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September 6, 2000

Mr. Harry Fisher  
c/o U of Nebraska Press  
Lincoln Nebraska

Dear Mr. Fisher.

I have read with great interest your book COMRADES, published by the University pres.

In particular I read your account of the march out to the Hermitage del Pueyo with David Reiss and Sid Rosenblatt, the opening shots of the battle, and the group of men at the Hermitage, followed by the retreat back to Belchite.

I have a typescript memoir by a Spaniard attached to the observers of the Lincoln Battalion, one Fausto Villar (he died in Valencia a few months ago) who was also with your group. Your accounts describe the same developments. Fausto was assigned as one of the four stretcher-bearers carrying Reiss down the hill toward Belchite. On the way they were strafed by German planes. By this time Reiss was dead and was abandoned as the men fled. Rosenblatt was with Fausto. Fausto got away safely to the Ebro, but rejoined the staff in the action above Corbera and was with Merrman when he was killed. His account is accurate and in great detail. He did not speak English and was not influenced by what others said about the Lincolns, whom he always admired.. He has no axe to grind-- either way.

(Fausto was captured on or about April 2 and spent two years in Franco prisons.. He then resumed his life in Valencia as a car mechanic.)

Fs (1 de 26)



I believe you might be interested in those pages of Fausto's memoir which overlap your own experiences. His memoir is in Spanish-- but it has been translated into English.

If you would provide me with your address I would be pleased to send them to you. No charge-- no obligation of any kind.

I read with great interest your account of the dive-bombing attacks over Belchite just before the retreats began. As you say, this might have been the first aerial dive-bombing in warfare.

You have written one of the finest books about the Lincolns that I have read. Any historian will always be grateful for your probity and honesty.

Respectfully yours,

Cecil Eby *Cecil Eby*  
Professor of English  
University of Michigan.

*PS I would also like to send  
copies of the manuscript to Rosenblatt  
and John Gerlach, if these gentlemen are  
still living.*

*CBE*

*fs. (2 de 26)*



Harry Fisher  
10 N. Ridgewood Rd., Apt. 214  
South Orange, NJ 07079

Dear Cecil:

I don't think that I can be of much help in giving you information on the deaths of Merriman and Doran. The story I heard was that one night, a group of Americans inadvertently wandered into a fascist camp. When the Americans realized what they had done, they fled in all directions. I think it was Lenny Lamb who told me that Doran and Merriman and some others went together in one direction and evidently ended up in the very center of the fascist camp. Lamb and others slid down a steep hill. They heard shots from the area that Merriman and Doran had gone. But I wasn't there, and I can't add anything to this. (When you talk to Dave Smith, ask him if he was with this group.) In fact, this was the night that I marched with the fascists. Fausto's description was interesting, and it may have happened the way he tells it, but I can't verify it.

What I found very interesting was the story Fausto wrote about how he and three others carried the dying Dave Reiss in a blanket, trying to get to Belchite. He claims that after Reiss died, the four abandoned Reiss's body, and separately tried to get to Belchite. During this time, Sullivan and I were watching the beginning of the retreat on Hermitage Hill less than half a mile from us, with fascist planes swooping down and firing at the retreaters. We saw tanks following the retreaters. Sadly, we had an excellent view of what was going on. Yale Stuart, with a bloody handkerchief covering his forehead, was running near the road leading to Belchite. He stopped for a few seconds to tell us that all hell had broken loose on the hill, that many were dead. He told us to get into Belchite as soon as possible, and then he started running towards Belchite. After Yale left, we looked at the flat empty field and saw a single fascist plane chasing a lone soldier, the only soldier in that vast field. Every time the plane came near him and started shooting, that soldier would drop to the ground. As soon as the plane passed him, he would get up and run in

fs. (3 de 26)



the direction of Belchite. After about four attempts to get this soldier, the plane left, but the soldier stayed on the ground. Sullivan and I thought that he was dead. We left the field and went into the woods where we joined one of our retreating columns. Now that soldier, who very well might have been Fausto, may have continued on to Belchite.

All this action took place on the morning of March 10, the first day of the big retreat. More than a year later, a few days before I was married, Sid Rosenblatt was released as a prisoner of war and came home. The story he told me appears on pages 183-184 of my book. You will see that Sid claimed to be with Dave Reiss at the Hermitage until Dave died.

One story that I did not include in my book was this. Dave had just died, and the fascists appeared on the scene. Sid was still holding Dave, and crying. Sid vaguely remembered a fascist soldier being told to guard him. He told me that he remembered the Franco soldier, patting him on the back and saying "malo, malo." Then he remembered being lined up with other Americans to be shot. Obviously they were not shot, but he did not remember how he got to the POW camp.

Dave told me later the other American prisoners told him that they were never lined up to be shot. He said his mind was so mixed up that he must have dreamed it--and maybe he dreamed about the Franco soldier guarding him and showing sympathy. He just wasn't sure.

So Cecil, I know this is not much help to you. I can only refer you to Sid Rosenblatt's story and let you draw your own conclusions. I can't tell you that Fausto's story is right or wrong.

Now on to Oliver Law. As you know, his story, and his death in particular, is something about which I have first hand knowledge. Over the past 60 years there have been many descriptions written of Law's death, but none has angered me more than the one in your book. I feel good being able to tell you this at last. After speaking to you, I have come to believe that you are an honest person trying to get at the truth.



