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A Long Way from Minneapolis: Minnesotans in the Spanish Civil War

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"A Long Way From Minneapolis": Minnesotans in the Spanish Civil War

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For Bekah, who listened

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In 1996, eighty-one-year-old Minnesotan Clarence Forester and sixty-seven fellow Americans traveled to Barcelona at the behest of the Spanish government. There, they feasted at state banquets, received honorary Spanish citizenship, and paraded down the streets of Barcelona to throngs of Spaniards ten deep. Forester later mused that as he moved through the crowds, some of the Spaniards he talked to that day were in their seventies. Perhaps the women and men who kissed him were the same boys and girls who had clung to his legs at another Barcelonian parade. Fifty-eight years earlier, in October 1938, Forester had marched down the streets of Barcelona, a man whose experiences made him much older than his years. For although he was just nearing his twenty-fourth birthday, he had already fought a war.

Forester was one of sixty Minnesota men who volunteered to fight for the Spanish Republic during Spain's Civil War of 1936-1939. Together with 3,500 men from across United States, they formed the American contingent of what would come to be known as the International Brigades - military and medical units formed of international volunteers for the Republican cause. Defying their own government's wishes, these Americans slipped into Spain by foot, rail, and sea to fight against what they saw as a grave injustice: that a democratically elected government was being strangled by a fascist coup. As defenders of democracy, they named themselves after Abraham Lincoln, someone they saw as their precursor.[1] The Lincolns believed they were following their namesake's example by defending a legitimate government from an illegal attack, and at the same time, striking a blow against the fascist powers of Europe.

While their commitment to their ideals is admirable, it is also difficult to understand from the 21st century. It is almost unfathomable for a modern American to contemplate travel across an ocean, voluntary military service in a strange land, and death in an olive grove - even for a dearly held cause. Yet, for sixty Minnesotans, this was not merely a possible, but an actual choice. Further, it was a defining moment of their lives. More than half a century later, Clarence Forester still knew that "nothing [could] give me a greater feeling of pride than to be able to say, 'I'm a veteran of the Lincoln brigade.'"[2] So why did sixty Minnesotan men travel to a foreign country to fight and die for a government and people they had no previous connection to? In addition, how was their decision to volunteer renewed, challenged, deepened, or shattered by their experiences of war in Spain? And how did volunteers continue to understand their decision as they became veterans and returned to the United States?

[1] This paper will refer to the men as "Lincolns" and to the unit they served in as the "Lincoln Brigade." This is not quite accurate, but is a common practice. There never was a Lincoln Brigade, only a Lincoln Battalion, part of the XV International Brigade. In actuality, Minnesotans served in several different battalions in Spain. However, it is common practice to lump all Americans together under the heading of the "Lincoln Brigade," a practice continued here.

[2] Clarence Forester, interview by Jay Hutchinson, Oral History (VHS), Minnesota, [2000]. 142.G.6.8F-1, Box 2, Clarence M. Forester Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

To explain what motivated sixty Minnesotans to volunteer for a foreign war is to plunge into their world and survey the societal forces that shaped their lives. The America into which these men were born or emigrated was a nation entering an extraordinarily turbulent time - one marked by increasing labour strife, populist unrest, and economic instability. These phenomena generated the popular movements in which the volunteers were swept up.

Even so, to see their choices as motivated solely by their temporal place in history is misguided, for as much as the Lincolns were subject to the larger forces of history, they were also active shapers of many of the movements they participated in. Minnesota Lincolns were active in the early direct-action unionism of the International Workers of the World and the development and expansion of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA). They also took part in key events in midwest labour history such as the Farm Holiday movement and the 1934 Minneapolis Trucker's strike.

Thus, explaining their participation in the war also necessitates an exploration of the men's personal stories - their individual circumstances, family histories, ethnic identities, and political commitments. In other words, to explain why these men went to Spain is to peer into sixty individual biographies and to place them in their proper historical context.[3]

In order to understand the kind of Minnesotan who went to Spain, it is useful to examine the demographics of the group as a whole. Although comprehensive statistical data is impossible to find for Minnesota - or indeed for the International Brigades as a whole - it is nevertheless feasible to assemble a reasonably coherent picture of the typical Minnesota Lincoln.[4] Such an examination suggests several important ways in which social location, ethnicity, and community influenced the men's choice to fight in Spain. In general, the men shared several commonalities - class, education, and income level, for example - which I posit made them more likely to be willing to volunteer. However, they also displayed considerable diversity, particularly in their ethnic identities or national origin. While ethnicity clearly provided some Lincolns their ethos of commitments, it is likely that this factor merely reinforced the larger social patterns on display and did not function as a distinct countervailing impetus.

