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Comrades and Commissars: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War

Cecil D. Eby

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In the summer of 1936, Generalissimo Francisco Franco led a group of right-wing nationalists in a military attack on the Republican government of Spain—the start of what would become the Spanish Civil War. Despite U.S. laws banning participation in foreign conflicts, American volunteers began pouring into Barcelona in January 1937. The most famous of these anti-Franco groups was the band of 2,800 American fighters who called themselves the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. In *Comrades and Commissars*, Cecil D. Eby pushes beyond the bias that has dominated study of the Lincoln Battalion and gets to the very heart of the American experience in Spain.

Controversy has plagued the Lincoln Battalion from the very start. Were these men selfless defenders of liberty or un-American Communists? Eby has long been regarded as one of the few balanced interpreters of their history. His 1969 book, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, won accolades for its rigorous and fair treatment of the Battalion. *Comrades and Commissars* builds upon that earlier study, incorporating a wealth of information collected over intervening decades. New oral histories, previously untranslated memoirs, and newly declassified official documents all lend even greater authority and perspective to Eby's account. Most significant is Eby's use of Lincoln Battalion archives sequestered in a Moscow storeroom for sixty years. These papers draw renewed focus on some of the most provocative questions surrounding the Battalion, including the extent to which Americans were persecuted—and even executed—by the brigade commissariat.

The Americans who served in the Lincoln Battalion were neither mythic figures nor political abstractions. Poorly trained and equipped, they committed themselves to back-to-the-wall defense of the doomed Spanish Republic. In *Comrades and Commissars*, we at last have the authoritative account of their experiences.

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