Unfortunately, the sources you relied on thirty years ago--perhaps the only sources that made themselves available to you--were scoundrels, men with personal vendettas who somehow felt justified in distorting events, slandering individuals, and simply, lying--*anything* to denigrate the Lincolns. But it is important that you--and your readers--know the truth.

Of course the worst of these scoundrels is Bill Herrick. I find the following quote from your book *Between the Bullet and the Lie* (p. 122) very disturbing:

...The reasons for his skyrocketing rise to prominence are unaccountable. "Why Law?" the men asked over and over. If the Party insisted upon a Negro commander, there were half a dozen superb candidates.

"Law was not a Negro as I thought of Negroes," recalled a furrier. "Law was an illiterate, southern darkie. The kind you picture with a watermelon."

The kind you picture with a watermelon??? An illiterate southern darkie??? Perhaps it should not surprise me that the furrier--Herrick--uses such terms. After all, Herrick is clearly not only a liar, but a racist as well. This is not the way we Lincolns thought or talked. No one would have used the term "southern darkie" and none of us would "picture" a black man with a watermelon--none, that is, except Herrick and his ilk. It does surprise me that even Herrick would be so stupid to use such terms in an interview conducted in the sixties; in that time of civil rights struggles, the Black Panther movement, Malcolm X and other militants, no one would have even used the word "Negro" without cringing. There is something very wrong here, something that should, perhaps, have been a tip-off to the true nature of this man's character.

Here is a quote from Herrick's book, *Jumping the Line*:

When Oliver Law was appointed battalion adjutant, Doug and Oscar Hunter, another Negro, scribbled up some picket signs demanding equal rights for whites,



much to the delight and laughter of our comrades, who'd said nothing for fear of being called racists. Sounds familiar? Doug seemed to take Oliver's difficulty personally. He even went one day back to battalion headquarters, cornered Law, and asked him to resign his command.

Law told him the truth. In the Party, Law told him, you can't resign. You don't volunteer nothing. You belong to the Party. And the Party means a lot to me. It gave me a life I never had before. Try to understand.

Doug refused to understand. With all his dignity, his self-respect, he was still a kid--we were all kids. So he refused to understand. What are yuh, a fucking Uncle Tom? Still a slave? Give it up, you're not fit to be a commander. (p.179)

What??? Doug Roach telling Law he's not fit to be commander? Telling him to resign his command? Suggesting that if he doesn't have the--what? guts?--to resign, it's a sign that he's still a slave? An Uncle Tom? This makes no sense at all--and it's a deliberate lie. I know because I was there.

Doug Roach's machine gun was to the right of my infantry squad, about thirty feet away. I had become very friendly with Roach, and two others in that group, Sol Zalon and Sid Crotto, spending hours with them every day. One day we were talking when a fellow came over and announced, "Oliver Law has just been made commander of the Lincolns!" This was exciting news--we knew it was the first time a black man had been made commander of an American battalion of mostly white men, and we were proud--proud of Law, and proud of ourselves for being part of it all. It would be no different today. Young leftists are delighted when steps are taken "in the right direction." And remember that the U.S. military units were still segregated. The Lincolns had become premature integrationists. Doug Roach let out a whoop. The expression on his face was one of sheer joy. He had no doubts about Law. He was proud, extremely proud. The picketing story is nonsense and a lie. It never happened, in jest or otherwise. These men--Doug and Oscar--had far too much dignity to engage in such foolishness



And Herrick claims to have gotten this story from Doug Roach??? How convenient for him to "quote" someone long dead! And why didn't he ask me about it, since I was there with Doug when he heard the news, since I was a good friend of Doug's, and since I knew and was with Oliver Law in battle. It sickens me that the names of so many good people are being denigrated with such falsehoods.

Another troubling quote from *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, (p. 45):

Doug Seacord was cursing mad. They had been assigned a position overlooked by the enemy and had a dugout against the skyline. Furthermore, Oliver Law, a latecomer to his company, had been appointed his adjutant, a promotion passing over half a dozen abler men. Law was a sulky Negro, born in Texas, who claimed to have been a sergeant in the American Army. No sooner had the artillery barrage stopped than a flight of Capronis came over, flying so low that the Lincolns could see their bomb bay doors opening. Above them was a glint of objects dropping down. Law shouted, "It's all right! They're dropping leaflets!"

I wasn't at Jarama at this time, but never have I heard this story from any of the dozens of soldiers I knew who *were* there. I have no way of knowing whether abler men were passed over for the position of adjutant. To us, Law was qualified, being one of the few among our ranks with any military experience. Whether or not Law had been in the American Army I can't know for certain, but this was the first time I'd read the phrase "*claimed*" to have been a sergeant in any book on the Lincolns. As far as we all knew, he *had* been in the Army. We believed this, and had no reason to doubt him, just as we had no reason to doubt that Pat Reid fought with the IRA or that John Cookson had corrected a mathematical mistake Einstein had made in a scientific journal. Perhaps *Herrick* doubted Law's "claim", but then, this would be in keeping with his racist nature, no? It was his assumption that Law was a liar, had never been a sergeant in the U.S. Army, and was incapable of leading troops. After all, Herrick's image of Law included a watermelon by his side!



In any case, the worst part of this is that it makes Law look like an idiot. If the plane was flying so low, anyone who saw "the glint of objects dropping down"--even a child--would know that they were bombs, not leaflets. Metal and paper are hard to mistake, one for the other. And I must tell you that Law was not a "sulky Negro" any more than I'm a "rich Jew."