In 1907, in a small town on the outskirts of Odessa, Benjamin Poberesky was born to Ukrainian Jewish parents, the youngest of three boys. Within a few years of his birth, Benjamin would leave the

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[3] Peter Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 14.

[4] "Abraham Lincoln Brigade Database," The Abraham Lincoln Battalion Archives, last accessed May 12, 2014, http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/about-the-database. The demographic data used in this section are largely from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Database. The database draws from Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade records, government, archival, print, and other sources and is an ongoing project of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive (ALBA). While I have not cross-checked the accuracy of every piece of information listed, I have compared the data to my own research to the extent possible. From this exercise, I conclude that the data has reasonable substantive integrity and thus consider it to be trustworthy for broad-level analysis. For more on this and related issues, see Appendices A, and B.

Ukraine. His father departed for Duluth, Minnesota sometime before 1917 and later that year, his wife and sons joined him. It is not clear why the family emigrated, but it would hardly be remiss to suggest the Great War likely played a role. There are also no records indicating how the Poberesky family made their living once in Duluth, but it's reasonable to infer the family was working class; according to a 1930 census, it's probable that Benjamin's father - like most Slavic immigrants in Duluth - worked in the steel plant.[5]

Benjamin's age - he was thirty when he left for Spain in 1937 - highlights the mature age of Minnesota's Lincolns. In fact, Benjamin was less than two years older than the average Minnesota volunteer who was slightly more than twenty-eight years old.[6] While there were several eighteen year old Minnesotans among the Lincolns, the oldest was fifty - an entire generation older than even the average Lincoln. These statistics match well with those assembled by other scholars and even indicate that Minnesota's Lincolns were slightly older than the national average. As Peter Carroll concludes, "these figures indicate that the average [...] volunteer [...] was no impulsive youth."[7]

Like Benjamin, Alexander Mikhail L'vovich Zlatkovski was born in the Ukraine in 1910, a few years after his countryman. Unlike Benjamin, Alexander was the son of Russified Jewish parents.[8] His father, Mikhail, was a medical doctor - the result of years of difficult study, bribery, and luck (Jews were denied access to tertiary education in this period). His mother was fiercely proud, a passionate adoptee of Russian culture, and had buried her Jewish roots and yiddish language deeply. Both of Alexander's parents were committed atheists and revolutionaries - the father was jailed for his participation in the abortive 1905 revolution. As such, Alexander grew up entirely disconnected from Judaism; the family had, after all, made the difficult leap into the pre-war Russian intelligentsia and were considered by virtue of Mikhail's medical degree, "honorary hereditary citizens" according to the tables of rank established by Peter the Great.[9] Thus, in class and social position, the two future Lincolns were widely separated.

This in itself is unusual. While Alexander's family seems to have always had access to a sort of shabby wealth (even if their circumstances, practically speaking, vacillated), Benjamin's family was solidly proletarian. The latter was far closer to the norm. While the Lincoln Brigade has been romanticised as an army of literati,

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[5] June Drenning Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 412.

[6] A full table the key demographic information discussed in this and the following sections appears in Appendices A and B.

[7] Carroll, *Odyssey,*15-16; 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 (Ph.D diss., Claremont University, 1971), 332-333. An older study by Robert Rosenstone concludes that the mode of the volunteer's ages was 22. (Robert Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 372.) In general, newer studies seem to 'grey' the age of the Lincolns.

[8] Jennet Conant, *A Covert Affair: Julia Child and Paul Child in the OSS* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 214.

[9] George Zlatovski, "An Anti-Hero of Our Times," (memoir), The George Zlatovski Papers IHRC2913, Jewish (Eastern Europe) American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, 6.

intellectuals, poets, and artists, the reality was usually far different. Admittedly, notable exceptions exist. New York's Alvah Bessie - later blacklisted with the Hollywood Ten - fought with the Lincolns, and at various points, Langston Hughes, Martha Gellhorn, Paul Robeson, and perhaps most famously, Ernest Hemingway, were associated with the Brigade.

