribute to American Maritime Workers Who Fought for World Democracy in the Trenches of Spain," New York (Waterfront Section, Communist Party, [1939?]) p.10

¹⁵⁰ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.310

¹⁵¹ Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War: revised and enlarged edition, New York (Harper and Row, 1977 [orig. pub. 1961]), p.595

¹⁵² Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.367-368

it more likely that they would be covered in the press, thus more likely to appear in his data), he failed to do so for students. The Party's efforts to recruit on campus through the American Student Union and the League for Peace and Democracy were well-known, so it seems reasonable that the Party would attempt to play up the number of students in Spain.

Stewart found relatively few traditional college students among the volunteers in his sample. The recruiters he interviewed had little success on campus, finding students more interested in drinking beer, chasing girls and watching football games than risking their lives in Spain. The Passport Office's rule requiring those under 21 years of age to obtain parental permission before approving a passport application thwarted some students. Recruiter Aaron Schneiderman recalled that most students he approached were "more talk than action." While they might become active in pro-Republican organizations, few students were motivated enough to join the International Brigades. Stewart found 147 men who had attended college at one time or another, but of these only 43 were in college when recruited. He attributed the higher totals of students cited by others to the Party's inflation of the numbers by counting men who had attended trade schools or Party-run "workers' schools."¹⁵³

The geographic origins of the American Internationals were interrelated with their occupational backgrounds. According to Rosenstone's projections, over 80 percent of the volunteers came from eleven states--with the Northeast, California, and the Great Lakes states heavily represented.¹⁵⁴ Nearly 71 percent of the 2211 volunteers on Stewart's roster whose hometown he knew came from urban areas with populations of one million or more. This is unsurprising, since the CPUSA failed repeatedly in its efforts to form a "Farmers and Workers Party" . The CPUSA

¹⁵³ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.285-287

¹⁵⁴ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.104; p.371

remained almost entirely an urban organization despite the membership gains during the Spanish Civil War.¹⁵⁵

Stewart's roster included men from all 48 states, as well as Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania--all populous industrial states in the core of Communist Party strength--accounted for nearly half the volunteers, however. About fifteen percent of the men came from the Pacific Coast, mostly from California. The numerous West Coast sailors who enlisted may have contributed substantially to this total.¹⁵⁶

Most other states with high representation in the Brigades were industrial states with a corresponding high level of party activity. California, Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan all fell into this pattern. Less-industrialized Wisconsin, which sent around 80 men, nonetheless provided substantial support to the state Communist Party section due to its progressive political tradition. Stewart found only 41 men from the ex-Confederate states, and men from Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Vermont, and Wyoming constituted less than one percent of the total. As with other factors, the states where the Party's strength was concentrated were represented disproportionately in Spain.¹⁵⁷

While the American volunteers came from a variety of backgrounds, their ethnic composition reflected that of the CPUSA. The volunteers tended to come from families that had immigrated relatively recently--within their lifetimes or within the past generation--as did many Communists. Substantial numbers of the volunteers were immigrants who had retained their foreign citizenship, living in the United States as resident aliens. The U.S. Passport Office estimated that, "as many as forty

¹⁵⁵ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.271

¹⁵⁶ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.370; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.272

¹⁵⁷ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.104, 370; Stewart p.272; Karl J. Worth, Wisconsin and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-1939, (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1981), pp.105, 110

per cent of the volunteers in some recruit contingents bound for Spain were aliens or individuals traveling on valid foreign passports." Veteran John Gates' statement that 129 of the 1,103 "American" survivors left in France after the withdrawal of the International Brigades were actually aliens recruited in the United States supported this analysis.¹⁵⁸

The CPUSA's propaganda efforts substantially inflated the apparent numbers of certain ethnic groups. The one Japanese-American who served was mentioned so many times that Nationalists came to believe that there was a substantial number of Japanese among the Americans. African-Americans, a constituency desperately pursued by the Party during the Thirties with little success, were said to number 200 in the American units in Spain. Subsequent efforts to track down the actual number of black veterans have produced a list of about 90 names, however. Irish-Americans, another group the Party wooed in vain, also were overcounted during the war years. Irish volunteers received substantially more publicity from Party sources (and thus from mainstream sources as well, since most background on the American volunteers came straight from Party sources) than their relatively small numbers warranted.¹⁵⁹

While those ethnic groups that had made up the last waves of immigrants--Italians, Southern and Eastern Europeans--were well represented among the American volunteers, Jews were probably the most disproportionately represented ethnic group by far, however. Veteran Max Farrar claimed that, "New York Jews, the best fighters among the Americans, comprised a large part of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade."¹⁶⁰ Stewart and Rosenstone both looked over their rosters for names that appeared Jewish in origin. Rosenstone found that 21 percent of his roster consisted

¹⁵⁸ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.271

¹⁵⁹ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.370 Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: "This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do", New York (G.K. Hall and Co., 1992) p.61; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.274, 278

¹⁶⁰ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.279

of obviously Jewish names. He concluded that around 30 percent of the Lincolns were Jewish, since not all Jews have obviously Jewish names and since many of them had "Americanized" their names. Thirty-seven percent of the men on Stewart's roster had Jewish surnames, which does not include those who had changed their names (such as Steve Nelson, *né* Stephen Mesarosh or John Gates, *né* Sol Regenstreif). From these data, it is safe to assume that more than 30 percent of the American volunteers were ethnically Jewish.¹⁶¹

The perception of the Spanish Civil War as the first round of an international war against fascism was an important factor in Jews' predominance in the American International units. The CPUSA had always had a substantial Jewish membership, but many more Jews joined the Party when it began to promote anti-fascism as one of its primary issues. So many Jews joined that the Party ordered some to change their names in order to avoid a resurrection of the hoary "International Jewish Conspiracy" theory. For many American Jews, the Spanish Civil War became an opportunity to take up arms against Nazism's fascist minions.¹⁶²

In light of their political affiliations, the geographical and occupational backgrounds of the volunteers were not surprising. The men who fought in Spain were not Midwestern farmboys, innocent college students, or wealthy professionals. They were primarily politically radical white ethnics. Most volunteers were urban proletarians motivated by the desire to defend their hard-won gains from the spread of fascism, which they saw as the final form of capitalist degradation. Their blue-collar origins did not make them any less idealists, however. Though they were fighting to make the world safe for socialism rather than capitalist democracy, the American

¹⁶¹ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p. ; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.279

¹⁶² Harvey Klehr, The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade, New York (Basic Books, Inc., 1984) pp.70-71, 381-383; Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.279

volunteers nonetheless sacrificed themselves for a cause they had come to believe in passionately.

A LONG, HOT SUMMER

BRUNETE AND THE ZARAGOZA OFFENSIVE

In mid-June of 1937 after 116 days in the line, the Lincolns were pulled out to join the fresh Washingtons in preparation for the Republic's first offensive of the war. At this point in the war, the XV International Brigade, of which the Americans were part, consisted of six under-strength battalions grouped in two regiments. The Lincoln, Washington, and the British Battalions composed one regiment; the other included a Franco-Belgian unit, the Slavic Dimitrovs, and the all-Spanish 24th Battalion. A British anti-tank battery was also attached to the Brigade during this period, providing it with the only worthwhile integrated artillery support it had during the war.¹⁶³

As the volunteers prepared to take the war to the enemy for the first time, the Americans' morale reached what would probably be its all-time high. "There isn't the slightest doubt that the Republican forces will win," one volunteer wrote in a letter home. Another wrote even more confidently, "Put in your order now! Keep a Fascist in your backyard instead of a garbage pail! They are guaranteed to be docile and will eat anything. It's the truth." The experiences of the coming battle would drastically alter these light-hearted sentiments.¹⁶⁴

On 6 July, 1937, the XV Brigade joined 50,000 Republican troops in an offensive aimed at the village of Brunete on the plains west of Madrid. The recently constituted MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion remained in the rear for additional training. The Republican forces moved quickly at first, but they slowed as they stretched their supply lines on the scorching, waterless plains. The Nationalists began

¹⁶³ Book of the XV Brigade, Madrid (XV Brigade Commissariat of War, 1938), p.131

¹⁶⁴ Verle B. Johnston, Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, University Park, Pennsylvania.(The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), pp.116-117

counterattacking on 14 July with 31 fresh battalions, 9 artillery batteries and elements of the German Condor Legion detached from the northern front.¹⁶⁵

The performance of the Washington Battalion in its first battle revealed that the Americans' new training regimen was a poor substitute for combat experience. At one point early in the offensive, the Washington Battalion's training directly contributed to disaster. As the Washingtons moved to the front lines in the tight arrow formations that they had been trained to use, enemy planes killed twenty closely-grouped men with one bomb run. Though the Washingtons participated in the successful assault on the small village of Villanueva de Canada, they abandoned their tactical training when engaged with the Nationalists in the ragged terrain beyond the town. Rather than concentrating on their topographical objective, the battalion dissolved into bands of armed men intent on hunting down small groups of Fascists. The Washingtons scattered, tangling the command and communications network and making an orderly advance impossible.¹⁶⁶

By the eighteenth the Americans were being rushed from one sector to another in an attempt to contain the resurgent Nationalists. That night, the American battalions were the last of the units that had begun the attack to be relieved from the lines. The exhausted troops had just arrived at their reserve positions after a six hour march when a messenger from division arrived to call them back to the front. There is some debate as to how the Americans reacted. The popular account is that the Americans cursed at the order, but they voted to return to combat; they had gone less than a mile down the road when another messenger arrived to order them back to

¹⁶⁵ Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1969]), p.181, 183; Cecil Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, New York (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p.137; Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War: revised and enlarged edition, New York (Harper and Row, 1977 [orig. pub. 1961]), pp.710-716. In The Volunteers (New York, Masses and Mainstream 1953), American commissar Steve Nelson stated that, "At Brunete, the I.B.'s made up a fifth of the attacking force." (p.177)

¹⁶⁶ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.132

their reserve position. Some have alleged that the Americans were in the midst of arguing over whether or not to obey the order to return to fight when the counter-order arrived, however.¹⁶⁷

The Americans had been in the thick of the fighting at Brunete and were cut to pieces. The Washingtons sustained fifty percent casualties and the Lincolns were heavily depleted as well. Of the eight hundred Americans in the Lincoln and Washington Battalions at the start of the Brunete offensive on 6 July, only five hundred effectives remained. The survivors of the two battalions were reconstituted into one unit under the command of Mirko Markovicz. Officially named the Lincoln-Washington Battalion, the name quickly faded to become Lincoln Battalion in common usage. The Washington Battalion, for all its training, had survived only two weeks into its first campaign. The front stalemated by 25 July; while the Republicans had advanced about three miles along a ten mile front, they had suffered heavy losses for little strategic gain.¹⁶⁸

While casualties among the Internationals were horrendous, they would probably have been substantially higher had it not been for the dedicated work of the volunteer medical units supplied by the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy. By the summer of 1937, there were also twenty five American hospital units staffed by 220 doctors, 550 nurses, and 600 ambulance drivers, stretcher bearers and aid men serving in Spain by the summer of 1937. Stretcher-bearers brought casualties to ambulances waiting to take them to front-line hospitals. From there, the wounded could be removed to better-equipped evacuation hospitals further from the lines or finally to permanent base hospitals for convalescence. The hospital units were not integrated into the International Brigade structure, but since the forward hospitals

¹⁶⁷ Nelson, The Volunteers, pp.170-172; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.186-188; Eby , Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.142n

¹⁶⁸ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.188

traveled with the heaviest fighting, they were usually near the Internationals. Thus, the International Brigades usually enjoyed the best medical care available on the Republican side. Among the innovations in medical care provided to the Internationals was Canadian physician Norman Bethune's pioneering work in the technique of storing blood for later transfusion. The presence of the American hospitals combined with the advances in treatment of wounds made by the Republican army medical staff (which included immediate surgery for wounds, extensive use of plaster casts, and the institution of front-line hospitals) to produce impressive results. Despite the shortage of equipment and doctors, the number of deaths per casualty in the Republican Army was far lower than on either side during the World War. Though surviving one's wounds was more likely to lead back to the battlefield than to repatriation, the work of the American medical units certainly saved many of the volunteers' lives.¹⁶⁹

Markovicz was removed from command shortly after the end of the battle. It was alleged that he had become sick, but Steve Nelson admitted later that Markovicz was removed for refusing to carry out an order from brigade staff demanding what he saw as a useless counterattack. After transferring to a Slavic battalion, Markovicz compiled an impressive record during the remainder of the war.¹⁷⁰

The Americans, despite their disastrous casualties, came away from Brunete better off than the other battalions in XV International Brigade. Less than 100 men

¹⁶⁹ Volunteer for Liberty, Vol. I no.12, 30 August, 1937--"American Hospitals in Spain." pp.4-5; Johnston, Legions of Babel, pp.87-88; Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War: revised and expanded edition, New York (Harper and Row, 1977 [orig. pub. 1961]), pp.550-552. As a result of their proximity to the front lines, the forward hospitals in particular were frequently shelled or bombed by the enemy. After the war, one American nurse claimed that she was taken prisoner during the spring 1938 retreats by Nazi German troops before she escaped with the help of sympathetic Spanish villagers (Salaria Kee O'Reilly in John Gerassi, The Premature Anti-fascists, New York (Praeger Special Studies, 1986 pp.98-100); her story seems dubious, however, since in "A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain," a 1938 propaganda pamphlet published by the Negro Committee to Aid Spain, she was said to have been forced to leave Spain after being wounded by bomb shrapnel.