And here's the same story, this time from Herrick's *Jumping the Line*, p. 162:

That morning when I went for daily instructions to Seacord's h.q. he introduced me to a tall, well-built Negro who he said was now part of his staff, a man named Oliver Law. Just arrived in the lines and already on the company staff; may come well-connected, I thought. During siesta hour, when the Capronis made their daily run, as the bombs glinting silver off the sun began their descent, we hear Law's voice from Seacord's headquarters call over the rumble of bomber engines, "Look, they're dropping leaflets." "Shut up" Seacord yelled, "they're bombs." Old veterans now, three days in the lines, we laughed. Thereafter some of the men referred to him as Leaflets Law.

Several years ago, Peter Carroll (chief of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives) interviewed Herrick for his book, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*. I find it interesting that the same story appears in this book published in 1994 by the Stanford University Press, p.99:

The logistical errors had just begun. Ordered to dig trenches the bewildered Lincolns asked, "With what?" Helmets, bayonets, and bare hands had to substitute for the missing shovels. In their ignorance, they dug against the skyline. At dawn artillery shells and machine-gun bullets smashed into their positions. Sniper fire and shrapnel claimed the first casualties. Then a row of Italian bombers appeared overhead. Seeing a metallic glint, the black volunteer Oliver Law, a six-year veteran of the U.S. Army, shouted in his southern accent to Merriman, "Lookee, boss, they're dropping propaganda leaflets." Instead, a cluster of bombs landed so near, said Merriman, that the explosions scorched the earth. After the raid, and a long, long silence, the unabashed Law exclaimed, "Boss Merriman, them sure was powerful leaflets."



I can assure you that never, never did Oliver Law refer to another Lincoln as "Boss," nor did he ever use phrases like "Lookie boss" or "them sure was powerful leaflets." And now Herrick says that Law is telling all this to Merriman, not Seacord. If Herrick is going to fabricate stories, he should at least get them straight.

Of course, the worst thing about Herrick's lies is his claim that the Lincolns shot Law. According to Herrick, the Lincolns hated Law for needlessly putting them in harm's way. Law was in command during the battle of Brunete for only three days before he himself was killed on the morning of the fourth day, July 9. Let me tell you what I know about the events surrounding Law's last days and his death. About fifteen minutes before three o'clock on the afternoon of July 6, the Lincolns lined up near the top of a hill facing Villanueva de la Canada. Law had been given an order by Brigade to attack at exactly 3:00 P.M. Just minutes before we started the attack, I approached my friend, Jerry Weinberg, Law's runner. Jerry told me to get ready, that Law had told him we were going over the top very soon. I rushed about thirty feet to my position and a few minutes later we attacked, Law leading the way. There were many casualties that day, but Law lived through it. The cover of my book has a wonderful, historic picture, taken by Sam Walters, of Law, standing almost erect, wearing an officer's cap, not carrying a rifle, leading the charge, with Jerry Weinberg close to him on his right. The town was taken that night, and Law came through it unscathed.

For the next two days, Law led the battalion as we chased the fascists, capturing many of them. There were not many casualties during these two days--for once we had the upper hand and were on the offensive. I don't think that there were more than five killed or wounded. So this was not a case of some foolhardy, gung ho commander leading his troops into needless jeopardy.

The next morning, July 9, Brigade ordered an attack by the entire 15th Brigade on Mosquito Hill. Law asked me to gather the Lincoln officers for a meeting on the bottom of a hill. I remember Paul Burns, commander of company 1, Steve Nelson, battalion



commissar, Sid Levine, commander of the machine-gun company, Jerry Weinberg, and a few others being present. Law told us the truth. We would attack at exactly 10:00 A.M. and other battalions in the 15th Brigade would also attack at the same time. The Washington Battalion would attack about a mile from us. He said that it could be a tough one because we were not going to be supported from the air, by tanks, or by artillery.

At 10:00 A.M. I saw Law go over the top first. Then we followed. I can still see Law standing upright and urging us on. Then I saw him fall with a bullet in his stomach. While Jerry Weinberg was helping Law to the rear, Law said to me and others as he passed us, "I'll be back in a few days." I saw Dave Smith, a first aid man, crawl out to help Jerry bring Law to safety. Dave saw that Law was spitting up blood and getting weaker. He wanted to save him, but it was impossible. Law bled internally and died about an hour later. So you can understand why I get sick reading those lies about him--illiterate, cowardly, ignorant, sulky, etc.

From Herrick's book: pp.208-209:

Suddenly that morning, he [Doug Roach] began to talk about Oliver Law, he just seemed to have to get it out, and when he stopped for a sip Joe [Gordon] picked it up. Thus they alternated in telling me that awful tale of woe, how they'd killed Oliver Law at Mosquito Crest. "Life or death," Joe said.

As my friends told me this harrowing tale, I could feel their hurt, and I was right there with them, still feeling my own hurt. When they concluded and were at last silent, Doug handed me the bottle and told me to take a swig, it would help. As I laced my nerves with the sharp brandy, Hy Stone, who lost his second brother to the war in one of the ambushes Law led them into, said, "I thought we agreed not to tell anyone." Joe then asked me to promise to keep their secret. Doug, it appeared to me, was suffering from guilt. Joe, it is true, was not, still he had to get it off his chest, both of them had to...Hy Stone, despite himself, confirmed the story." (p.-208-209)



What a terrible lie! Hy Stone was in the same squad with me at Jarama. We had both been brought up in orphanages and we had much in common. We became very close friends. Hy's closest friend was Charles Nusser, who was the sergeant in command of our group of about 40 men in Jarama. After the war, many of our "Jarama group" met every month or two at one of our homes. We were a close-knit group for decades. Hy and his wife moved to Florida in the 1980's, but every year, he'd come to New York for the annual reunion of the VALB. Both he and Charlie died in the early 90's, all of us very close until their deaths. I still consider them to be two of the best friends I've ever had. So surely, had this story been true, I would have heard about it. Charlie, Hy and I discussed many things about the war over many decades, both good and bad, pleasant and ugly. Herrick may not realize it, but in telling this story about Hy Stone and the death of his brothers, he *proved* that he is a liar. Here's how.

