

COMRADES: TALES OF A BRIGADISTA IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR BY HARRY FISHER

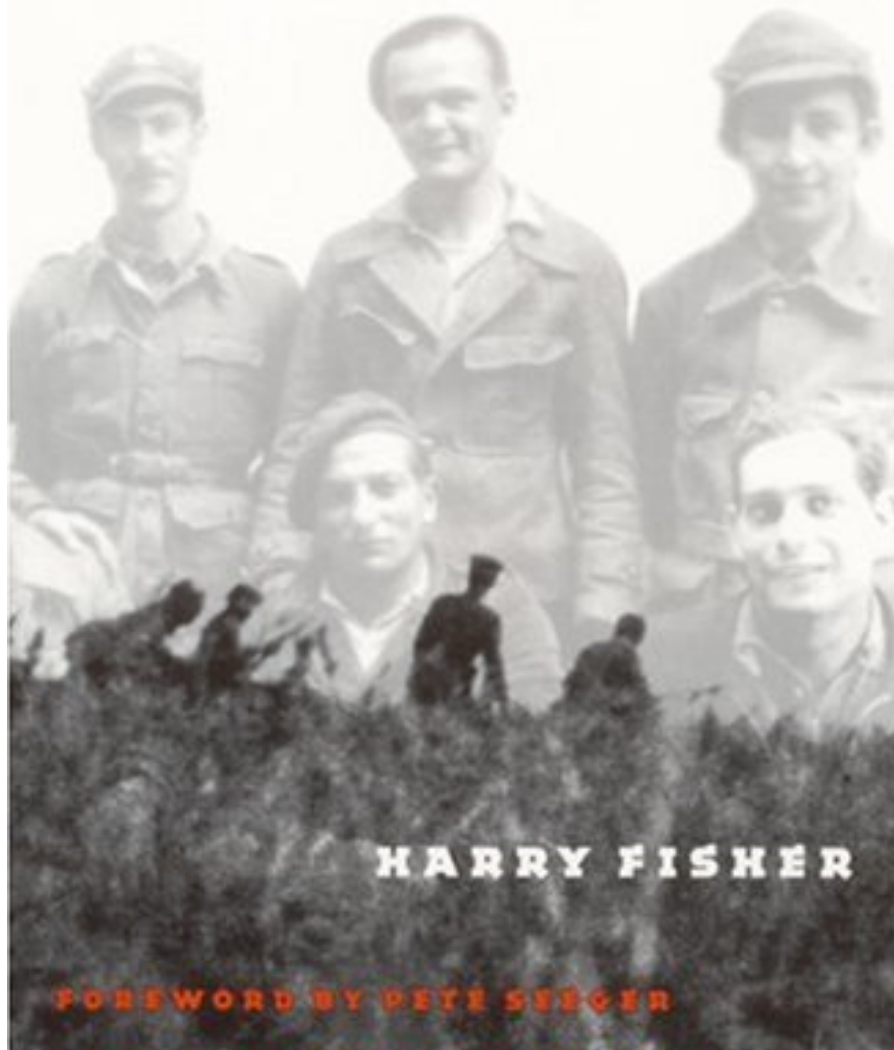


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COMRADES

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Amazon.com Review

Harry Fisher, a young labor organizer during the depression years, was one of some 3,000 Americans to join the cause of the loyalist government when civil war broke out in Spain in 1936. Assigned to the Lincoln Battalion, which would later become the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (and, the author notes, the first racially integrated unit in American military history), Fisher fought in several key engagements against the fascists, including the bloody battle of Jarama. He emerged from the war scarred but alive, unlike most of the young Americans who populate the pages of his memoir, nearly all of them killed in action for a cause they knew was right--but also doomed to failure. Anger, Fisher writes, motivated him to assemble his memoirs--anger that, as he puts it, "countless U.S. administrations have treated us like pariahs, President Reagan even commenting once that the Lincolns fought on the wrong side in the Spanish Civil War!" Yet what emerges from his pages is not so much anger as a gentle, and often good-humored, homage to the young men who fought at his side--and even some kind tributes to his former enemies, who, he writes, "were just kids who happened to live in territory controlled by the fascists, kids who would surely have preferred soccer games to war." A highlight comes at the end of the narrative, when Fisher recounts a trip to Spain in 1996 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Lincoln Brigades' founding. His book is a solid contribution to histories of the period, worthy of a place alongside Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. --Gregory McNamee

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Harry Fisher has been a department store worker, a seaman, a labor activist, and an engineer gunner on a B-26. For many years he served as chief of communications for the TASS news agency in New York City.