¹⁷⁰ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.137, 140; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp. 185-188

remained of the 360 original effectives of the British Battalion, 93 of 450 Dimitrovs, 88 of 360 Franco-Belgians, and 125 out of 400 Spaniards of the 24th Battalion.¹⁷¹ Moreover, the largely American MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion emerged from its long training program to take its place in the lines in September. After Brunete, the Americans' relative numerical strength led to an increasing American presence on Brigade staff. Merriman was promoted to major and made brigade chief of staff. Steve Nelson was promoted to Brigade Commissar, a post held by Americans for the remainder of the war.¹⁷²

Though heavy combat and the Nationalists' superior firepower were central causes of the Americans' high casualty rate, the "mixed brigade" concept under which the International Brigades operated contributed significantly to their casualties at Brunete and in subsequent battles. The Soviets had pushed the development of mixed brigades against the opinions of some Spanish strategists. As the world's most respected experts on revolutionary warfare and the Republic's main source of war material, however, the Soviets carried the day.¹⁷³ In theory, a mixed brigade was supposed to be able to operate without other divisional supporting elements. In practice, the International Brigades approximated the plan, operating as individual units relying on their own supply, transport and administrative staff. The Brigades were also forced to operate without even the meager support provided by divisional artillery at most times, as the Americans experienced at Brunete. Without additional support, the American infantry units were expected to assault fortified enemy positions that would have been formidable even with artillery preparation; the predictable result was heavy casualties.

¹⁷¹ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.142

¹⁷² Vincent Brome, The International Brigades: Spain 1936-1939, London (Heinemann, 1965) p.217; Arthur H. Landis, Death in the Olive Groves: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939, New York (Paragon House, 1989), p.66; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.143, 146

¹⁷³ The International Brigades: Foreign Assistants of the Spanish Reds, Madrid (Spanish Information Office, 1946), p.81

Throughout the war, the American volunteers were forced to make do with machine guns for fire support, with the occasional addition of mortars or light anti-tank guns. When artillery or tank support was promised by higher commands, it failed to materialize as often as not. Since the American battalions, like the other Internationals, were used as shock troops on the offensive, the absence of effective artillery support virtually ensured that they would take heavy casualties.

Socialist Hans Amlie was promoted to succeed Markovicz as commander of the Lincoln Battalion after Brunete, largely because his politics and the fact that his elder brother was Wisconsin congressman Thomas Amlie made him a shining example of the Popular Front at work. Though the Party relentlessly publicized him as evidence of the broad anti-fascist coalition at work in Spain, the non-Communist Amlie seemed to hold little real authority. Though Amlie eventually joined the Communist Party to protest the Socialist Party's failings in the anti-fascist crusade, he remained basically a figurehead. During Amlie's tenure, popular Brigade Commissar Steve Nelson often accompanied the battalion and frequently functioned as the central military decision-maker for the Lincoln Battalion.¹⁷⁴

In late summer, the Americans moved to the northern Aragon front to take part in an offensive aimed at the provincial capital of Zaragoza. Eighty thousand Republican troops supported by tanks and aircraft began the attack on 24 August with the element of surprise. The Lincolns took the town of Quinto in a lightning assault that was probably the Americans' most successful action of the war. For one of the few times in the war, the firepower advantage was on the Americans' side. Supported by nine Republican guns and six tanks, the Americans fought house to house using grenades and newly-delivered Soviet Dichterev light machine guns.¹⁷⁵ The Lincolns

¹⁷⁴ Book of the XV Brigade, p.197; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.147-149; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.202, 206, 208

¹⁷⁵ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.153-154

secured the town in three days of house to house fighting, nearly on schedule. Even more surprising, the entire XV Brigade had only about 30 men killed in the action.¹⁷⁶ Republican units crossed the Ebro river on 26 August, but dogged resistance by the Nationalist garrisons of the towns in the path of the offensive slowed the Republican advance. Meanwhile, the rebel command brought two crack divisions from the Madrid front and aircraft and artillery from the Basque front.¹⁷⁷

As the offensive slowed, the XV Brigade shifted to the southwest to take the town of Belchite. This small fortified town became the scene of some of the fiercest fighting of the war. The Americans attempted to rush the town on 1 September, only to be beaten back by heavy Nationalist fire. Many remained dug in under fire through the night and the next morning. At this point Brigade Commissar Steve Nelson, one of the Americans' better military leaders in addition to his political position, discovered that the Nationalists' had left a factory on the edge of town unoccupied. The Lincolns burst into the factory, gaining a foothold from which they clawed their way into the rest of the town. For two days they exchanged fire with the Nationalists without significant progress. Finally, with the aid of tanks and the guns of the British anti-tank battery employed at point-blank range they were able to blast their way through the town. Through the days and nights of 5 and 6 September, the guns of the tanks, the anti-tank battery, and the American footsoldiers' grenades and pickaxes combined to turn Belchite into a smoldering heap of rubble before all the Nationalists were driven out.¹⁷⁸ The usually propagandistic Book of the XV Brigade printed a veteran's account: "When darkness fell on the fourth night, Belchite presented a picture of the horrors of war which no Hollywood film could ever give...." Amid

¹⁷⁶ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.725; Eby , Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.158

¹⁷⁷ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.726; Eby , Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.158

¹⁷⁸ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.158-164; Nelson, The Volunteers, pp.182-186

burning buildings and the stench of death in the air, the observer saw, "war shorn of all its glamour, war cruel and bloody--but a war we had to win."¹⁷⁹

Though the Americans captured Belchite before the Nationalists could relieve it, they did so at a high price and for little gain. Twenty-three Lincolns had been killed and 60 wounded. Among the wounded were Commissar Nelson and Lincoln commander Amlie, both of whom were repatriated to the United States. Belchite's capture contributed next to nothing to the drive on Zaragoza, which stalled as Nationalist reinforcements threatened to roll back the limited gains that the offensive had made.¹⁸⁰

Significant leadership changes took place following Belchite. New Yorker Leonard Lamb took over the Lincoln command for about a month, until he was wounded in early October.¹⁸¹ Texan Phil Detro, an apolitical maverick, took his place. Detro was perhaps the only legitimate non-Communist to command the American units during the war. The Party's growing realization that political reliability was not proof of military skill allowed Detro, popular with the men and a National Guard veteran, to advance to command based on merit despite his lack of Party connections.¹⁸²

More important than the new military leaders was the accession of Dave Doran to the position of Brigade Commissar, however. Doran was a 27-year-old former seaman and veteran Communist functionary. Prior to enlisting in the Brigades, Doran had been a national officer of the Young Communist League. He was appointed as an assistant to Commissar Steve Nelson upon his arrival in Spain in May of 1937, but rose straight to the Brigade Commissar position after Nelson was

¹⁷⁹ Book of the XV Brigade, p.272

¹⁸⁰ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.725-728; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.164

¹⁸¹ Edwin Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in the International Brigades in Spain, New York (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939), pp.125, 136

¹⁸² Book of the XV Brigade, p.237; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.250; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.198-199

wounded at Belchite in September. His most notable action had been commandeering a truck with a loudspeaker at Belchite and using it to cajole a Nationalist garrison surrounded in the city church to surrender. Though his message was basically just detailed the annihilation awaiting the Nationalists unless they gave up, the Party seized it as an example of successful propaganda. The Party leadership thereafter believed him to be a politico-military genius, an opinion seconded by Doran himself. ¹⁸³

While the war raged on in Spain during the summer of 1937, the recruiting organization's campaign to send more Americans to Spain bogged down. The commonly-held notion that there were always more willing volunteers than money to send them to Spain was completely fallacious. Though recruiting had been relatively easy to begin with, it soon became very difficult to convince men to go to Spain. Recruiter Marvin Rosenwald later recalled that after the first few months, "it soon got to the point where every man we got [represented] a major achievement."¹⁸⁴ By July of 1937, the CPUSA had become desperate for new recruits for Spain.¹⁸⁵

Statistics compiled by the State Department on suspected volunteers' passport applications reveal the pattern of decline in the recruiting process. The Passport Office's investigations produced a list of 1,558 volunteers. Of this sample, fully one half submitted their passport applications in the first four months of 1937. Seventy-five percent had applied by July of 1937. Only 17 percent of the men applied in the rest of 1937, and less than 8 percent in all of 1938.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.175-178; Peter N. Carroll, Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Stanford, California (Stanford University Press, 1994), p.165

¹⁸⁴ Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field:" An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), p.225

¹⁸⁵ R. Dan Richardson, Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War, Lexington, Kentucky (University Press of Kentucky, 1982), pp.39-40

¹⁸⁶ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.225-226

A popular explanation for the shortage of recruits has been that there were scores of men who were eager to volunteer for Spain but did not know how to contact the recruiting organization. Veteran commissar John Gates stated after the war that, "I have met hundreds of people who have said that they had wanted to volunteer at the time but had no idea how to go about it."¹⁸⁷ Recruiters vehemently contradicted this statement, however. "Anyone who tells you that he really wanted to fight for Spain but didn't know how to go about joining the Lincoln Brigade is peddling a line of self-serving bullshit," said recruiter Joseph Wald. "If a person had any political sophistication whatsoever (and he would, if he was anti-fascist enough to really want to go to Spain), he wouldn't have had any trouble at all finding the people who could get him across."¹⁸⁸

While the recruiters' concern over the illegal nature of their work limited the number of non-Communists who were accepted as recruits, their caution did not extend to the initial stages of contact with prospective volunteers, however. Even though its recruiting function was secret, the FALB's seventeen regional chapters and the publicity it received gave it a nationwide presence. Individuals who were truly interested in fighting in Spain should have realized that a nearby FALB office would probably be a good place to get information on how to volunteer even if they were unaware of the organization's central role in the recruitment process.

There are several more plausible explanations for the recruiters' difficulties. Law enforcement authorities' interference with the CPUSA's recruiting agents was a primary cause of the decline in recruiting. Though the U.S. government did not aggressively attempt to stop recruiting, it did work to limit it. Recruiters were frequently followed by federal agents or local police, and were often questioned about

¹⁸⁷ John Gates, Story of An American Communist, New York (Nelson, 1958), p.43

¹⁸⁸ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.224

their activities. The police pressure made recruiters even more cautious than before and probably scared off some potential recruits.¹⁸⁹

Another plausible reason for the declining number of new recruits is that the CPUSA simply exhausted the supply of eager would-be martyrs. Presumably, only a finite number of American men were motivated enough and in good enough condition to volunteer for Spain. Most of these men may have enlisted in the first few months, leaving the recruiters to struggle to convince less-interested prospectives thereafter.¹⁹⁰

Growing American disenchantment with the war may also have contributed to the recruiters' difficulties. In the early days, interested men might have expected a short, triumphant war and signed up quickly so they would get a shot at the fascists. After news of the Americans' bloody but disappointing battles filtered back to the United States, many potential recruits had second thoughts, however. Reports from Spain about the political repression in the Republican zone began to color American opinion of the Republic, particularly after the internecine fighting in Barcelona in early May of 1937. Many men who might have considered volunteering probably decided not to enlist in a losing cause.¹⁹¹

Whatever the reasons for the recruiters' difficulties, the flow of recruits dried up at an inopportune time. The troubles of the recruiting campaign coincided with heavy casualties that created a need for more recruits. The rush of volunteers in the spring of 1937 had filled the ranks of the three American battalions, but all three units were heavily depleted in combat during the remainder of the year. With fewer and fewer new recruits to replace casualties, the American units were frequently understrength during the remainder of the war.

¹⁸⁹ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.226

¹⁹⁰ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, p.226

¹⁹¹ Stewart, Summoned to the Eternal Field, pp.227-228

The Republican forces made one last attempt to regain the offensive in Aragon at Fuentes de Ebro in October. The MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion had joined the XV Brigade in mid-September and saw its first action in the battle of Fuentes de Ebro. A thrust by concentrated Soviet armor with Spanish infantrymen riding the tanks was supposed to clear the way for the following International infantry. Everything went wrong from the start. The Spanish infantry were shot off the tanks or fell off as they crossed rough terrain; they were unable to play any significant role in the battle. The tanks advanced much too quickly, leaving the Americans behind. Cut off from infantry support behind the lines, 12 of the 40 tanks were destroyed and the remainder scattered. Meanwhile, the Nationalists were able to turn their attention back to the advancing volunteers. The inexperienced Mac-Paps, not recognizing the futility of their advance, continued to attack under heavy fire as units all around them fell back. In a pattern that was probably becoming very familiar to the old-timers among the Americans, they volunteers remained pinned down under enemy fire until darkness allowed them to make their way back to their trenches.¹⁹²

The Americans' efforts at Fuentes de Ebro proved futile, as they had so many times before. Mac-Pap veteran Al Amery later said that, "Perhaps right there could be seen the beginning of the end of Spain. It was either the most colossal stupidity or the most brazen sabotage. You can't run a mile through heavy machine-gun fire with no support and then tackle the enemy hand-to-hand."¹⁹³ After the failure at Fuentes de Ebro, the Republican generals permanently abandoned their attempts to break through to Zaragoza.