Still, the vast majority of the men - certainly the Minnesotan men - were true proletarians. Most were born poor, and by examining their occupations, it is evident that they largely remained so. The most common given among Minnesotans were that of truck driver, laborer, and mechanic, a list which closely mirrors the national occupational data.[10] These positions earned low wages and were highly unstable during the depression, a fact highlighted by the estimated 40 percent unemployment rate in 1937.[11] Further, five of the Lincolns identified themselves as "organizers" - almost certainly shorthand for 'unemployed.'

The juxtaposition of Alexander and Benjamin's stories disguises another key facet of Minnesota's Lincolns. Both men were of Jewish background and both were from Ukraine. In fact, neither of these traits were shared broadly by the rest of the volunteers. Although certain scholars have estimated the incidence of Jewish participation in the International Brigades to be upwards of one third, Jews account for only six of Minnesota's men (10 percent).[12] Even so, it is probable that, like Alexander, none of Minnesota's Jews identified with their religion, either religiously or culturally.

Likewise, the two men were atypical for their Ukrainian-Slavic extraction. Most Minnesota Lincolns were not from Ukraine, although Ukrainians represented the second largest known ethnicity at 6 percent. The single largest ethnic group represented was undoubtedly the Finns, comprising a full 40 percent of the total. This is a phenomenon that is likely unique to Minnesota and possibly Michigan, as those two states contained the largest population of Finns in the country.[13] Certainly, Minnesota's preponderance of Finns is exceptional. Besides the Finns and Ukrainians, nearly every other early 20th century immigrant group to Minnesota is represented. The remaining men - in groups of one or two - sort mainly into the Scandinavian countries, central and south-eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean regions. Perhaps the least expected nationalities represented are one Sioux Native American and a Chinese international student.

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[10] Peter Carroll, in his *Odyssey* (16), gives seamen, drives, and mechanics as the three top occupations. Minnesota would naturally have fewer seaman or longshoremen than a coastal state like New York; even so, the iron ore shipping in the Great Lakes allowed Minnesota to claim four sailors. Rosenstone's *Crusade* (368) gives more weight to students, teachers, and miners, although once again, seamen top the list. Stewart's "Eternal Fields" shows a balance between the other two lists (334).

[11] See Appendix B for more detail.

[12] Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field," 333; Carroll, *Odyssey*, 18.

[13] Stewart, "Summoned to the Eternal Field," 333. Stewart, on 331, gives a total of 42 Minnesota volunteers, representing 1.88 percent of the national pool (n = 2,232). He lists 47 Finns nationwide; assuming the present author's 40 percent Finn-to-Other ratio holds for Stewart's numbers, Minnesota accounted for nearly half of *all* of the Finnish volunteers. Arnold Alanen gives slightly different figures: 100 Finns went to Spain, and a full 25 percent hailed from Minnesota (Arnold R. Alanen, *Finns in Minnesota* [St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012], 2; 60.)

This list is striking for two reasons. First, nearly every group represented is part of the so-called "third wave" of immigration. Stretching from about 1880 to 1920, this period saw the bulk of Minnesota's immigrants shift south and east from the British Isles and western Europe. Instead of French, Germans, and English, Minnesota saw increasing numbers of Finns, Danes and Swedes, Poles, Hungarians, Ukrainian Jews and Slavs, Greeks, and Italians.[14] It was primarily from these newer immigrant groups that the Lincolns were drawn. Second, the list is equally conspicuous for its lack of older immigrant stock. Aside from two Germans and three men who, while their ethnicity is unknown, have distinctly English surnames, the Spanish cause did not appear to have appealed to established immigrants and their fully-Americanized children.

Back in Europe, Alexander was living the events from which he would later describe himself as part of the "flotsam and jetsam of the First World War." Around 1914, his family moved from Kiev to a small village about one hundred miles north of L'vov, then on the Austro-Hungarian border. That summer, he remembered cheering squadrons of cavalry and long lines of infantry as they moved to the front. Toward the end of the year, the soldiers were back - ragged and bloodied. The family moved to St. Petersburg.[15]

It was in that port city that Alexander began his love of culture and literature that would last a lifetime. Accompanying his mother, Alexander attended countless plays - the works of Gorky, Chekhov, and Bernard Shaw, among others. He also frequented museums and developed a voracious appetite for reading. Several years later, when the family was living back near L'vov, the house's library was exposed to the frigid winter air (the house had been shelled during the Civil War). Alexander got so caught up in his reading that he forgot to move back into the heated house and was nearly frostbit.