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The Spanish Civil War served as an ideological and physical battleground for visionary Americans wishing to combat the spread of fascism. Harry Fisher was one such idealist who became a soldier in the famed Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the American contingent of international volunteers dedicated to defeating Franco's forces. Fisher was one of the earliest American volunteers and one of the few to participate in all the major battles. Under a barrage of shells, bombs, and bullets for eighteen months, he lost his illusions about war's efficacy in solving political issues. To this day a despondence often overwhelms him when he recalls a family photograph he found jutting from the pocket of a slain fascist soldier. His involvement taught him that up close, the dead, whether fascist soldiers or his own fallen comrades, looked alike. This is a war story, simply told. Yet it is also a complex story about a young man testing his ideology in the harsh realities of battle.

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Most helpful customer reviews

10 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Should be read by every young person

By A Customer

If you need a reaffirmation of the goodness in humanity, read this book. Fascism, in many artful guises, still oppresses and exploits ordinary people throughout the world. Although Harry and his comrade Brigadistas were deemed to be 'premature anti-fascists', they recognised the need to fight it even though the odds were stacked against them. What fine men and women volunteered to aid the people of Spain. In my country, we are taught nothing about the Spanish Civil War, even in its true context as the first battle of the second world war. I would encourage young people, indeed everyone, to read this thoughtful book. It gives an insider's insight to an extremely important and much-maligned historical event. And lends a little faith that there were and are decent souls in the world.

14 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

A timeless story that should be read by every generation.

By A Customer

"Comrades" is more than just a story of one American's experience in the Spanish Civil War. It is the story of young men and women taking responsibility for the issues of their day. Harry Fisher and his comrades are quite possibly the "greatest" of what Tom Brokaw has called the "Greatest Generation." In the days before World War II, the young Americans of the Lincoln Battalion joined tens of thousands of volunteers from around the world to fight the emerging evil of facism in the Spanish Civil War. Instead of being rewarded for their foresight, our own country branded them as radicals and subversives.

Read "Comrades" and learn the story of these forgotten American heroes. Then make an attempt to contact

one of the 130 or so who are still living and tell them "thank you."

23 of 30 people found the following review helpful.

Gentle Account of WWII's First Campaign

By Elderbear

Harry Fisher, a young, idealistic labor activist, relates a very personal tale of his experiences during the Spanish Civil War. This period of history ignored by most Americans, was a crucial moment in the history of Western Civilization. Fisher, recognizing the battle between Democracy and the Fascist powers, ignored the wishes of his family and volunteered to fight in Spain, supporting the democratically elected government there against the Nazi supported military rebellion of Franco.

War is hell, but getting to the battlefield was no easy matter. Not only did the United States refuse to aid the Spanish government, it actively sought to block American citizens from opposing the fascists and Hitler's nascent military machine. (this at a time when Henry Ford and Prescott Bush (our "president's" grandpa) were raking money in supplying the Nazis). Fisher finally made it to Spain.

The book relates comradeship, sudden death, misery, deprivation, and the courage that can only come from putting your life on the line for a cause you desperately believe in. Fisher relates anecdotes in a soft, gentle, personable manner.

This book can be compared with Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. Orwell spends more time with political analysis and historical background. His style is less personal, and somewhat harsher. Fisher brings in his family, his hopes, his fears, but leaves the greater political context largely unexplored. Both books are five-star-must-reads.

After reading *Comrades*, I again had to wonder, "What might have happened if America had acted as a Democracy instead of a Capitalist Oligarchy and officially backed the legitimate Spanish government? Even weapons sales might have enabled the forces of Democracy to prevail ... and taught Hitler and Mussolini that the Democracies would not stand idly by while they attempted to subdue the world.

(If you'd like to discuss this book or review in more detail, click on the "about me" link above and drop me an email. Thanks!)

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