At Fuentes de Ebro, the Mac-Paps' intensive training had proven as useless as the Lincolns' marching drills. The Mac-Paps followed the tactics that they had

¹⁹² Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.728; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.183

¹⁹³ Al Amery, "Fuentes de Ebro" in Our Fight: Writings from Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Spain 1936-1939, ed. Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, New York (Monthly Review Press with the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1987), p.190

learned to the letter, advancing in textbook fashion into enfilading Nationalist machine gun fire. After suffering heavy casualties, the Mac-Paps followed the example of the veteran Lincolns, who had long ago abandoned the futile attack and dug in where they lay. While the Lincolns lost only 18 dead and 50 wounded, the Mac-Paps lost 60 dead and 100 wounded. The Mac Pap officers suffered particularly heavily. Battalion commander Robert Thompson apparently became very ill during the battle and had to be hospitalized afterward; his unit's poor performance probably was responsible for his return to the United States soon after. He was replaced by Canadian Edward Cecil-Smith, who remained in command into the spring retreats. Battalion commissar Joe Dallet was killed. Two of the four company commanders were killed and a third seriously wounded.¹⁹⁴ Lincoln commander Detro was one of the few American officers who came through Fuentes de Ebro unscathed.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.184

¹⁹⁵ Book of the XV Brigade, p.237; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.250; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.198-199

THE HAMMER FALLS

TERUEL AND THE RETREATS

Important organizational changes took place behind the scenes after Fuentes de Ebro. As the Americans returned to the Madrid sector to rest, the Republican government unexpectedly announced on 1 November 1938 that the International Brigades had been officially incorporated into the Spanish Republican Army. In reality, the legal fiction of the volunteers' induction into the Spanish army allowed the Albacete staff to tighten its control over the Brigades. Though the men had taken no legal oath to serve the Republic, they learned that they were expected to serve for the duration of the war or until they were wounded too badly to return to action. For those among the Americans who had been told by the recruiters that their service in the International Brigades would last only six months, this news was particularly demoralizing. Military discipline was also tightened considerably, ostensibly at the urging of the Spanish Communist Party. The spirit of proletarian unity which had been present in the International Brigades to a greater or lesser extent throughout their service in Spain was to be subordinated to the norms of bourgeois capitalist armies: saluting officers, wearing proper uniforms, and separating officers and enlisted men's mess. These strictures were intended to encourage a spirit of professionalism and dedication among the men, but in practice they merely aroused resentment.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Edwin Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in Spain in the International Brigades, New York (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939) pp.144-152; Cecil Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, New York (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp.118-119, 186, 227-228; Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War: revised and enlarged edition, New York (Harper and Row, 1977 [orig. pub. 1961]), pp.543-544; Vincent Brome, The International Brigades: Spain 1936-1939, London (Heinemann, 1965), pp.227-228

During this period, Commissar Dave Doran began to alienate his fellow volunteers. Doran's lust for discipline and political indoctrination endeared him to CPUSA officials and the Albacete staff, but not to the men in the ranks. His strict enforcement of the Republican Army's new disciplinary code earned him the enmity of many of the men. Later, after Doran sentenced a number of deserters to death, the men came to fear him as well. Doran could hardly have cared less what the men thought of him, however, as he was a singularly self-righteous individual. He sincerely believed that his ruthless discipline were essential to victory.

Through November and most of December of 1937, the American units were inactive. As the Americans rested in the Madrid sector, the Republic's Socialist Minister of Defense Indalecio Prieto prepared an offensive designed with the dual purpose of striking a blow at the Nationalists and proving the Republic's ability to fight without the Internationals' help. The government chose the provincial capital of Teruel as the objective of the offensive; no International units were to be used in the attack. On 15 December, amid a mounting snowstorm, an all-Spanish force moved in without the warning of a preparatory artillery barrage and quickly surrounded the Teruel. Within the walled city, however, the garrison continued to hold out. Though the Republican forces overwhelmed most pockets of resistance within a few days, the battle was only beginning.¹⁹⁷

The Americans rejoiced when they learned of the Teruel's investment by Republican forces on Christmas Day, but they were soon to lose their enthusiasm for the progress of the battle. Franco decided that he could not ignore the moral blow provided by the Republic's seizure of a provincial capital. Accordingly, he halted an offensive in Guadalajara and shifted the crack Navarrese Carlist divisions of the two newly organized Army Corps of Castile and of Galicia to retake Teruel. The winter

¹⁹⁷ Brome, The International Brigades, pp.236-237; Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.788-789

weather at Teruel, situated in hilly country at an elevation of 3,000 feet, was held to be the worst in Spain; the winter of 1937-1938 happened to perhaps its worst on record. Temperatures reached 18 degrees below zero and blizzards dumped four feet of snow on the combatants; vehicles were snowbound, aircraft were grounded, visibility dropped to zero, and men suffered from severe frostbite and exposure. The Nationalist counteroffensive pushed the Republican forces west of the town back, but the government lines did not break. As both sides committed more and more resources to the struggle, the battle became far more important in terms of prestige than its strategic value justified.¹⁹⁸

As the Nationalist counterattack ground forward, the American units were brought up into reserve positions north of Teruel on 31 December. Men who had been in the campaign for Zaragoza on the baking Aragon plains during the summer could not believe they were in the same region. Frostbite cases serious enough to require medical attention cropped up at the rate of 20 a week. The Mac-Paps took up positions across the hills flanking the road northwest of Teruel, directly in the path of the rebel counterattack. For the next month, they endured the hellish weather and faced the Nationalist onslaught. The Nationalist troops outnumbered the Republican forces by perhaps two to one, and they enjoyed massive fire support from massed batteries of German artillery as well as air support from the Condor Legion when weather allowed. Though the Mac-Paps took a fearful toll of enemy infantry, they suffered 250 casualties and by 22 January had to give ground before fresh Nationalist forces attacking from upslope. The Lincolns, meanwhile, had been holding positions along the railroad just outside of Teruel, undergoing heavy Nationalist bombardment. The Lincoln Battalion suffered 80 casualties during the last two weeks of January, but most of these had been in sections sent to support the Mac-Paps in the hills.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp.791-792

Unfortunately, Lincoln commander Detro was mortally wounded crossing a street under sniper fire. Leonard Lamb once again took temporary command of the Lincolns.¹⁹⁹

Despite the efforts of the International Brigades, the Nationalists' weight of men and material was too much for the Republican defense. Frostbite and disease had taken their toll of men untouched by Nationalist steel, leaving the Americans more than ready when they were relieved by Spanish troops on 3 February. The Lincolns traveled by train to Valencia. The Mac-Paps were to follow, but were ordered back to the battle when the Nationalists broke through. The frustrated Lincolns rejoined them and the reassembled XV Brigade participated in a diversionary attack near Segura los Baños. The Brigade successfully rooted out Nationalist forces entrenched in the rocky hills of Segura and then held the hills around Segura against a Nationalist counterattack, but their efforts were useless.²⁰⁰

The Republic ultimately had to evacuate Teruel on 22 February. In the aftermath of its abandonment, the XV Brigade Commissariat attempted to justify the sacrifices made in its brief defense. The Volunteer for Liberty had to quickly change its tune from claiming that the Republican forces' morale made them invincible to explaining how the Republic had come to vacate once-critical Teruel. The Republican forces allegedly chose to abandon Teruel "following a heroic resistance," during which they had achieved their goals by seizing the initiative from the Nationalists and preventing an enemy offensive elsewhere. The Brigade leaders' shallow efforts to produce victory from the dregs of defeat failed to convince the

¹⁹⁹ Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1969], pp.246-251

²⁰⁰ Rosenstone Crusade of the Left, pp.250, 253-254

men, however. The Republic's new slogan, "To Resist is to Win," boded ill for its subsequent military fortunes.²⁰¹

The level of military expertise in the American battalions throughout the war essentially conformed to a bell curve that peaked at the battle for Teruel. The Lincolns were totally unfamiliar with the ways of warfare when they went into combat at Jarama, but those who survived the catastrophe learned lessons that would stand them in good stead in the battles ahead. Likewise, though the Washingtons and Mac-Paps were mowed down in scores in their early engagements, the survivors learned from their mistakes. By Teruel, the two remaining American battalions had both seen action and were fairly dependable in combat.

The total level of experience in the American units had already reached its peak and was declining, however. The massive casualties suffered by the International Brigades left many Americans buried or in the hospital rather than living and learning. The dwindling flow of volunteers during the summer of 1937 and the heavy losses suffered during the campaigns for Brunete and Zaragoza combined to force the American battalions to begin incorporating increasing numbers of Spanish conscripts as replacements. After the battle for Teruel, the Volunteer for Liberty began to run its articles in both Spanish and English in order to accommodate the increasing Spanish presence.²⁰² The volunteers attempted to teach the Spaniards the secrets of survival on the battlefield, but the conscripts' low morale, the language barrier and incidents of cultural conflict made this an uphill struggle. Veteran Ben Iceland wrote that, "we all felt a little contemptuous, and yet sorry for them [the Spaniards]." Despite these problems, sheer weight of Spanish numbers ensured that

²⁰¹ Volunteer for Liberty, Vol. II, no.3, 29 January 1938 "MORALE: The Dominating Weapon at Teruel;" Vol. II, no.6, 23 February 1938 "The Military Situation Today"

²⁰² Volunteer for Liberty, Vol. II, no.4

integration of one sort or another would be necessary. There were no longer enough volunteers coming to Spain to fill the American units²⁰³

After being pulled out of the line at Teruel, the XV Brigade was sent north to the town of Azaila to rest. The men were tired and disappointed with the outcome of the battle for Teruel, but nonetheless satisfied with their performance. They were on familiar ground, near the positions from which they had launched their successful assault on Quinto a few months before. Several hundred North American replacements joined the Brigade from Tarazona, one of the last sizable non-Spanish contingents to do so.²⁰⁴

Many of the brigade officers left their units during this period of apparent calm. Brigade commander Copic left for Barcelona. Dave Doran left to have a sinus operation. Acting Lincoln commander Leonard Lamb went on hospital leave. Major Merriman took unofficial command of the brigade. Mac-Pap commander Edward Cecil-Smith remained with his unit. The absence of more seasoned officers left Lieutenant David Reiss and newly-arrived Commissar DeWitt Parker in command of the Lincoln Battalion. This little-known pair had the misfortune to take charge at perhaps the worst possible moment.²⁰⁵

On 6 March, the Lincolns marched twelve miles west to camp in the olive groves north of the ruins of Belchite. The other three battalions took positions in the hills near Lecera and Letux, about six miles to the south and southwest. The front lay twelve miles west of the closest XV Brigade positions, and Major Merriman was told that his unit was in a reserve position. The divisional command told him to prepare to

²⁰³ Sandor Voros, American Commissar, New York (Chilton Company, 1961), p.453; Ben Iceland in Our Fight: Writings From the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Spain, 1936-1939, Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, eds., New York (Monthly Review Press with the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1987), p.229; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.185, p.187

²⁰⁴ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.205-206

²⁰⁵ Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion, pp.181-182; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.206, p.210

move since a major Nationalist offensive was expected in the Teruel region, about seventy miles south.²⁰⁶

Instead of attacking at Teruel, however, the Nationalists launched their attack directly at the Belchite sector. On 9 March, three Nationalist armies supported by 47 artillery batteries and 800 aircraft swept down on the Republican front. The Nationalists broke through within three hours, sending streams of Republican troops fleeing to the east. The XV Brigade, which had heard the rumble of artillery west of their positions, started to sense the trouble brewing as dazed artillerymen carrying the breech-blocks of abandoned guns passed through their lines. Major Merriman ordered the battalions into new positions on the evening of 9 March, but still believed that the brigade remained in reserve. At first light on 10 March, however, the Americans discovered that the valley before them and the higher ridges beyond swarmed with enemy troops.²⁰⁷

"All hell broke loose," recalled Lincoln veteran Mike Goodwin. German aircraft strafed and bombed at will, while Nationalist tanks rolled through the American positions. The Lincoln Battalion command post took a direct hit that killed Lieutenant Reiss, Commissar Parker, and most of the staff, leaving the unit temporarily leaderless. Enemy units had already outflanked the Lincolns during the night, so they had to pull back at noon. The Mac-Pap positions several miles to the south held through the daylight of 10 March, but by evening they too retreated.²⁰⁸

While the International units generally held together, the Spanish units on their flanks panicked and forced the foreigners to withdraw as well. Watching streams of young Spaniards running past, one unnamed American remarked, "After

²⁰⁶ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.207

²⁰⁷ Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion, pp.184-186; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.279

²⁰⁸ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.279-280

all, they're only kids. They don't know what it's all about. We would like to get out of this place too."²⁰⁹

The Nationalists swept through the Republican lines to depths ranging from 30 to 60 miles across the front. The Americans lost all contact with brigade and division headquarters as they retreated. Each time the Internationals tried to establish a defensive line, they would soon be outflanked once again. The units to either side could not be counted on to hold their ground, and the motorized Nationalist infantry could move far more quickly than the XV Brigade footsoldiers.²¹⁰