Hy Stone was in the Lincoln Battalion, but his brothers were in the Washington Battalion. Hy's two brothers were in the same battle, the Brunete offensive, but at least one mile away from the Lincolns. Both Stone brothers were killed at about the same time that Oliver Law was killed, but Hy's two brothers and Law were not anywhere near each other. Indeed, they had never met, being in different battalions. Evidently, Herrick, in formulating this particular lie, made the assumption that the three Stone brothers were all together in the Lincoln Battalion. But they weren't. If further proof is required, please take a look at Landis's book, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, pp.203-205. This story, by Harold Smith, tells about the action that day in the Washington Battalion and how the two Stone brothers were killed.

I wish you would be able to point this out to Herrick. Law had absolutely nothing to do with the Washington Battalion. It would be interesting to see how Herrick gets out of this lie. I'm sure you could get all this information from our archives, by looking under the names of Hy Stone, Joe Stone, Sam Stone or the Stone brothers. By the way, pictures of Sam and Joe Stone are on the cover of my book



Peter Carroll interviewed me about ten years ago while he was writing his book, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*. Soon after, he interviewed Herrick to get his story. One day, Carroll phoned me and said that he had asked Herrick to supply him with names of other Lincolns in that circle the day he claimed Law was killed. After all, Roach and Gordon were dead then for about 25 years. Carroll told me that Herrick had reluctantly given him two more names. I asked Carroll who they were. He replied that he couldn't tell me because he wanted to talk to these fellows first, that he didn't want me to have the opportunity to "prompt" them. I told Carroll that he was 100 percent right. Some time later, Carroll told me that the names of the two were Hy Stone and Joe Colbert and that both had told him that the story of the men sitting in a circle was a lie, that nothing like that had ever happened. Carroll also told me that another vet on the West Coast, Melvin Anderson, had said that he had been at Mosquito Hill on July 9, and gave the same story I gave about how Law was killed. (see pp. 138 and 139 of Carroll's book). Interestingly, when Carroll asked Herrick to respond to our versions of Law's death, his response was "How do they know where the bullets came from?" So for a second time, Herrick forgets the circle in his original story. Carroll does say that the two fellows (Stone and Colbert) denied it, but I wish that he had given their names in his book. Perhaps it would be a good idea if you got in touch with Peter Carroll and asked him about the interview with Herrick, in relation to Stone and Colbert.

Here's an interesting quote from Paul Berman's introduction to Herrick's recent book:

There was an officer in the battalion named Oliver Law, and Herrick's friend and several other men had felt that Law was hopelessly incompetent and was sending them to their deaths, and they killed him in a mad fury during the Brunete campaign. Was there anything implausible in this story? It is worth observing that the execution of soldiers was a notable trait of the Lincoln Battalion, which stood closer in that respect to the traditions of the Soviet military than to those of the American military. The story about Oliver Law, in any case, was not especially new. A history of the Lincolns



by Cecil Eby *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, published in 1969, had reported two different versions of Law's death, with no way to choose between them: a version that conformed to what Herrick had told me in the interview, and an "official" version, according to which Law had died a heroic death attacking the fascists. In preparing my interview with Herrick, I spoke to a number of Lincoln veterans, including an important figure, John Gates--a commissar during his time in Spain, with a link to military intelligence, later on a top figure in the Communist Party USA, who had told me he had heard the rumor about Law's death, and, for that matter, had heard rumors about men from the battalion killing other officers, too. So the story was old news.

This single aspect in Herrick's interview with me, the passing mention of Law getting killed by his own men, nonetheless became the focus of a VALB campaign against the *Village Voice*. The organization wrote and telephoned the editors to demand a retraction of my column or, short of that, the publication of an article by the VALB. The editors offered, in response, a place on the letters page which the VALB was not at first eager to accept. One of the leaders of the VALB, Steve Nelson--another major figure in the Communist Party during the Stalin era--went out for coffee with me and pleaded with me to back off what I had published about Oliver Law. Nelson reminded me that Law was black, and made the case that black people in America have very few heroes and that I was besmirching the name of one of them--even if, as Nelson said, "maybe Law wasn't a genius" (which I thought was an odd piece to volunteer) pp. XVI-XVII

Cecil, it must trouble you that Berman used your book to "prove" authenticity of Herrick's story--knowing all the time, I'm sure, that your version itself came from Herrick as well. And if Berman implausibly didn't know that you got your story from Herrick, certainly Herrick himself knew it, and nonetheless allowed Berman to bolster the lies, using your name, in the introduction to his book. Yes, I will say that certainly Herrick was again "lying" when he neglected to correct this bit of distortion in his own book.

A word too about John Gates. Berman states that he spoke to Gates who claimed to have heard rumors about members of the Lincolns killing Law. What Berman leaves out is that Gates didn't believe the rumors. This according to Berman himself who admitted this in another column for the *Voice*. But some years later, when Herrick's book was written, John Gates was dead, so Berman felt he could say anything he wanted about



Gates, and of course Gates couldn't refute him. Berman and Herrick were clearly taken from the same mold.