Amidst these cultural pursuits however, Russian society was splintering. The February Revolution was "[enormously] exciting" for the young boy, who remembered, with his young school peers, participating in the adult violence. Down the street from the primary school Alexander attended was an orphanage. Inspired by the local chaos, the boys from each institution began a feud. Meeting during recess, they fought each other with sticks, stones, and boards - one student was even killed. Alexander remembered the "thrill I felt when one of our leaders, an older boy, praised me for bravery during one of these battles." When the Bolshevik Revolution began later in the year, Alexander's exposure to violence continued. Several times, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks fought around the family home, leaving bloodied corpses in the yard for the boy to observe with fascination.[16]

As the Civil War progressed and the Bolsheviks solidified their hold on power, the Zlatkovski family remained fed only by the intervention of a local party official whose life Alexander's father had saved. The

[14] Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota*, 3.
[15] Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 1.
[16] Ibid., 13-20.

children - Alexander and his younger sister Helen - received food from the Hoover relief plan, but the rations were barely sufficient to survive. In 1922, Mikhail decided to move the family to Duluth, Minnesota, where most of his family had been living since 1903. Alexander remembered being excited by the prospect of a trip to America but repelled by changing his language and culture. His mother however, was utterly against emigrating. The trip out of the Soviet Union was harrowing, but the family eventually reached Cherbourg and departed for New York. Within the month, they had arrived in Duluth.[17]

The Zlatkovskis arrived in Duluth in 1922, some five years after Benjamin Poberesky and his family had emigrated to the same city. No evidence suggests they knew each other, in spite of their shared background. This is perhaps expected - Benjamin was three years older than Alexander and was nearing the end of his schooling. Benjamin, now known as Ben Gardner (the family had opted for the more American-sounding surname sometime after arriving in the United States) was a dedicated student in Duluth's primary and secondary schools. In spite of this, his father forced him to drop out of high school, insisting Ben seek work. Ben's later writings hint at the frustration this caused; although he evidently enjoyed cultural activities - frequently commenting on symphonic concerts and operas he'd attended - his writing self-admittedly betrayed his truncated education. Often lacking words for what he wished to express, it is evident that he remained a curious man through his adult life.[18] In those years before the Depression, jobs were easier to come by. After dropping out of school, Ben was able to find steady employment as an automotive painter from 1924 to 1928.

Ben's frustration at his lack of schooling is a trend seen in several of the other Minnesota Lincoln's lives. In spite of their truncated formal education (or perhaps because of it), many of the men developed into voracious readers. Alexander Zlatkovski's love of literature, theatre, and the arts developed early, nursed by the availability of books and cultural outlets in St. Petersburg and the Ukraine. Although Alexander's cultural tastes would be stifled in Duluth, he did find solace in the public library. Another Minnesota Finn, Veikko Lindfors, who grew up in Minneapolis, was also remembered for his love of books. Veikko's favourite was the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and he was remembered for knowing "a little something about everything."[19]

Even so, the general level of formal education was low to middling, with a few notable exceptions, the foremost of which was Dr. Franklin Bissel Jr. Bissel, a German-American who had received his M.D.

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[17] Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 27a-42. Among the more interesting stories Zlatovski recounts is how the family moved the money gained through the sale of their home to the New World. Mikhail was able to exchange his gold rubles for a giant ruby. The ruby was smuggled across the Soviet border, sewn into the coat of an unsuspecting man. After the family was safely in Warsaw, Alexander's mother casually offered to repair the man's coat; the ruby was extracted and later exchanged for Polish marks, and so forth. If discovered, the 'mule' would have likely been executed for expropriating Soviet wealth.

[18] Gardner to Alice, May 27, 1938, Benjamin Gardner Papers, ALBA.141, Box 1, Folder 2, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives; Gardner to Alice, July 17, 1938, Box 1, Folder 3; Gardner to Alice, October 22, 1938, Box 1, Folder 3.