The XV International Brigade's retreat finally halted at the town of Caspe, where commissar Dave Doran essentially dared the few hundred men constituting the organized remnants of the Lincolns, Mac Paps, and the British battalion to make a stand. For many of the men, Caspe became a battle of wills with the unpopular Doran. One volunteer muttered, "If that little bastard can take it, so can I. But if he runs out on me, I'll follow him wherever he goes and kill him with my bare hands."²¹¹ Fewer than 500 men remained of the XV Brigade, barely the size of a battalion. Spurred on by Doran's relentless harangues, however, they fought so tenaciously that the two Nationalist divisions opposing them believed that all five International Brigades defended the town. Against ludicrous odds, the Internationals actually launched a counterattack, recapturing a hill outside the town for an hour. Only 250 men remained, however. Although the sheer weight of Nationalist numbers forced further retreat within two days, the XV Brigade's heroism at Caspe may have for once been matched by the action's military importance. The two days that the brigade delayed the Nationalist advance allowed the Republican forces to throw together a

²⁰⁹ quoted by Ben Iceland in Our Fight, ed. Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago p.229

²¹⁰ Antony Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, New York (Peter Bedrick Books, 1982), pp.222-223; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.208-210; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.281-282

²¹¹ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.219

semblance of a front behind it, preventing the potential collapse of the entire Republican army in Catalonia.²¹²

The remnants of the XV Brigade finally found respite at the town of Batea, 25 miles southeast of Caspe. The Nationalist advance had been so rapid that their supply lines were overextended, forcing them to halt and regroup. The Lincolns and Mac Paps recovered some degree of organization during a two week rest. A final complement of between 100 and 150 American recruits arrived from Tarazona. The fresh-faced newcomers were met by sullen stares and jeers from the demoralized veterans.²¹³

Large numbers of Spanish replacements also joined the Brigade at Batea. Sandor Voros, then serving with the Brigade Commissariat, observed that Spaniards made up the majority of the supposed XV International Brigade thereafter. "Of the four battalions in our Brigade one is pure Spanish. In the other three, one company of the four is Spanish; in the companies, one section out of four is Spanish; in the sections, one squad out of four is Spanish. The Brigade has been so diluted with Spanish soldiers that the Internationals are acting mostly as noncoms which the Spanish lack."²¹⁴

Most of the XV Brigade officers had been killed, wounded, or captured by the time the remaining Americans drifted into Batea. A low-ranking machine-gunner named Al Kaufman found himself in command for a few days of the 100 men who

²¹² Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.218, 220-221; Arthur Landis, Death in the Olive Groves: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939, New York (Paragon House, 1989), pp.134-135; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.286-287. Landis stated that there were 150 Lincolns, 150 British, 200 Mac Paps and about 150 Spaniards of the 59th Battalion (the renumbered 24th Battalion). Eby argued that even with the presence of 2 battalions of the XIII Brigade and the remnants of the XI Brigade, fewer than 500 men defended Caspe, of whom only 300 were from XV Brigade; Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp.800, 802 Thomas wrote that at Caspe, "the 15th, rallying, performed prodigies of valour." (p.800)

²¹³ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.287; Alvah Bessie, Men in Battle: A Story of Americans in Spain, New York (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939), pp.82-85

²¹⁴ Voros, American Commissar, p.410

constituted the Lincoln Battalion at the time. Mac-Pap commander Major Edward Cecil-Smith shot himself in the foot while cleaning his pistol during the respite at Batea. As the "American" battalions were now filled largely by Spanish replacements, Spaniard Hector Garcia took over.²¹⁵ Milton Wolff, only 23 years old but a veteran of every battle since Brunete, took over the Lincoln command during the brief respite at Corbera. Though Wolff denied being a member of either the CPUSA or the Young Communist League, his politics after the war were resolutely Stalinist. His record in Spain was fairly impressive considering the state of the Republican cause by that point, and he was popular with the men.²¹⁶

In order to bolster the flagging spirits of the troops, the Volunteer for Liberty staff suspended normal publication during the retreat and rushed out a series of two-page broadsides festooned with slogans and encouraging headlines. Between 17 March and 28 March, four special issues bearing messages such as "NO PASARAN," "DO NOT YIELD AN INCH OF GROUND TO THE ENEMY," "TO RESIST IS TO WIN," AND "TO FORTIFY IS TO CONQUER!" bombarded the XV Brigade. While headlines such as "Don't Yield an Inch of Ground to the Enemy!" seemed ridiculous to the weary volunteers, the paper's unintentional comedy boosted morale somewhat.²¹⁷

Casting a shadow over the rest period was Commissar Doran's effort to punish men whose discipline broke during the retreat. A number of men were condemned to death for cowardice, desertion, or abandoning their posts. "Doran is prosecutor

²¹⁵ Voros, American Commissar, p.395, Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.216, 225, 228 At one point during the retreat, the Mac Paps had been cut off after Brigade staff failed to keep Major Cecil-Smith apprised of enemy movements. Smith apparently ordered the battalion to disperse and run for the nearby town of Alcaniz, where the unit was largely reconstituted. Voros alleged that this incident brought the ire of the I.B. political hierarchy on Cecil-Smith, and that he shot himself in the foot on purpose in order to avoid disciplinary measures or a possible bullet in the back at the front.

²¹⁶ Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion, p.301; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.276

²¹⁷ Volunteer for Liberty, Vol. II special issues: 17 March, 21 March, 25 March, 28 March 1938; Voros pp.409-410

and judge at the same time," noted Voros. "...he rolls the sentence 'You're condemned to die before a firing squad' with great relish, lingering on the word 'die.'" Brigade command decided that executions might alarm the foreign reporters who frequently visited the Brigade, however, so the men were spared.²¹⁸

Within two weeks of its arrival at Batea, the tattered XV Brigade was on the move again. The brigade was apparently back up to nearly its full numerical strength, but the majority of the men were raw recruits, particularly among the Spaniards. As the brigade moved to positions in the hills along the roads into Batea on 30 March, the Nationalists resumed the offensive in full force. More than 200,000 Nationalist troops swept aside the 80,000 Republicans opposing them, but poor communications failed to apprise the XV brigade command that the Nationalists had broken through. The Lincolns engaged in small arms fire with enemy troops throughout the day on 31 March, but developments around them on the front proved more important.²¹⁹

Major Merriman overruled Commissar Doran's order to die in position, ordering a retreat instead to avoid being surrounded by the onrushing Nationalists. The Nationalists had already broken through on both sides of the brigade's positions, cutting the roads to the south and east. The Mac-Paps and the British Battalion were overrun en route to new positions, but they were able to extricate themselves and regroup. The Lincolns were surrounded and crushed, however. The Lincoln Battalion essentially ceased to exist as a military unit. Major Merriman and Commissar Doran disappeared. Both were probably captured and executed. Many other men were captured as they tried to sneak through the Nationalist lines by night in small groups. The battalion dissolved into isolated bands of men desperately trying to pick their way through the Nationalist lines to the comparative safety of the opposite bank of the Ebro River. On the road to the river, a group of Mac-Paps came

²¹⁸ Voros, American Commissar pp.411-412

²¹⁹ Voros, American Commissar, p.412; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.290-291

upon a handful of North-American stragglers and asked, "where's the Lincoln?" only to receive the dry reply, "We're the Lincoln."²²⁰

²²⁰ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.291-292; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.237, 244-246; Landis, Death in the Olive Groves, pp.144-150; quote from Bessie, Men in Battle, p.123

THE LAST HURRAH

THE EBRO OFFENSIVE AND WITHDRAWAL

In April of 1938, the American units recuperated on the east bank of the Ebro River. The Lincoln Battalion was re-formed, with 500 Spanish youths joining the few American survivors of the Aragon disaster. Captain Wolff, who had disappeared for days during the rout, reappeared to take command of the Lincoln Battalion once more. Wholesale changes occurred in the Brigade staff. The XV Brigade's commander, Croatian Colonel Vladimir Copic, was relieved of command and replaced by a veteran Spanish officer, Major José Antonio Valledor. With Doran gone, former Lincoln commissar John Gates took his place as Brigade Commissar. Once in authority, Gates started to show signs of Doran's obsessive discipline. After friends pointed out that he was abusing his power, however, Gates relented.²²¹

By this point in the war, the remaining volunteers' morale was at its lowest point. The long train of defeats and disillusionment had led the few seasoned veterans remaining to lose faith. The men were disgusted with the constantly changing and inept officers and "comic-stars," blaming them for the constant heavy casualties. The vision of proletarian solidarity had vanished long ago, to be replaced by Marty's heavy-handed vision of brute military discipline.²²² The veterans had heard too many ideological harangues from the leadership, and seen too many men killed, to retain any faith in their cause. Their inadequate weapons and organization were responsible for their defeats, not insufficient motivation. One Lincoln

²²¹ Cecil Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, New York (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p.283; John Gates, Story of an American Communist, New York (Nelson, 1958), p.62

²²² Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.284; Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War: revised and enlarged edition, New York (Harper and Row, 1977 [orig. pub. 1961]), p.780

commented, "Like most Americans, I could not stomach the know-it-all, party-line dogmatism of the Polit-Commissar system, which had originally developed in armies of illiterate peasants."²²³ After the Aragon retreat, some of the more sarcastic Lincolns jokingly formed an organization called FONICS--Friends of the Non-Intervention Committee. They advocated the removal of all foreigners from Spain, particularly themselves. The Americans' favorite marching song in the summer of 1938 was short and to the point:

March-ing, march-ing, march-ing,
Always f...ing well march-ing.
God send the day--
When we'll--
F..ing well march no more!²²⁴

With low morale and little hope of victory, many Americans decided not to wait for the Non-Intervention Committee during the spring of 1938. Desertion became a problem during the retreats and thereafter. Few of the volunteers deserted, but their actions contributed to the poor morale of the American units following the disastrous spring. Throughout the war, a small minority of Americans deserted. The Lincolns mutinied *en masse* at Jarama, though the vast majority returned to the ranks. Prior to the spring of 1938, thirteen men had made their way to American consuls vainly seeking assistance from the U.S. government. While the International Brigade Police and the Spanish SIM military secret police were active in apprehending deserters, the small number of men who contacted U.S. diplomats suggests that few volunteers deserted overall. After the retreats, however, a small wave of desertion took place. About twenty American deserters received international media publicity after escaping Spain during the spring and summer of 1938. Two, Abraham Sobel

²²³ Eby Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.186

²²⁴ Eby Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.284

and Alvin Halpern, testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee shortly after their return. The unfavorable publicity generated by the deserters' exaggerated accounts of the hardships experienced by the Americans in Spain greatly tarnished the American volunteers' reputation in the United States. Of the handful of Americans executed during the war, most came during the spring of 1938. Proof that these executions were for military offenses (primarily desertion) lies in the fact that Paul White, a veteran New York Communist who was popular among the men, was among those executed. White had deserted, then returned to the Lincoln Battalion weeks later to assuage his conscience. Commissar Gates had been ordered by his superiors to make an example of deserters, so he had White shot only to have the order countermanded later on the day of the execution.²²⁵

The leadership attempted to restore morale, but their efforts were ineffective. Lincoln commissar George Watt formed an "Activist" society designed to organize motivated volunteers to motivate others. Activists took a Boy Scout-like pledge to redouble their efforts to learn tactics, increase their own and others political awareness, and "to struggle against the pessimists and provocateurs" who were allegedly responsible for the Brigade's poor morale.²²⁶

The International Brigades general staff made its own attempt to bolster the fighting spirit of the men. International Brigade Inspector General Luigi Gallo's treatise on the importance of maintaining discipline when outflanked proved more comical than educational, however. "If it is true that the enemy is behind us, it is also true in such a case that we are behind them," Gallo argued. After being overrun by the Nationalist juggernaut in Aragon during March of 1938, it is doubtful that Gallo's inescapable logic was much comfort to any of the surviving volunteers. That the

²²⁵ Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Press of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1969]), p.401

²²⁶ Volunteer for Liberty--Volume II no.25, 19 July 1938 pp.2-3

commissariat felt the need to print an article addressing the problem of "Fools and Firearms" and another reminding the men that "Orders are Orders" provides a sense of the disorganization and indiscipline that the Americans experienced. It seems safe to say that words on newsprint were ineffective weapons against such significant and pervasive problems.²²⁷

After the Aragon rout, the American volunteers' time in Spain was nearly done. After the collapse of the Aragon front, the limited number of Internationals still available was hardly enough to be militarily significant. The International Brigades had played their part; but with the large armies built up by both sides and their own declining numbers, they had lost their significance. The Republican Popular Army had built some degree of discipline and organization, so the Loyalists had little further need of the few remaining volunteers. The Republican government hoped that its unilateral withdrawal of the insignificant volunteers would generate diplomatic pressure on the Germans and Italians to remove their much more important forces from the Nationalists, however.²²⁸

Though plans to repatriate the volunteers were already in the works during the spring of 1938, the Lincolns' war was not yet over. In early July, as rumors circled about their impending departure, the Lincolns began training for a river crossing. Everyone knew that the Ebro River had to be their intended objective, but hope persisted that they would be withdrawn from Spain before the offensive. The offensive won out, however, and the XV Brigade went into action on 25 July. The Lincolns and Mac Paps were among the first assault wave. They crossed the Ebro in inflatable boats and created a bridgehead for the larger forces that would follow them over pontoon bridges. As they fanned out on the opposite bank, the Americans routed

²²⁷ Volunteer for Liberty, Vol. II, no.22, 30 June 1938--"Some of Our Weaknesses and How to Overcome Them." pp.2-3; Volunteer for Liberty, Vol.II, no.21, 15 June 1938--"Fools and Firearms" and "Orders are Orders," p.15