And yes, Steve Nelson did meet with Berman. Also present at that meeting was Marc Crawford, a black teacher and writer. Both Steve and Marc told me what happened. Steve was so angry at Berman, that even though he was an old man near 80, he tried to attack Berman that day; Marc had to hold Steve back

Berman doesn't mention Steve's justified anger--nor does he mention Marc's presence. Never would Steve make the "Law wasn't a genius" comment because (a) he had nothing but the highest respect for Law; (b) he would never make such a condescending comment about *anyone*; it just wasn't in his nature; (c) no white person would be so stupid as to make such a comment in front of a black man! (This is, of course, why Berman neglects to mention Marc's presence--it would clearly point out the falsehood of Berman's "quote.") Of course, Steve and Marc were no longer alive when Herrick's book came out, so once again Berman and Herrick could take liberties with the words of the dead. (Cecil, if you would like to speak to Marc's widow, I'd be happy to put you in touch with her.) Berman *does* say, in a letter to the *Village Voice* of Aug. 19, 1986:

Herrick's very different version [from mine] comes from two Lincolns, Joe Gordon and Doug Roach, who told him that they were part of the group that fragged Law--a not uncommon event in war, by the way. Gordon and Roach were Herrick's best friends in Spain, but since both men are dead, we will never be able to confirm the story.

So you see, Herrick and Berman always use the words and names of dead people. How convenient! When it came to quoting me, Herrick did not use my name, because I was still alive. I was simply an "officer's runner."

Berman *had* to use my name in his letter to the *Voice* because he was answering my letter. Here is how Berman explains why my version of Law's death "was not true, could not be true":



! ...Herrick's interview advanced in other ways--in a New York black newspaper, on a radio talk show, and most of all, through letters to the *Voice*.

"The first of those letters came from someone named Harry Fisher. I must say, when I first read Fisher's letter, the hair stood up on my journalist's head. I considered that I was justified in publishing the interview with Herrick because of his literary achievements, because of the confluence of his view of the Spanish war with that of various historians, and because I had spoken to a number of other veterans, at least three of whom had expressed admiration for him, in degrees from forthright to begrudging. Still I had no way to judge for myself how accurate was Herrick's recall of particular details from the 1930's. The letter from Harry Fisher began, "I was shocked, appalled, and outraged by the Herrick interview," and went on to say "I was in Spain for nineteen months, sixteen of them at the front with the Battalion. I fought under Commander Law and was an eyewitness to his death." Fisher in his letter said that he had watched Law stand up in the middle of the battle and shout to the Lincoln's, "Let's chase them off that hill! Let's go!"-- And then Fisher watched as Law was shot. I will admit that after reading this letter, I began to worry about that one section of Herrick's interview.

Then I learned a couple of curious facts--about the picket line and about Harry Fisher's letter--from one of the other Lincoln veterans. This other veteran, who wished to keep his name out of print, told me that some of the old men in the VALB were not happy about having to spend two days picketing the *Village Voice*. But these men were pensioners of businesses--a travel agency, a publishing house--that were associated with the Communist Party USA, and were ordered to go out and picket, and they had no choice in the matter. As for Harry Fisher and his letter, was I aware that Fisher had spent his life working for the New York office of Tass, the Soviet news agency?

"This struck me as a relevant bit of information, given Tass's reputation for dishonesty." (p. XVII)



So there you have it. Case closed. I couldn't be telling the truth because I worked for Tass. What other proof does he need? On one side, honorable Herrick and two dead men, on the other an eyewitness who couldn't be honest because of where he worked!

Herrick admits that he got his story from two Lincolns, both long dead. I was an eyewitness to Law's death and I'm still very much alive. Berman never asked me any questions! There were many veterans of Mosquito Hill still alive in 1986. Berman's office was only two short blocks from the VALB office. Why didn't he stop by the VALB office and ask for accounts of Law's death? Cecil, you were about 1,000 miles away from New York, and yet you spent two weeks interviewing vets in New York and other parts of the country. You obviously *tried* to get the truth.

Finally, Berman says we picketed the *Village Voice* because we were ordered to do so by the Communist Party USA. Berman reported that there was only one woman on the picket line, an old woman with white hair. Again, bad reporting. There were several women there that day, mostly young, including my daughter with her 3-year-old in a baby carriage. Also present were my fiend Tibby Brooks and Marc Crawford's wife, both young. And we were ordered to picket by the Communist Party! This is sheer nonsense. I can remember one or two of the picketing vets who were still members of the Communist Party. But the picket line was organized by Charles Nusser and Steve Nelson, both of whom had quit the Party more than 25 years earlier. That the C.P. could--or would--"order" us to attend a picket line is laughable. In fact, the C.P.'s newspaper, *The People's World*, never even *mentioned* the picketing, before or after. You see, the VALB was not popular with the Party anymore, because the veterans would not follow Party line.

Enough about Berman! (I needed to spend some time discussing him because I feel he is responsible for giving "legitimacy" to Herrick's lies. He gave Herrick a voice, and much more publicity than he otherwise would have received.)

From Herrick's new book, *Jumping the Line*:  
For years a shame I couldn't understand stood in the way of



my revealing this incident [the killing of the three young anarchists]. Finally, after several attempts ended in the wastepaper basket, I wrote a fictional scene in *Hermanos*, founded on what had happened in the church basement, and it was the antagonist himself who shot one of the three young revolutionaries. Afterwards, readers, friends, even professional historians, all who should know better than to confuse a fictional character with the writer, kept asking me, some even insisting, whether I had executed someone in Spain. Now I was afraid I would be called a killer. I would respond indignantly, Don't you give me credit as a fiction writer? It never happened. I was never in a church basement in my life. I made it all up.