²²⁸ Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p.851; Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.326-327

small groups of surprised Nationalists and captured an enemy supply depot. On the offensive once again, the men's morale recovered remarkably.²²⁹

The spectacle of 80,000 Republican troops crossing the Ebro shocked the Nationalists initially, but in the usual pattern, the offensive began to stall three days later as the rebels established a front and brought their massive firepower to bear. Nationalist air superiority interdicted the tenuous Republican supply lines across the river, slowing the offensive. By 2 August, the offensive was over, and the Nationalists began a counterattack. The Lincoln Battalion suffered 400 casualties out of the 700 men who had begun the attack. Among the Americans in the unit, casualties were even higher: only 13 of the 40 Americans in one company escaped injury or death. The Mac-Paps had sustained heavy losses as well.²³⁰

The American units were relieved on 6 August, only to be sent back into action on 15 August. The Lincoln Battalion was sent to defend the Sierra Pandols, barren granite mountains south of the town of Gandesa. The hills' sparse vegetation had been burned off previously by Nationalist incendiary bombs, and their granite faces made constructing proper fortifications impossible. The Americans squeezed into crevices in the rocks and waited without food or water during daylight while Nationalist artillery, mortars and aircraft showered them with one of the heaviest barrages of the war. The Americans suffered heavily during the 12 days they held the hills. Many men never fully regained their hearing after the bombardment. Only about 380 of the 768 men in the Lincoln Battalion when it crossed the Ebro remained in the ranks when they were withdrawn on 27 August.²³¹

²²⁹ Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left*, p.325; Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, pp.284-285

²³⁰ Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp.835, 838-841; Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, p.292; Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left*, p.321

²³¹ Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left*, pp.330-331; Alvah Bessie, *Men in Battle: A Story of Americans in Spain*, New York (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1954 [orig. pub. 1939]), p.297

As September began, the Americans rushed from one breach in the Republican line to another near the crossroads at Venta de Camposines, desperately trying to prevent a Nationalist breakthrough to Corbera while the Spanish units around them fled. On 21 September, however, Republican Prime Minister Juan Negrin announced at the League of Nations headquarters in Geneva that the International Brigades were to be withdrawn immediately and sent home. Though the news reached XV Brigade headquarters on the morning of the next day, the staff decided not to tell the Lincolns of their imminent withdrawal since the battalion was already in combat. When, at nightfall, the officers finally informed the troops that they had to hold out just one more day, discipline broke down.²³² One volunteer recalled that, "The last day was psychologically very bad. Everyone wanted to live."²³³ Predictably, the 80 Americans of the 280-man Lincoln Battalion had lost interest in dying where they stood when the Nationalists attacked on 23 September. As usual, the Spanish conscripts who made up the rest of the under-strength unit broke and ran; this time, however, many of the Americans followed them. The XV Brigade's ignominious battle of 23 September was the last engagement fought by any of the Internationals.²³⁴ Only about 60 Americans remained in the ranks when the Lincoln Battalion mustered-out at the town of Marsa.²³⁵

Following the withdrawal order, the Internationals withdrew to camps near the French border while a special commission of the League of Nations counted them. On the afternoon of 29 October, 1938, the International Brigades marched in a

²³² Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp.331-333

²³³ Arthur Landis, Death in the Olive Groves: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939, New York, (Paragon House, 1989), p.210

²³⁴ Antony Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, New York (Peter Bedrick Books, 1982), pp.242-243; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.301

²³⁵ Edwin Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in Spain in the International Brigades, New York (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939), p.296; Eby claimed that two of the men in the photograph were Spaniards, leaving only 59 Americans (Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.302).

farewell parade through the streets of Barcelona past cheering crowds of hundreds of thousands.²³⁶ About 2,000 volunteers participated, among them 200 to 300 Americans, who marched in their distinctively disorganized style. Dave Doran's was the only American name that appeared on the billboards listing the heroes of the Brigades that dotted the route.²³⁷ Dolores Ibarruri, the great Spanish Communist orator, gave an emotional final address, momentarily recapturing the idealism that had brought the Internationals to Spain:

Comrades of the International Brigades! Political reasons, reasons of State, the welfare of that same cause for which you offered your blood with boundless generosity, are sending you back, some of you to your own countries and others to forced exile. You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend. You are the heroic example of democracy's solidarity and universality. We shall not forget you, and when the olive tree of peace puts forth its leaves again, mingled with the laurels of the Spanish Republic's victory--come back!²³⁸

The League Commission eventually established that 12, 673 Internationals remained in Spain, among them several hundred Americans. Repatriation began in November, but did not function smoothly. The U.S. Department of State and the American Party officials became embroiled in a controversy. The U.S. government feared that in the hectic repatriation process, the Internationals would attempt to smuggle non-American citizens into the United States. They apparently tried to do just that, since more than 200 Americans who claimed to have lost their passports abruptly found them when the thoroughness of the government's efforts to verify their identities became clear.²³⁹ As a consequence of this complication, the volunteers' departure was delayed nearly a month while information on each volunteer was obtained, recorded, and cabled back to Washington for verification.

²³⁶ Landis, Death in the Olive Groves, pp.217-218

²³⁷ Landis, Death in the Olive Groves, p.218; Eby p.315

²³⁸ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, p.303

²³⁹ Eby , Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.304-305

Passage back had to be paid for each American, which resulted in further delays as the FALB and the Department of State argued over who should pay. The FALB maintained that it did not have enough money to pay for the volunteers' return. Eventually, private donations and aid from the Spanish Republic produced the necessary funds.²⁴⁰

Retrieving the Americans who had been taken prisoner created additional problems. The State Department was embarrassed by the diplomatically sensitive issue of citizens of the officially neutral United States held as prisoners. The United States government was very tentative in addressing the repatriation of prisoners, preferring to avoid it at times rather than devoting all its energies to the problem. As a result, the last American prisoners of war did not leave Spain until after Franco's victory.²⁴¹

On 2 December, the first group of Americans finally left the frontier town of Ripoll by train, followed within a week by a second and final large group. All told, about 1,000 Americans traveled to the French port of Le Havre after the repatriation order. There, they were again delayed by a seamen's strike that had paralyzed the port. The politically conscious volunteers were unwilling to travel on a ship crewed by strikebreakers, so they stayed in a filthy compound outside Le Havre. The French authorities were concerned that the Internationals might serve as a catalyst for radical elements in the strike-torn city, so they were kept in the camp, isolated from the rest of the city by an eight-foot barbed wire-topped fence and police patrols. The first group of Americans finally left France aboard the *Paris* on 6 December after a compromise had been reached with the seamen's union.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Richard P. Traina, American Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War, Westport, Connecticut (Greenwood Press, 1968). pp.174-175

²⁴¹ Traina, American Diplomacy, pp.175-176

²⁴² Landis, Death in the Olive Groves, p.219; Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field:" An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), p.271--as noted

The first group of returning volunteers arrived in New York on 15 December 1938 to a bittersweet homecoming. The FALB had arranged a parade, but many of the men dropped out along the route, preferring that their activities in Spain be forgotten. At the end of the parade, the veterans nearly engaged in one last battle with the New York police, but cooler heads prevailed and the volunteers drifted away as someone played "Taps."²⁴³

Meanwhile, in Spain, the Nationalists had begun the decisive offensive that would wrest Catalonia from the Republic. By the end of March, Franco's victory was complete and the Spanish Republic was consigned to history. Though the end of their brief service in Spain was only the beginning of years of struggle for the veterans, the war that had brought them together and that served as the starting point for all subsequent debate was over.

earlier, John Gates told Stewart that 129 of the 1,103 supposedly American volunteers left in France after the war were aliens recruited in the U.S.; Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.306-308

²⁴³ Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp.308-309

CONCLUSIONS

The experiences of the Americans who fought in the Spanish Civil War were defined by a unique combination of interrelated military and political circumstances. Though the ultimate impact of the 3,000 or so Americans who joined the International Brigades remains a subject of intense controversy, the dispute centers more on normative judgments of volunteers' motivations than on their significance. Their military actions, though ultimately futile, substantially affected the course of the war in Spain. The impact of the political circumstances surrounding the formation of the Brigades on their military performance in Spain is easily discerned as well. While their political impact is more difficult to judge, it is safe to say that the American volunteers created an enduring locus of debate.

In assessing the record of the Americans who fought for the Spanish Republic, it is impossible to ignore the fundamental role that politics played in their motivations and performance. The civil war in Spain drew the world's attention because it offered a stage upon which the conflict between fascist and liberal or progressive visions of the global future could be played out. For the Americans who joined the International Brigades, the war in Spain was an extension of the social and political struggles that they fought at home. Both their attitudes and actions were consistently defined by their politics which, though more radical than those of mainstream America, resonated with American political traditions.

Ideology defined the entire purpose of the International Brigades. Though the International Brigades critically altered the military balance at times during the war, particularly at Madrid in November 1936, the Communist International's basic political purpose in organizing the brigades was symbolic. By recruiting men from all over the world for the war in Spain, the Comintern sought to bring home the

urgency of its "Popular Front" anti-fascist policy goals to the volunteer's native countries.

The Comintern's appeal for a common front against fascism led the Communist Party of the United States to drastically change its tactics. The hardline revolutionary rhetoric that had formed the core of the Party program through the early Thirties disappeared after the Comintern changed its line at its Seventh World Congress in the late summer of 1935. Rather than calling for violent revolution, the American party began to attempt to play up alleged populist and socialist elements in American history. The Party's objective was to give itself a greater grounding in mainstream American political life in order to advance the Comintern's Popular Front policy.

When the Spanish Civil War erupted, the CPUSA was quick to join the Comintern in condemning the rising tide of fascism. When, with the agreement of the Soviet Union, the Comintern began to organize the International Brigades in the fall of 1936, the CPUSA was eager to play its part. American Communists had long been dismissed by their battle-scarred European counterparts as political dilettantes who lacked the discipline and fervor of real revolutionaries. To prove its mettle, the CPUSA began energetically recruiting men for the American contribution to the International Brigades.

That the American Communist Party was able to generate enough interest in the Spanish Republican cause to entice several thousand Americans to cross the Atlantic to fight, and to encourage many thousands more to contribute money to the cause has more to do with the Party's endorsement of mainstream politics than the appeal of revolutionary Leninism. Throughout the Spanish Civil War, the CPUSA played the politics of the Popular Front to the hilt. Only in mid-1937 did the Party finally admit that it was active in recruiting for Spain, and even then it denied being behind the organization of the American units. Several hundred non-Communists

fought in Spain, but the Party's appeal to pro-Republican sentiments in middle America went far beyond those who volunteered. The American military units, hospitals and other elements of American aid to Republican Spain were all financed by public donations to front organizations secretly controlled by the Party. Even when the Party showed its hand, the emphasis was on liberalism rather than Leninism. Following Earl Browder's slogan, "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism," the Party organized its propaganda campaign to equate the Spanish struggle with American history. The war in Spain was held to be analogous to the American Revolution; Spain struggled for liberty and democracy rather than social revolution. Likewise, the names of the Lincoln and Washington Battalions were deliberately chosen for their symbolic effect.

Certainly the Communist Party was successful in bringing an American presence to Spain--more Americans crossed the Atlantic to volunteer than Britons crossed the English Channel--but the breakdown of the Americans who went to Spain reflects the turbulent politics of the New Deal more than the October Revolution. The men who joined the Lincoln, Washington, and MacKenzie Papineau Battalions exhibited a wide range of geographical, social and occupational origins. They were neither the cross-section of American society in the Thirties claimed by their supporters, nor the hardline Communist shock troops their detractors made them out to be.

While the ranks of the American units were filled predominantly by Communists, the volunteers reflected the changed face of the Party during the late Thirties. Few of them were longtime party stalwarts. Though recruiter Aaron Schneidermann noted that some new Party members "could out-Stalin Stalin," Sandor Voros' expressed the sentiments of most hard-core Party veterans that most of the

newcomers were "not really Communists."²⁴⁴ Amid the domestic and international chaos of the Thirties, the Communist Party had muted its calls for revolution and emerged as a leading element in progressive politics. The Party's endorsement of the New Deal and its anti-fascism had gained it thousands of new adherents during the 1930s. People whose politics were more progressive than radical joined the Communist Party because the Communists acted while other parties debated.²⁴⁵

While cases of men who joined the Party and shipped out for Spain a week later have been over-publicized, they are part of a pattern of Communist Party membership during the 1930s that has frequently been ignored by detractors of the volunteers. By the end of 1939, the Party-supported Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade organization admitted that "We have maintained the interest of only about one-third of our membership," which ostensibly included all veterans.²⁴⁶ Most veterans were staggered by the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact, though they generally remained in the Party. The disillusioned majority drifted out of the Party in the ensuing years, however. Some left out of frustration with the leadership, others because of personal problems. Some expressed boredom with the Party's constant meetings and attention to organizational details. One veteran quit after the Party censured him for meeting his fundraising goals by running a gambling operation. While many men remained politically active, their activism continued to be more personal than Party-oriented.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ quoted in Cameron Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field: An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971), p.294

²⁴⁵ John Gates, Story of an American Communist, New York (Nelson, 1958), pp. 18-21; Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Lanham, Maryland (University Publications of America, 1980 [orig. pub. 1969]), pp.53-55, 96

²⁴⁶ Carroll p.216

²⁴⁷ Peter N. Carroll, Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Stanford, California (Stanford University Press, 1994) pp.224-234; John Gerrassi, The Premature Antifascists, New York (Praeger Publishers, 1986) account of Alex Forbes, p. 178; account of Oscar Hunter, p.206--for supporting accounts, see Gerrassi pp.161, 165, 171, 174, 176, 178,181, 185, 195

Criticizing the volunteers as Communist dupes or stooges of the Soviet Union is unjustified. Following the 1935 adoption of the Popular Front strategy at the Seventh Comintern Congress, the American Communist Party gained new legitimacy. The volunteers' based their admiration for the Soviet Union and membership in the Party on their perceptions of the world Communist movement's rhetoric and concrete action in support of anti-fascism and social justice. While there were a few hard-core revolutionaries among them, most men went to Spain to fight for the causes they believed in rather than for the Party which happened to represent their causes.

Though politics was critical in the creation and operation of the International Brigades, their impressive military performance was responsible for the widespread and enduring attention they have received. Even the most savage critics of the International Brigades acknowledge their military significance. The Spanish Nationalists derided the Internationals, claiming they "came from the dirtiest of Paris suburbs and the slums of Central Europe. Many of them had been out of their country for a long time, and a disordered life in exile had debased and degraded them." Though they admitted that, "There were also idealists and fanatics among them," the Nationalist historians concluded that, "the great majority were disreputable people...." Nonetheless, the Nationalists agreed that the appearance of 3,500 of these dirty characters turned the tide in the November 1936 battle for Madrid because the Loyalist militiamen mistook the Internationals for the advance guard of the Red Army. The Internationals boosted the flagging spirits of the militiamen and gave them the spirit to halt the Nationalists' advance. Though the Nationalists maintained that the Internationals' occasional successes during the remainder of the war came only when outnumbered Nationalist martyrs were overwhelmed by the foreign rabble,

they agreed that the Internationals' presence at Madrid had thwarted the rebels' opportunity to end the war quickly..²⁴⁸

Writing from a distinctly different point of view, historian Verle S. Johnston reached somewhat related conclusions. "The Volunteers of the International Brigades helped prolong a bloody and futile struggle, but paradoxically those who fell did not necessarily die in vain." Johnston claimed that, "By preventing an early Nationalist victory, they may have contributed significantly to Hitler's defeat eight years later." Johnston suggested that the destruction wrought in Spain by the long war influenced Franco's decision to remain neutral in the Second World War. Franco's neutrality hindered Germany plans to attack Gibraltar in the summer or autumn of 1940, which if captured would have denied the Western Mediterranean to the Allies, preventing the invasions of North Africa and Sicily.²⁴⁹

While Johnston's conclusion is merely conjecture, he presents a plausible argument. Moreover, his suggestion that the Internationals prolonged the war is easily defended. Historian R. Dan Richardson concurred with Johnston. "It seems safe to say," Richardson wrote, "that while the Internationals did not, and probably could not have, defended Madrid alone, Madrid would not have been successfully defended without them. Thus, while giving due weight to the essential Spanish contribution, the role of the Internationals was probably decisive."²⁵⁰ Since even the Nationalists credited the foreigners with prolonging the war, the Internationals' military impact cannot be ignored solely because they fought in a losing cause.

The contribution made by the American volunteers is harder to quantify than that of the Brigades in general, since they were not present during the critical days of

²⁴⁸ The International Brigades: Foreign Assistants of the Spanish Reds, Madrid (Spanish Information Office, 1948), p.81

²⁴⁹ Verle Johnston, Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, University Park, Pennsylvania (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p.152

²⁵⁰ R. Dan Richardson, Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War, Lexington, Kentucky (University Press of Kentucky, 1982), p.87

November 1936. The Lincolns were among the last available troops thrown into the breach when the Nationalists threatened to break through at the Jarama in February of 1937, however. There they helped stop an advance that could have led to Madrid's encirclement. Though few of the Americans realized it at the time, their rally at Caspé in March of 1938 was perhaps their most important action. There they performed epic feats of heroism reminiscent of Thermopylae. By temporarily halting the onrushing Nationalist armies, two-day stand at Caspé of the battered remnants of the Anglo-American XV Brigade helped save the Republican armies in Catalonia from destruction.

As the war progressed, the Americans gained increased respect. The Volunteer for Liberty related that after the Lincoln and Washington Battalions' performance in the Brunete offensive, "the Americans were counted as on par with the best International troops."²⁵¹ While this praise from the XV Brigade's own paper may be discounted, one International Brigade official was critical enough in his appraisal of the Americans to lend credibility to his evaluation. He felt that though the Americans did not really understand the political nature of the Spanish war and despite their infuriating lack of discipline, they were nonetheless, "grand soldiers," who, "when they go into action... fight like hell."²⁵²

Estimates of the total number of Americans who fought in Spain vary. Edwin Rolfe, an official XV Brigade historian and Lincoln Battalion veteran, claimed that 2,800 Americans served in Spain, of whom only about 1,800 returned to the United States following the war. Veteran commissar John Gates agreed with the approximate figure of 1,000 Americans killed, noting that the number had been frequently exaggerated after the war. Other sources have cited a variety of different totals. The Subversive Activities Control Board concluded that about 3,000 men

²⁵¹ Volunteer for Liberty, Vol.II no.35 7 November, 1938-"American Volunteers in Spain" p.9

²⁵² Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.214

went to Spain, of whom around 1,800 returned. Writer Cecil Eby maintained that there were 3,200 volunteers of whom 1,500 were killed. Hugh Thomas cited a figure of 900 killed of 2,800 who served. Lincoln veteran Arthur H. Landis, whose figures are frequently questionable, agreed with Eby's total but alleged that 1,600 men died in Spain. Though no exact records of the volunteers are available, the fairly narrow range within which these figures fall makes it seem reasonable to believe that around 3,000 Americans served in Spain.²⁵³

Since the various accounts basically agree that around 1,800 volunteers returned from Spain, the actual number who went over is important in estimating the death rate. As Gates noted, the tendency following the war was to cite higher death counts, perhaps in an effort to emphasize the extent of the sacrifice made by the volunteers. If Landis's figures are correct, every other American was killed, whereas working with Rolfe's figures, the ratio is considerably smaller. Rolfe's status as a veteran and a writer make his accounting more believable than Landis or Eby's, and Gates' approval lends further credibility to the lower numbers. The fact that Rolfe's more conservative figures still leave more than one of every three American volunteers dead stands as stark evidence of the ferocity of the war they fought.

Significant military problems arising from the unusual nature of the American International units contributed to their high casualties. Throughout the war, the Americans suffered from inferior equipment, lack of training, and poor command. The fact that political and military imperatives ensured that the Internationals were used in the heaviest fighting throughout the war compounded these problems. The

²⁵³ Edwin Rolfe, The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in Spain in the International Brigades, New York (Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939), pp.6-7, p.9; U.S. Subversive Activities Control Board, Herbert Brownell, Jr., Attorney General of the United States, Petitioner v. Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Respondent--Recommended Decision, Washington, D.C. (United States Government, 1955), p.88; Cecil Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, New York (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p.302; Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War: revised and enlarged edition, New York (Harper & Row, 1977) Arthur H. Landis, Death in the Olive Groves: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939, New York (Paragon House, 1989) [citation from dedication]

unfortunate combination of these difficult circumstances produced the staggering casualties and military futility that the Americans experienced.

The Nationalists' massive advantage in the material of modern war was perhaps the most damaging problem experienced by the Americans. Though the International Brigades received the best equipment that the Spanish Republic had to offer, the Republic never had much. Though it received substantial amounts of military material from the USSR, most was of dubious quality. Stalin's interest in prolonging the war ensured that the Republic got only enough first-rate equipment to stave off defeat, particularly after the Soviets gained control over the Spanish gold reserve. Most equipment sent to the Republic consisted of the obsolete scrapings of Soviet arsenals and suspect arms purchased cheaply on the international market then sold to Spain at high prices. The Nationalists, on the other hand, received large amounts of the latest German and Italian arms and massive quantities of ammunition. Thanks to German and Italian aircraft and the famous German 88 millimeter anti-aircraft guns, they enjoyed nearly unchallenged air superiority after the spring of 1937. Their artillery was vastly superior in both quality and quantity to that of the Republic. They had enough guns by the fall of 1938 to successfully employ the classic tactical doctrine: "Artillery conquers the ground, infantry occupies it."²⁵⁴ The Nationalists' light German and Italian tanks were inferior to the Soviet models used by the Republic, but the cautious Soviets' control over most of the Republic's armor generally prevented it from being put to effective use. Even in terms of basic mobility, the Nationalists enjoyed an advantage. The Nationalists' motorized infantry units (mounted largely on American-made trucks) gave them a decided advantage over the Republic's footsoldiers, particularly when the collapse of the Aragon front in spring of 1938 allowed them to experiment with the tactics of blitzkrieg that would be

²⁵⁴ Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p.331

so effective in the early days of the next war. The Nationalists' massive firepower advantage and superior mobility were central causes of the Americans' heavy losses.

Training was another area of inadequacy among the American units of the International Brigades. While few of the Internationals received substantial training in Spain, large numbers of the European volunteers came from countries with compulsory military service. Very few Americans had any prior military experience. The poor performance of the virtually untrained Lincoln Battalion at Jarama in February of 1937 led to an attempt to provide a far more rigorous training program to subsequent recruits, but the absence of teachers with combat experience among the CPUSA's so-called military experts frustrated these efforts. While the training of the volunteers did increase in substance and duration throughout the war, it failed to adequately prepare them for combat. The Republic's desperation during much of the war forced it to throw green troops into the thick of the fighting, which removed any possibility of new recruits becoming acclimated to warfare before undergoing their true baptism of fire. The combination of poor training and desperate circumstances certainly contributed to the Americans' casualty rate and to inexperienced men's tendency to fail to use proper formations or tactics in combat. The fact that all three of the American infantry units failed to achieve their objectives and sustained particularly heavy casualties during their first engagements underscores the importance of experience in their performance.

Related to the lack of experience was the acute shortage of qualified military leaders among the American volunteers. The Communist Party's control of the officer selection process frequently led to the promotion of men whose main qualification for command rank was their political dependability, particularly early in the war. Though political control and the shortage of men with experience were substantial problems, they might have been overcome had it not been for the high casualty rate among American officers. The International units suffered 50 percent

casualties almost routinely, but it is nonetheless significant to observe that few of the American battalion commanders made it through more than one battle before being killed or wounded. While small-unit leaders usually suffer heavy casualties, nearly half of the American battalion commanders in Spain were killed. With poor communications and poorly trained troops, even higher-ranking officers often had to go up to the lines and lead by example. Even when they were behind the lines, Nationalist air attacks and frequent breakthroughs could make headquarters as dangerous as the front-line trenches.²⁵⁵ Even after the Party reduced its interference in the command structure, the American officers rarely survived long enough to profit by experience. Though the Americans' leadership deficiencies may seem insignificant in relation to the problem posed by the Nationalists' superior equipment, the shortcomings of their commanders were an additional problem that exacerbated an already poor situation.

In addition to the shortage of qualified American military officers, the domination of divisional and brigade command by foreign-born Red Army officers contributed to the volunteers' difficulties. The officers sent to lead the International Brigades were aware of the extreme danger of being a foreigner in the Soviet Union during the Great Purges, and realized that their record in Spain would be critical to their reception upon their return to the Soviet Union. General Gal, the Americans' first divisional commander, attempted to put himself in Stalin's good graces by driving his men to superhuman efforts, an attitude that resulted in the massacre at Pingarrón. Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Copic, the Croatian-born Soviet officer who commanded of the XV International Brigade for most of the war, was similarly aware of his precarious status. Copic followed a distinctly different strategy than Gal, however. Rather than attempting to distinguish himself, Copic resolved to blindly

²⁵⁵ For instance, at Jarama, by the end of the fighting at Pingarrón, Morris Maken was the only Lincoln officer still alive and unwounded (Richardson, Comintern Army, p.85)

follow all orders from above in an effort to prove his political dependability. As a result, Copic had little regard for the men under his command and was willing to submit them to the demands of his superiors.

The importance of the politics of the Popular Front in the creation of the International Brigades was another crucial factor affecting the military performance and casualties of the American units. As the International Brigades' importance to the Comintern arose mostly from their value as a symbol of the Popular Front in action, their value was greatest when they were fighting and dying. Since they were also among the Republic's best troops, the Internationals were shuttled back and forth from one front to another to keep them in the heaviest action. For the Americans, as with all the other nationalities, this meant exhaustion and heavy casualties.

The reality of the war was quite different from the images that had been painted in the left-wing press and at pro-Republican rallies in the United States. Rather than advancing in the glow of proletarian solidarity, the men found themselves mourning dead comrades as they retreated before the Nationalists' massive weight of war material. As the rank and file began to realize that the likelihood of their smashing International Fascism in Spain was approaching zero, the Americans' morale dropped precipitously.

To the leadership of the International Brigades, declining morale was even more damaging than it would have been in a more traditional army. Since most of the volunteers were Communists, it was thought that their notorious Bolshevik discipline would be their most potent weapon. The International Brigades were supposed to be the prototype of a Popular Front army, superior to "imperialist" armies because their discipline resided in every man's commitment to the popular cause. The troops' declining faith in the leadership as the war progressed jeopardized the International Brigades' whole reason for being--rather than demonstrating collective security, they threatened to expose the weakness of Communist doctrine.