Of what was I ashamed, of what was I guilty? I knew, whether I admitted it or not, that if Neumann had pushed a gun into my fist and ordered me to kill one of them, the chances are very great indeed that out of fear for my own life, I would have committed the crime. I was not, after all, the hero I thought I was, or hoped to be. (I must note that when Paul Berman interviewed me and I decided at last to reveal the incident, so distraught was I that I kept calling the three young people "guys," not mentioning that one was a young woman. Yet, it's my image of her which is the sharpest and most poignant.) (p.204)

Knowing as I do that Herrick has no qualms about lying, about ruining people's lives, about destroying the reputations of honorable dead men, the above paragraphs make my blood boil. Herrick, afraid that someone would call him a killer? Herrick holding a poignant image of the young anarchist woman? What garbage! None of it rings true. I have to wonder why, if the story is true, did Herrick wait fifty years to tell it? Why, after watching this supposed execution, did he collect money for the VALB? Cecil, if you have read Herrick's latest book, *Jumping the Line*, you know this is not a decent man, someone to be trusted or respected. He has no "poignancy" in him--not even for his own mother. He abuses and belittles people throughout the book--women, blacks, members of his own family. But suddenly he wants us to believe his guilt over witnessing three murders that were once-upon-a-time fiction (but no longer so) involving three men (one of whom now becomes a woman).

I'm sure that Herrick was telling the truth when he told his friends that he didn't do it, that he was never in the basement of a church, and it was all fiction. But when



Berman phoned him, Herrick saw his chance of getting publicity, of really selling his books. But he forgot to tell Berman that one of the anarchists was a girl, even though "it's my image of her which is the sharpest and most poignant." The sharpest and most poignant thing on his mind, and he forgot to mention it. What a story!

Cecil, I want you to know that Staughton Lynd wrote a review of Herrick's *Jumping the Line* in the Washington Post. I thought that it was too favorable a review, and I wrote to Lynd expressing my dismay. Lynd was kind enough to correspond with me, and I even had a chance to meet with him and discuss the issue. As a whole, he told me, he disliked the book, but felt that Herrick's description of the execution of the three young anarchists was so real and convincing, that he was impressed. So in the end, Herrick was right--if you tell a good enough story, people--even as sophisticated as Staughton Lynd--will fall for it.

Now Cecil, I'd like to comment on some other material in your book. Let me start by mentioning a footnote about the book *Fear in Battle*. You say that a majority of the VALB, when asked about how to treat deserters, said they would execute soldiers who deserted three times. I know this is true because John Murra worked on the survey. It's not something I'm proud of and I supported the minority view. I have no idea how the vets would vote today, but, in my mind, it is a black mark against the vets. Yet I wonder how American soldiers who served in the front lines during WWII would answer that question.

Here are some quotes that I question:

...When Miss Ellen Wilkinson, one of the MP's [of Great Britain] asked Doran about his duties as a brigade commissar, Doran thought a minute before saying pleasantly, "Well I could have any of these men shot." (p.188)

I knew Dave Doran and I can't believe he would have made this statement. I criticized Doran in my book for sending an anarchist, Pat Reid, home because he was



saying things against the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. He didn't have Pat Reid shot, that's for sure. Reid's punishment was to be sent home. And in spite of my criticism of Doran, he did a terrific job in Belchite convincing hundreds of fascists to surrender. I will never forget Doc Strauss giving the nuns, who were nurses, chocolate, water and medical equipment to take care of the wounded. I saw many nuns burst into tears of relief when they realized they were not going to be shot. Doran was responsible for the actions that day. He was not a killer. He was certainly not someone who would boast about having the power to kill--particularly about killing his own men! *If* this quote is even remotely accurate, I believe Doran was making a stupid joke with the undersatanding that Wilkinson would regard it as such. He would roll over in his grave with mortification if he knew he had been quoted as saying those words seriously. The worst part of that quote is that you don't give a source. You wrote the story as though it actually occurred. It's a terrible thing to say about a man who lost his life fighting fascism and, because he's dead, can't defend himself.

Here's another quote from your book.

Now Merriman arrived in an armored car and reassured them that the situation was not grave: The Mac Paps held the left flank solidly and the British occupied a reserve position in the olive grove to their rear. Before departing, Merriman promised the British would be sent up during the next lull in the battle. But no lull occurred. (p. 188)

That is not the way I remember it. I saw Merriman at about 3:00 AM, angrily bawling out Dave Reiss. Merriman claimed he had sent a runner many hours earlier, telling the Lincolns to take up positions because the fascists had broken our lines. He said that the situation *was* very grave. I have no memory of Merriman at the Hermitage at 9:00 AM. And I *did* see the British to our right in retreat. That is why Reiss, acting commander of the Lincolns at the time, sent me and Marty Sullivan to repair the telephone line to brigade headquarters in Belchite, so that he could *talk to Merriman* about the situation.