While a certain degree of indiscipline and grouching was bound to result in the face of the massive casualties and poor conditions that the Americans experienced, it is evident that the Communist-dominated Commissariat believed the volunteers to be less "politically developed" than the party would have liked. The Commissariat appealed to the rank and file throughout the war to become more responsible. The XV Brigade's newspaper, The Volunteer for Liberty, published by the brigade commissariat, warned repeatedly of the dangers of disobeying orders and emphasized the importance of strong political motivation to military success. Near the end of the war, the commissariat tried to entice volunteers to become "Activists," swearing an oath to become a political and military example to their comrades. The amount of effort that the leadership expended trying to increase the discipline and motivation of the troops indicates that political adherence was not terribly strong despite the prevalence of Communists in the ranks.

It is significant to note that a substantial part of the problem with the Americans' discipline stemmed from their "overly democratic" bent. Raised in an atmosphere of freedom and calm relative to their European comrades, the Americans frequently resisted the leadership's efforts to indoctrinate them. In particular, the Americans resented the commissar system. Despite effusive self-congratulation of the commissariat's good works by the Brigade's newspaper, many of the Americans continued to feel that the simplistic political formulations of the commissars were meant for bewildered Spanish peasants rather than committed anti-fascists like themselves. The constant struggle for Bolshevik-style unanimity of opinion irked those volunteers who felt that anti-fascism was the only important qualification for membership in the International Brigades, particularly since many of the Americans had joined the Communist Party and the Brigades for no other reason.

Despite their daunting military problems, the American volunteers' contributions to the Republican war effort were substantial. Though they had to

overcome the prejudices of the European-dominated central leadership, the American units were counted among the best in the International Brigades after the summer of 1937. As the war ground on, the other International Brigades were filled largely with Spanish replacements as attrition outstripped the trickle of foreign volunteers. While the American battalions also became increasingly Spanish as casualties mounted, they retained their international character long after other units had become international in name only. Alone among the national groups, Americans continued to arrive in Spain in sizable numbers through the summer of 1937. The last substantial group of American recruits did not arrive at the front until shortly after the disastrous retreats of the spring of 1938. The sixty-odd Americans left in the Lincoln Battalion in late September of 1938 had the dubious distinction of being the last Internationals in combat. The American units certainly played a part in Republican victories and helped to contain Republican defeats in many instances; clearly, they made a positive contribution to the Republican war effort despite the ultimate futility of their actions.

The American contribution to the cause of the Spanish Republic is indelible, but the volunteers' greatest impact was probably in the United States. By the end of the war, the American battalions numbered less than a thousand foreigners among over a hundred thousand Spaniards in the Republican army; their military significance was quite limited. Though they represented a still smaller percentage of the population of the United States, the American volunteers became an important symbol for both sympathetic and antagonistic observers. The Volunteer for Liberty maintained that "The fighting ability displayed by the Lincoln-Washington Battalion was, to a large extent, responsible for the gradual changing of public opinion in the United States towards Loyalist Spain. Even the most reactionary newspapers couldn't

help but feature the feats of arms performed by their valiant countrymen in Spain."²⁵⁶ This assertion must be qualified because public opinion on the war in Spain never did shift very substantially, but the presence of the American volunteers certainly established a persistent psychic bond between American idealism and the Spanish struggle that has helped keep debate over the war raging throughout the decades that have passed since its end. To their supporters, the volunteers were repaying America's debt to Lafayette and Pulaski, risking their lives for others' freedom. Their opponents saw them as not only the embodiment of the threat of American intervention elsewhere in the world, but also the vanguard of a radical revolution. Neither group was entirely correct.

The American volunteers made a unique choice in going to Spain, but in their basic motivations they were not as different from mainstream America as they might have seemed. Most were Communists, yet many of them were not Communists. To the extent that they were Communists, most of the American volunteers had joined the Party because it was the only nationwide organization that addressed the issues that they believed to be important. The volunteers were mostly men whose few roots had been swept away in the Depression. Men in such circumstances had little to lose by joining the International Brigades. The war in Spain offered a focus to replace the aimlessness in their lives, a chance to live and die for their beliefs rather than dealing with the frustrations of daily life in dead-end jobs or unemployment lines.

The volunteers were more radicalized than mainstream Americans, but their basic motivations coincided substantially with mainstream American beliefs. Of the 60 percent of Americans who reported having an opinion on the Spanish Civil war in a 1938 Gallup poll, 76 percent supported the Republic; most of these people probably would have supported the American volunteers as well. Most of the small fraction of

²⁵⁶ Volunteer for Liberty, Vol.II no.35 7 November, 1938-"American Volunteers in Spain" p.9

Americans who went to Spain to fight were men in unique social and economic circumstances, but a strong minority of Americans with more material connection with mainstream American society nonetheless agreed with their cause. The war in Spain became to most Americans, however inaccurately, a liberal cause. The majority of the Americans who fought espoused liberal goals, albeit in a radicalized rhetoric, while their domestic supporters were more traditional progressive liberals. Though the American volunteers were not a representative group of American society, they were not alienated from American traditions. Although the Communist Party's liberal rhetoric was primarily a tactic to increase its popular support, for most of the Americans the rhetoric was what had drawn them to offer their lives in defense of the Spanish Republic.

Select Bibliography:

A. Primary Sources--Printed material:

Barry, Dick. "Soldier of Misfortune." The Saturday Evening Post, Vol. 209 (1 May 1937) pp.21-21, 81-84.

Barry, an American liberal, claimed to have attempted to enlist in the Spanish Republican Army independent of the Comintern recruitment apparatus. His subsequent misadventures illustrate the degree of Communist control over the Republican military and the International Brigades in particular.

Bessie, Alvah. Men in Battle: A Story of Americans in Spain. New York: Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939--repub. 1954.

Bessie, a professional writer, wrote one of the best of the first-hand veteran accounts. Unfortunately, he only arrived in Spain after the spring 1938 retreats; nonetheless, a gripping, informational account of the short time that Bessie served.

Bessie, Alvah and Albert Prago, eds. Our Fight: A Collection of Writings by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Spain 1936-1939. New York: Monthly Review Press with the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1987.

An anthology of works by International Brigade veterans, edited by veteran Prago with the assistance of the veterans' resident literary luminary Bessie, who died before its publication. While much of the contents was not applicable to this study, contained valuable veteran accounts not seen elsewhere. It appears that the passage of time has led the VALB stalwarts to tolerate more criticism of the Brigade leadership than previously.

The Book of the XV Brigade: Records of British , American, Canadian and Irish Volunteers in the XV International Brigade in Spain 1936-1938. First pub. 1938 by Commissariat of War XV Brigade, Madrid. Republished in Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K.: Frank Graham, 1975.

The original in-house history of the English-speaking brigade assembled by the Brigade Commissariat. Published while the volunteers were still in combat, it provides first-hand accounts of events undulled by the passage of time (though frequently shaped by political motivations and censors).

Bowers, Claude G. My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954.

The U.S. Ambassador to Spain during the war (later a professional historian) provides his personal account of the war in Spain. Reflecting Bowers' personal feelings during the war, the book is very pro-Republican. Useful in interpreting many of the Foreign Relations documents.

Fischer, Louis. Men and Politics: An Autobiography. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941.

The extent of notorious leftist journalist Fischer's role in the formation of the International Brigades and the defense of Madrid is debatable, but he was a participant and knew many of the principals personally. His account sweeps from Madrid to Moscow and contains a substantial amount of information that is unavailable elsewhere. His familiarity with many of the high-ranking Soviet and Comintern officials in Spain gave him a unique perspective on the events of the war.

Gates, John. The Story of an American Communist. New York: Nelson, 1958.

Despite his break with the Party, onetime Central Committee member Gates provides a relatively uncritical account of his experiences in Spain and the life that led him there. Like many veterans, Gates said that fighting in Spain was the most important thing that he ever did.

Geiser, Carl. Prisoners of the Good Fight: The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1986.

A captured veteran's first-hand account; incorporates well-documented references to either sources.. The book's main focus is not terribly relevant to the task at hand, but the author (born in Wayne County) reflected on his motivations and on other aspects of his experiences in Spain that are pertinent.

Gerassi, John. The Premature Anti-Fascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-39 An Oral History. New York: Praeger publishers, 1986.

Contains valuable oral history interviews with veterans; questions have been raised by another author about the accuracy of Gerassi's transcriptions.

Hudson, Roy B. "True Americans: A Tribute To American Maritime Workers Who Fought for World Democracy in the Trenches of Spain ." New York: Waterfront Section, Communist Party of New York, n.d.

This pamphlet seems to focus as much on the class struggle on the high seas as it does on the considerable number of Communist seamen who fought in Spain. Testifies to the Party's influence on the waterfront, which greatly influenced the makeup of the American battalions.

Hull, Cordell. The Memoirs of Cordell Hull: Volume I. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948.

Roosevelt's Secretary of State devotes an entire chapter to his actions and opinions on the Spanish war. Provides important information on the State Department's perspective on the conflict.

Ickes, Harold. The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes: Volume II--The Inside Struggle 1936-1939. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954.

Ickes, one of the more ardent pro-Loyalists in the U.S. government, presents a valuable insider's perspective on the process by which policy towards Spain developed. His analysis of State Department infighting and of Roosevelt's political motivations are particularly important.

Krivitsky, W.G. In Stalin's Secret Service: An Exposé of Russia's Secret Policies by the Former Chief of the Soviet Intelligence in Western Europe. orig. pub. 1939; republished Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, Inc., 1985.

Soviet intelligence officer Krivitsky defected in 1939 and quickly impressed Westerners by predicting the Nazi-Soviet Pact later that year; he was murdered in Washington D.C. in 1940, presumably by Soviet operatives. A unique source of information on the actions of the Soviet intelligence and security agencies in Spain during the war, though Hugh Thomas has noted that Krivitsky may have exaggerated at times.

Matthews, Herbert L. Education of a Correspondent. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946.

Matthews, one of the most prominent journalists in Spain and a frequent visitor to the American units, culled several chapters of this book from his experiences in Spain. Chapters dealing with the battle for Teruel and the spring retreats of 1938 are particularly helpful. Contains some inaccuracies, perhaps unsurprising from a front-line journalist who was also a stalwart supporter of the Republic and the Internationals.

——— Two Wars and More to Come. New York: Carrick and Evans, 1938.

Collects much of Matthews' insightful but relentlessly pro-Republican reporting on the war. Much of the material within was not published by his employer, The New York Times. Since access to Matthews' unpublished original dispatches is difficult to obtain, this is a valuable source.

McMillen, Wayne. "This Is Our Concern: A Statement to American Social Workers on their Stake in the Civil War in Spain." New York: Social Workers' Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (for Child Welfare), 1937.

A good example of the propaganda focus taken by a pro-Republican group in the United States during the war.

Negro Committee to Aid Spain. "A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain." New York: Negro Committee to Aid Spain with the Medical Bureau and North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, 1938.

Another example of pro-Republican propaganda by an American front group. Casts serious doubt on the account of its subject, nurse Salaria Kee O'Reilly, in John Gerassi's The Premature Antifascists.

Nelson, Steve. The Volunteers. New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1953.
Nelson's primary contribution to the record; a valuable primary source, but naturally not an objective account.

Nelson, Steve, James R. Barrett and Rob Ruck. Steve Nelson: American Radical. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981. This book contains a chapter on Nelson's Spanish experiences, in addition to giving background on some of his activities as a Party organizer. Nelson was not much of a writer, explaining the need for additional authors. The book makes no mention of accusations that Nelson first went to Spain to work for the Soviet secret police.

Orwell, George. Homage to Catalonia. London: Secker and Warburg--first pub. 1938; republished, 1951. Orwell's experiences with the disorganized militias on the northern front gave him a front-line view of the political chaos among the Republican forces.

"R.P." "With the International Brigade." The Nation, Vol.144 no.19 (8 May 1937), pp.531-532.

Purportedly a letter written by a twenty year-old American volunteer. Gives his opinion of the Spanish situation and appeals to his friend at home to aid the cause.

Regler, Gustav. The Owl of Minerva: The Autobiography of Gustav Regler. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959.

The exiled German writer joined the International Brigades himself as well as traveling extensively in the circles of the European left; his criticism of André Marty's despotism is important, as is his eloquent testimony to the Internationals' spirit and motives.

Romer, Samuel. "I Was Franco's Prisoner." The Nation, Vol.147 no.21 (19 November 1938), pp.529-533.

Mac-Pap veteran Romer gives an account of the hardships of the American prisoners of war. Concurs with other prisoner accounts, including Geiser's.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs: Volume III: September 1935-January 1937. Ed. by Edgar B. Nixon. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.

Presents documents which Roosevelt had access to, as well as speeches and documents which he produced. Of particular interest is a letter from Roosevelt justifying U.S. embargo policy to the socialist leader Norman Thomas, an ardent critic.

Ryerson, Barrington. "A Foreign Volunteer in Spain." New Republic, Vol.90 (21 April 1937), pp.317-319.

Ryerson, a Briton who volunteered in November of 1936, provided an account of his experiences in the International Brigades. Includes a brief first-hand account of the bloody fighting at Jarama and an amusing anecdote about his first meeting with a generous American volunteer.

Sommerfield, John. "Volunteer in Spain." New Republic, Vol.91 (7 July 1937), pp.239-241.

An excerpt from a book later published by Sommerfield, a British volunteer who fought with the first Internationals in the November 1936 battle in Madrid. Unremarkable, but presumably widely read among the New Republic's liberal-left subscribers.

Tisa, John. Recalling the Good Fight: An Autobiography of the Spanish Civil War. South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1985.

A fairly typical veteran's memoir. Provides some details and corroborating evidence, but is not particularly insightful.

Volunteer for Liberty. New York: Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1949.

A bound reprinting of the original 63 issues of the XV Brigade's internal newspaper. Highly propagandistic, but gives unique insight into what the International Brigade hierarchy believed or wanted the rank-and-file to believe; cited frequently in secondary sources. Provides some information found nowhere else.

Voros, Sandor. American Commissar. New York: Chilton Company, 1961.

Disaffected Communist Voros's account is by far the most critical written by a veteran. In a bit of a novel situation, some of his assertions are biased against the International Brigades and their leadership. A very helpful first-person account, particularly for the balance it provides to the other veteran accounts.

U.S. Department of State. Foreign Relations of the United States--Diplomatic Papers 1937 Volume I: General. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1954.

Vital source of diplomatic documents relating to American policy towards the war in Spain.

U.S. Department of State. Foreign Relations of the United States--Diplomatic Papers 1938 Volume I: General. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1955.

U.S. House of Representatives, Un-American Activities Committee, Martin Dies chairman. Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States: Hearings Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-sixth Congress. Volume XI. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1940.

Provides a large amount of first-hand testimony by veterans of the Spanish conflict. Particularly useful with regards to recruiting procedures.

U.S. Subversive Activities Control Board--Presiding Board Member Kathryn McHale. Herbert Brownell, Jr., Attorney General of the United States, Petitioner v. Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Respondent--Recommended Decision. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government, 1955.

The SACB's hearings produced thousands of pages of invaluable testimony from former volunteers and party functionaries. While the transcripts were sadly unavailable to the author, Recommended Decision provides an abbreviated but extremely useful summary of the testimony and the Board's findings. The information within must be considered in light of the fact that many of the witnesses were disaffected Communists or eager to assert their loyalty before the Board; nevertheless, the record is highly valuable.

B. Secondary Materials:

1. Books:

Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives--Danny Duncan Collum, ed. African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: "This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do." New York: G.K. Hall and Company, 1992.

Assembled by the archive staff. Useful oral history interviews with a number of black veterans; highly sympathetic to the veterans' cause. While reviewers received it warmly, one must be cautious, as it holds the potential to renew the tendency to exaggerate the African-American presence among the American volunteers.

Beevor, Antony. The Spanish Civil War. New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1982.

An insightful general history of the war. Provides some important insights and pays attention to some details not covered in Hugh Thomas's definitive work.

Bolloten, Burnett. The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Bolloten was a journalist in Spain during the war and subsequently a primary chronicler of the revolutionary politics of Leftist Spain. While focusing primarily on Spanish politics during the war, Burnett's book gives some valuable information relating to foreign aid to both sides.

Brome, Vincent. The International Brigades: Spain 1936-1939. London: Heinemann, 1965. A general history of the International Brigades.

A general history of the International Brigades; sympathetic to the cause. Some documentation, but also many questionable assertions and errors.

Cattell, David. Communism and the Spanish Civil War. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965.

Cattell's account focuses on the Spanish political situation and the impact of Soviet aid on Communist domination of Republican Spain. Reveals its Cold War origins with anti-Soviet and anti-communist bias. Information relating directly to the International Brigades is limited and often erroneous.

Eby, Cecil. Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

One of the better secondary works on the American volunteers; more narrative than critical analysis, however, and unfortunately lacking in documentation. Criticized by some as overly anti-Communist, though this seems somewhat exaggerated.

Falcoff, Mark and Frederick B. Pike, eds. The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39: American Hemispheric Perspectives. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Interesting information on American reaction, both governmental and grass-roots, to the Spanish war. Suggests that U.S. interests in improving relations with Latin America influenced policy towards the Spanish Civil War.

Furay, Conal. The Grass-Roots Mind in America: The American Sense of Absolutes. New York: New Viewpoints, 1977. Furay makes some interesting generalizations of grass-roots opinion; relevant because his theories apply to the motivations of the volunteers and to popular opinion during the Depression.

Guttman, Alan. The Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962.

A well-researched account of American reaction to the war in Spain. Presents the whole ideological spectrum, from American fascists to communists and everything in between. The bibliography provided helpful suggestions for further research.

Hinton, Harold B. Cordell Hull: A Biography. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1942.

Some helpful second-hand information on the State Department's policies towards Spain.

Hoover, J. Edgar. Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958.

FBI director Hoover revealed his paranoid perception of the Spanish war veterans in a brief and almost totally inaccurate account of their recruitment and motivations. Provides a measure of rightists' mistrust of the volunteers. Attempts to justify government harassment of veterans.

The International Brigades: Foreign Assistants of the Spanish Reds. Madrid: Spanish Office of Information, 1948.

An interesting (but blatantly and thoroughly biased) account of the Nationalist view of the "foreign invaders" written in the decade following the end of the civil war. Does provide a unique source for many names and posts of International Brigade leaders.

Johnston, Verle B. Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. University Park, Pennsylvania.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967.

A well-documented general history of the International Brigades focusing on their organization and military exploits. Provides important information on the military structure of the Brigades and their organizational functioning not found elsewhere.

Klehr, Harvey. The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984.

Klehr provides insight into the decisions of the CPUSA during the war and their effect on public opinion.

Landis, Arthur H. Death in the Olive Groves: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939. New York: Paragon House, 1989.

A reworking of his earlier book The Abraham Lincoln Brigade, a canonical work on the American Internationals. A secondary account written by a veteran; contains a large amount of material, but also many errors and inaccuracies. Useful as long as one is aware of the author's biases.

Matthews, Herbert. The Yoke and the Arrows: A Report on Spain--revised edition. New York: George Braziller, 1961.

Matthews' opening essay on the Civil War is particularly interesting as a look back at events by the primary American correspondent in Spain, a die-hard supporter of the Republic and of the Internationals.

Merriman, Marion and Warren Lerude. American Commander in Spain: Robert Hale Merriman and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1986.

Robert Merriman's wife, present in Spain for part of the war, describes her husband's life and actions in Spain. Downplays Robert Merriman's Communist leanings; naturally sympathetic to his side of the story in the dispute with James Harris. Written years later with Lerude's help; some primary material, but relies on substantial amounts of secondary material.

Payne, Stanley G. Politics and the Military in Modern Spain. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1967.

Payne, a well-respected historian specializing in Spanish history, gives a brief analysis of the military significance of the International Brigades, concluding

that their declining absolute and relative numbers reduced their importance as the war progressed.

Richardson, R. Dan. Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982.

Historian Richardson focuses on the important consequences of Soviet domination of the International Brigades. Very well-researched and well-documented; provides helpful bibliographical information for further research.

Rolfe, Edwin. The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in Spain in the International Brigades. New York: Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1939.

An account of the Americans' experiences in Spain written by brigade historian Edwin Rolfe soon after the war. Contains some of the bias to be expected in veteran accounts, but avoids the widespread distortion present in many others. Contains important information; considered a core text for study of the American units.

Rosenstone, Robert. Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1980 (first published 1968).

Rosenstone provides the best general history of the American volunteers that this author has seen. A well-researched and documented history. One must remain aware of Rosenstone's obvious sympathy for the volunteers, though he is not uncritical. His research into the background of the volunteers was half-hearted and led him to inaccurate conclusions.

Stewart, Cameron. "Summoned to the Eternal Field:" An Inquiry into the Development and Composition of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1971 (Microfilm by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1972).

That this work has gone unpublished is very unfortunate. Should be required reading for anyone seeking to understand the background and motivations of the American volunteers. His research into the composition of the American units is unparalleled in depth, putting Rosenstone's efforts to shame. The only source that provides a detailed account of the recruiting process; many interviews with veterans and recruiters.

Thomas, Hugh. The Spanish Civil War: Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977.

The most acclaimed general history of the Spanish Civil War. Rigorously documented; provides the best account in English of the overall military course of the war.

Traina, Richard P. American Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1968.

Generally held to be the best analysis of the reaction of the U.S. government to the war in Spain. Provides important links between motivations of different political figures and describes repatriation controversy in detail.

Valliant, Charles Martin. American Responses to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. unpublished M.A. thesis, Eastern Kentucky University, 1968.

An undistinguished analysis of American domestic reaction to the war in Spain; not especially noteworthy.

Weintraub, Stanley. The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968.

Provides some information on the motivations for the English-speaking intelligentsia's commitment to the Republican cause.

Worth, Karl J. Wisconsin and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1981.

Worth's work is interesting, as there are few (if any) other works that focus attention on American reactions to the Spanish war at the state level. Useful to the extent that it provides some information on sentiments in middle America that do not appear in the national press.

2. Magazines and periodicals:

"Abies and Georgies." Time, Vol.31, 18 April 1938, pp.21-22.

An interesting account of the origins of the American units and the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. Reveals Time's tolerance for anti-fascism despite its usual conservatism, as it discounts the influence of Communists in the American units. The amusing nickname for the volunteers seems to have been the invention of the writer, since it has not appeared in any other known source. A rather romantic account, referring at one point to "the jaunty 'Abies and Georges,' who in devil-may-care brown berets are fighting the Spanish Rightists."

Carroll, Peter N. "Psychology and Ideology in the Spanish Civil War: The Case of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade." Antioch Review, Vol.52 no.2 (Spring 1994), pp.219-230.

Carroll detailed the importance of camaraderie to the military performance of the American International volunteers. Includes a summary of the findings of sociologist John Dollard's "Fear in Battle" study of 300 Lincolns, conducted in 1941. Quite informative. Some of the material in this piece appears in Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

"Exit." Time, Vol.32, 3 October 1938. p.19.

Covers the International withdrawal and the problems involved. Noted that the Internationals had become militarily insignificant and a political liability. Includes a summary of the International Brigades' record that is surprisingly accurate and balanced for a contemporary account. Does contain inaccuracies regarding composition of Brigades, however.

"Glad Reds." Time, Vol.29, 5 April 1937, pp.18-19.

Details political and military conditions in Madrid during the winter of 1937. Includes a conversation with International Brigade General Kleber and describes the organization of the Brigades. Useful representation of information available to American public, but not very accurate.

"Hemingway Finds that Americans Know Their Trade." Newsweek, Vol.10 no.23 (4 October 1937) (no author), pp.23-24.

Immediately following a multi-page pictorial of the American Legion's national convention is a short article on the course of the Spanish war. While the article reflects Newsweek's conservatism, it includes Ernest Hemingway's favorable impression of the American volunteers' performance at Quinto and Belchite. Provides evidence of pride in the American Internationals felt even by some American conservatives.

Liddell Hart, Basil. "Military Lessons From Spain." The New Republic, Vol.91 (October 1937), pp.357-359.

Military expert Liddell Hart assessed the developments to date in the Spanish war and analyzed developments significant to military strategists. Like many observers, drew the mistaken conclusion that "defense is paramount at the present," a notion which Franco would disprove by the spring of 1938 and Hitler would shatter in 1939-1940. Felt that air attack posed a greater moral than physical threat, argued that national will was less important than technological capability in modern warfare.

Fischer, Louis. "Madrid's Foreign Defenders." The Nation, Vol. 145 no.10 (4 September 1937), pp.235-237.

Fischer, a notorious leftist journalist during the Thirties and briefly the quartermaster of the International Brigades before a falling-out with André Marty, provided a brief history of the International Brigades for the popular audience. He included an uncritical portrait of Robert Merriman and discounted allegations of political tension in the American units. Clearly reveals Fischer's leftist bias; highly sympathetic to the volunteers.

"One-Way Neutrality." The New Republic, Vol.88 (30 September 1936) pp.212-213. (no author).

Noting Portuguese, German and Italian violations of the Non-Intervention Agreement, the New Republic argued that the Western democracies should reconsider their policy of neutrality lest they unintentionally aid the Nationalists.

"Plan to Bring Back Americans in Spain." New York Times, 1 October, 1938.

A brief account of the problems involved in bringing American volunteers back to the United States. Helpful, but information is not unique to this source.

"PRO-CON--Was the President's Chicago speech a move toward peace?" The Digest, Vol.1 no.16 (30 October 1937).

Prints newspapers across the country's reactions to Roosevelt's famed "Quarantine" speech. Reveals the extent of American isolationism. While several newspapers supported the President, others violently attacked even the suggestion of American responsibility abroad.

"Stranded Volunteers." The Nation, Vol.147 no.15 (8 October 1938). (no author).

Applauds the Republic's decision to withdraw the international volunteers as a shrewd political move. Openly appeals to Americans for money to help pay for repatriation of American volunteers.

"Was Spain Worth Fighting For?" The New Republic, Vol.98 (12 April 1939) p.265. (no author).

While the Fascists were mopping up the remainder of the Republican resistance, the New Republic concluded that Spain had indeed been worth fighting for despite the defeat. Spain had defended itself valiantly against an unprovoked attack and had provided an inspiration to the democratic world to carry on the fight against fascism.