Another quote from the same book:

Everywhere groups of Lincolns were breaking from the line, plunging down Hermitage Hill toward Belchite. No one ordered a retreat, yet no one tried to stop them. It took an uncommonly brave man to watch his fellows deserting while he held on. (p.210)

Cecil, you make it sound like most of the Lincolns were cowards. Commander Reiss and Commissar De Witt Parker were dead. Many officers were dead or badly wounded. There was no one from Brigade at the Hermitage, which was why Reiss asked me and Sullivan to repair the telephone line. He was trying to get in touch with Merriman because he saw the British retreating on our right. There was nothing at all to do but try to get away from those hills or be killed or captured. It's a miracle that so many of our men lived through that day. We formed into groups and retreated as best we could. And for almost a month after, we kept fighting against terrible odds. In one battle at Caspe about a week later, one company was ordered to take a fascist hill outside of town. Many men didn't have bullets for their rifles, thanks to the Neutrality Act, and they were told to fill their pockets with stones. No, these men were not cowards.

Another quote:

Many men at remoter outposts were never notified of the retreat. They formed, by necessity rather than by desire, last-ditch pockets of resistance, covering the flight of their comrades until overwhelmed. Survivors would later rhapsodize about the heroism of men like Paul MacEachron, whom they abandoned ignominiously while holding the enemy at bay. (p.210)

This image was particularly distressing for me. Though I didn't know MacEachron, I did know the man who died at MacEachron's side, Jack Corrigan, and I wrote a lot about him in my book. But you make it look as though the men who lived through that day were cowards. Please remember dozens and dozens of fascist bombers and fighters were in the sky, and dozens of tanks surrounded our men. Bombs and shells were falling all around. The place was on fire. We had no telephone connections. This



was sheer pandemonium. MacEachron and others who were already surrounded must have known that they were doomed. It was impossible to get word to them to retreat, to get out any way they could, and even if we *had* been able to, it was too late. So when we "rhapsodize" about MacEachron and Corrigan, it is because they truly were heroes and martyrs, and we are grateful to them for giving their lives so others could escape with theirs. But no, they were not abandoned.

And still another quote:

...On the Azaila road bands of stragglers climbed on top of ambulances, and when the tops were packed they pulled out the wounded and piled into the van. It was dog-eat-dog". (p.211)

Cecil, if that ever happened, it would be worse than cowardice. You are describing monsters. Throwing the wounded out of ambulances--no, this never happened. I can't imagine where you got this story from. As you know, I went through most of the battles and I never saw or heard of anything like what you describe.

And still another one:

In these marathon retreats, the brave and obedient soldiers, like Paul MacEachron and Leo Gordon, were victimized, for they covered the getaway of others unwilling to defend themselves. Unfortunately for the Republic, however, the supply of sacrificial lambs had been depleted through overuse.

Trucks, ambulances, and staff cars raced through the stragglers, occupants leaning out of windows shouting, "The fascists are behind us." Such havoc-criers might as well have joined the Nationalist column. Pedestrians were knocked down and run over, wounded men were abandoned, rifles thrown away. (p.214).

Again Cecil, I went through the entire retreat. I never saw anything like this. I never heard anything like this. I feel that this story and others like it, must have been given to you by Herrick or by cowards who deserted and needed to find a way to assuage their guilt. By making the non-deserters look bad, by making us look like panic-stricken



cowards who cared less about the civilians around us than about our own necks, the deserters make it look like they did the right thing. I just don't believe that any Brigadista acted in this way. I know that you didn't make these stories up, and I only wish I knew who gave these stories to you. There *were* men like McQuiston, who was so frightened that he deserted, made his way home, and immediately went to HUAC to "bare his soul." Guilt makes people do strange things. There were obviously quite a few deserters. Most of them were decent people who couldn't take wars--understandable enough--but never testified before HUAC, and the VALB for that reason, never named them as deserters.

Here's another:

In the days that followed, the initiative passed to the Nationalists. It was not uncommon to see overhead a squadron of twenty Junker bombers escorted by sixty Fiat planes--without a single Republican aircraft in the sky. They sowed their bombs up and down the Sierra de Pandols. (p.296-97)

How true. During this time, not a single Republican plane was in the sky. This was our problem. We had very little to fight with. As you said earlier in your book, we were "outmanned, outgunned and outgeneralled." We didn't have a chance. Then why did we fight on? We were hoping that the democracies would see that the fascists were winning, and see the dangers that they faced in the near future, and we hoped that the French border would open and let the arms piling up on the French side, come in to help us. It never happened. So the fascists won, and the whole world lost because now we would have to fight in a terrible world war.

Now to the very difficult part of my report. I'll start by quoting from your book:

As might be expected, the VALB was rigorously pacific during the tenure of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, but when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, it promptly reverted to militant anti-fascism once again. Members participated in the "Smash Hitler Rally" at Madison Square Garden in July,



and a few months later Milton Wolff authored a pamphlet entitled *Western Front Now*. The *Volunteer for Liberty* gave great attention to the "major phase" of the allied war effort--and urged veterans to engage themselves in a war which miraculously was "imperialistic" no longer. Some six hundred Lincoln veterans (who were not necessarily VALB members) joined the armed services or the merchant marine during the Second World War, or roughly half the number of those who survived the Spanish war. Sixty-five are alleged to have become commissioned officers, twenty-five were killed. (p.314}

I was one of the majority of vets who supported the VALB position. In retrospect it's obvious that I was wrong, but I want you, Cecil, to understand how I and others felt about it. Remember that Great Britain and all the European countries signed a non-intervention pact at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. Even though Germany and Italy signed it, they of course ignored it and openly helped Franco with men and arms. The Soviet Union also signed the pact, but when Germany and Italy sent materiel to Franco, the Soviet Union sold arms to the Republican government. The fascists said they were helping Franco because the Spanish government was communistic. When the war broke out, there was not a single communist in the executive part of the government, and only 17 had been elected to the parliament of about 480 members. The Spanish government did not recognize the Soviet Union when the war started. The legal government of Spain tried to buy arms from the democracies, but they turned her down. They were forced to lean on the Soviet Union, and only then did Spain recognize them. The democracies were responsible for the Spanish government having to lean on the Soviet Union.

About six months after the SCW ended the Germans and Russians signed a non-aggression pact, and only then did the democracies get worried. They had expected the Germans to invade the Soviet Union. Most of us in the VALB, including me, supported the Soviet position because we felt it was a way for the Soviet Union to protect



itself, to buy time. After all, the U.S. and other democracies were fully hoping that Germany would destroy the Russians, as Hitler promised in *Mein Kampf*.

I now feel that once Hitler started to bomb the British, the Soviets should have broken their pact with Germany. They didn't. And we supported the Soviet signing of the non-aggression pact with Hitler and not getting involved in the war. We were wrong. We should have been making our own decisions and not following the Soviet line. I was as wrong as any of them.

Let's face it. Most Americans said that the Soviet Union was thinking only of itself. And of course, that was true. The Soviets did not want to get into a war with Hitler by itself. And the United States also wanted to stay out of a war with Hitler. That was the excuse it made for its Neutrality Act. We did not want to get more deeply involved. Even after more than ten European democracies were invaded by Germany, we were doing everything in our power *not* to antagonize Hitler, to stay out of the war. And this held true while England was being bombed.

Why was it wrong for the Soviet Union to try to keep out of the war but understandable for the U.S. to do so? I now believe that both the Soviet Union and the United States were wrong.

When Secretary of State Hull was asked by reporters why he allowed American oil companies and truck makers to send their goods to the fascists, his answer was that oil and trucks were not arms. (Cecil, if you doubt this and want substantiation, just let me know.) So for years, the U.S. was not neutral, and actually aided the fascists. I'm sure you remember the story of the German ship, the *St. Louis*, with almost 1,000 Jews onboard hoping to get asylum in Cuba. This was three months before Hitler invaded Poland. Cuba turned the ship away, and the ship's German captain, evidently a decent man, tried to get the U.S. to give the passengers asylum, but we turned them down, also in the hope we would not antagonize Hitler.



My very strong feeling is that our Neutrality Act prevented Spain from buying the arms so badly needed to help "make Madrid the tomb of fascism." It was a major reason for the fascist victory in Spain. And Hitler knew that many leaders in the democratic countries, *wanted* him to win in Spain and then, as he promised in *Mein Kampf*, to invade the Soviet Union. Yes, it's true that Hitler double-crossed these people by signing the non-aggression pact with Stalin. But it was only then that the democracies realized that Hitler intended to subdue the European democracies before attacking the Soviet Union.

Very few Americans know about the role played by the United States in the years leading up to WWII. Even our top leaders of that period, the men most responsible for the Neutrality Act, admitted it was a terrible mistake. Let me quote a few words from Claude Bowers, the American ambassador to Spain during the SCW in his book, *My Mission to Spain*:

I found President Roosevelt seated at his desk in the White House residence, more serious and graver than I had ever seen him before. I got the impression that he was not happy over the course we had followed. Before I could sit down or utter a word, he said, "We made a mistake; you have been right all along." These words were said in the last weeks of the war, when it was obvious that the fascists would be victorious.

The night of the day I saw President Roosevelt, I was with Senator Key Pitman, an old friend, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and author of the embargo, from nine o'clock until dawn, alone in his house. When I entered, after shaking hands, he walked over to a table for a cigarette, saying over his shoulders, "I am afraid we made a mistake in Spain."

A few days later, I was standing beside Mr. Messersmith at a reception given me by Senator Guffey, when Sol Bloom, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House, approached, and asked if I would appear before his committee and give it my impressions about Spain...The committee met in secret session and there was a full attendance.. I talked frankly for more than an hour, receiving the closest and most courteous attention... When asked if I thought the embargo had contributed to the fascist triumph, I replied that it



unquestionable had. At the conclusion I was warmly cheered, and I had the feeling that the committee was sympathetic to my view.

Thus the president had said we had made a mistake.

Senator Pitman, author of the embargo, had said we had made a mistake.

The house committee was sympathetic.

But it was too late." (1954, p. 419}

My God, was it ever! The result of our mistake--WWII. Fifty million people, about half civilians, killed. First atomic bombs used. The holocaust. The most devastating war in world history.

I'm telling you all this, Cecil, so you can know how I feel more than sixty years after the war. Our young people know nothing of this history. It's so important that the truth be known, so that the same mistakes are not made again. Herrick's book, and yes, your book and many others make the Americans who sacrificed their lives trying to stop fascism look like evil people. It makes me sick. I know that we made mistakes, plenty of them. But we were the first Americans to try to stop Hitler, and most of us were wounded, maimed or killed. And then to be treated like criminals! It is terribly unfair, the supreme injustice. I am writing all of this to you because I hope you will make corrections in the next edition of your book. I get the feeling, after talking to you, that you are looking for the truth. The fact that you want to interview people who went through the SCW speaks well of you. and yes, I'm pouring my heart out to you. I want you to know that even though we made mistakes, we tried--oh how we tried--to put an end to fascism. I hope that the next edition of your book will be more accurate, especially the part about Oliver Law. I feel more than anything else, that you owe him an apology.

Thanks for taking the time to get my view.

Again, Cecil. I'm looking forward to any questions you have.



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