[19] Lindfors, interview by author.

from the University of Vienna in 1932, was likely the wealthiest of the Minnesota Lincolns. His passport application listed houses in California and New York, and he appears to have operated a successful medical practice in Minneapolis. Other Lincolns did attend college - and graduate - but their studies were often interrupted by economic distress. Such was the case for Donald Thayer of Rochester, a sometime student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison whenever he could afford a semester's tuition. In a familiar scenario, Thayer turned to books in his spare time, reading widely even as his formal education lagged.[20]

Like Ben Gardner, Clarence Forester was unable to continue his schooling as he wished. And like other Lincolns, he compensated for this by becoming an an avid reader. Clarence was born in 1915 in a small town in east-central North Dakota. He was the ninth of ten children born to a Finnish mother and an Irish father. Always poor, the Forester family became poorer still when the father died, leaving Clarence's mother with several young children to support (the oldest children - Rudolph and Walter - were born of their mother's previous marriage to a Finn and had left the home years before Clarence was born). As a result, when Clarence and his siblings turned twelve, each was sent out to the surrounding farms to work. Clarence's education suffered; he managed to work through seventh grade but had to quit that year.[21]

In 1930, having just turned fifteen years old, Clarence decided to leave the farms of his childhood and look for work in Minneapolis. Travelling the three hundred-sixty miles south was cheap, if uncomfortable: by laying flat on the tensioning rods which undergirded certain freight cars, Clarence was able to freight-hop to the Twin Cities.[22] Once there, he ended up in the Gateway Park area of Minneapolis, just south of Nicollet Island. Minnesota had taken longer than some states to fully realise the effects of the depression, but by the summer of 1930, the unemployment crisis was beginning to hit the Twin Cities.[23] Gateway Park had been transformed into a space for out-of-work men to sleep, stay, and generally wait for opportunities.[24] Clarence fit right in. Hungry, he later remembered walking by the Farmer's Market a few blocks south of Gateway and seeing stalls of fruits and vegetables. After a few more passes, he "grabbed an apple."[25] After spending "about a week" in Minneapolis, Clarence sought better luck in the north. Hopping

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[20] Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left,* 105.

[21] D.J. Tice, *Minnesota's Twentieth Century: Stories of Extraordinary Everyday People* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 96.

[22] Lindfors, interview by author. Although initially skeptical of Forester's claim to have ridden under the freight car, subsequent research produced period photos of men doing exactly that. Certain types of railcars evidently had tensioning rods running underneath fore to aft and rail-riders could lie on these.

[23] Norman K. Risjord, *A Popular History of Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), 91.

[24] Raymond L. Koch, "Politics and Relief in Minneapolis During the 1930s" *Minnesota History* Winter (1968): 153-170, 154.

[25] Clarence Forester, interview by Carl E. Ross, Oral History (transcript), Minneapolis, 1989. AV1990.228.18, Twentieth Century Radicalism in Minnesota Oral History Project, Minnesota Historical Society. Gateway Park is presently the site of the Minneapolis Public Library. The Farmer's Market in 1930 was located at 3rd Avenue North and 6th and 7th Streets, under

another train, he planned to join his two half brothers in Superior, Wisconsin - a small town on the nose of Lake Superior.

Clarence's early life illustrates one of the ways in which the Minnesota Lincolns both blend into and starkly emerge from the conventional picture of early 20th century Minnesotan population geography. Although most were born within the state's borders or in neighboring midwestern states, their parents were not, being mostly first-generation immigrants. As such, when the the Lincolns' parents first entered the country, they could largely choose where to settle within the area. As most of their fellow third-wave immigrants (those who arrived during the period 1890-1920) came to Minnesota just as supplies of relatively cheap, fertile land were quickly depleting, they tended to settle in urban areas.[26] The Lincolns' families starkly rejected this trend, choosing predominantly to settle in rural areas. Of the thirty-four Lincolns with known birthplaces, twenty-one were born into small towns and rural areas, while only thirteen spent their first years in larger cities. This suggests that ethnic ties among at least some groups played an important role in determining their family's final destination.

The Finnish Lincolns again illustrate the point, although Clarence himself was exempt from the effect. His birthplace - Alfred, North Dakota - does not fit the general Finnish settlement pattern, a fact likely explained by his father's ethnicity. As an Irishman with a Finnish wife, the elder Forester would not have felt particularly strong ethnic ties to the state's Finns. It's telling to note that Mrs. Forester's two eldest sons, (she was previously married to a Finn) left the home for Superior, Wisconsin - a hotbed of Finnish settlement.

Clarence's family aside, early rural Finnish settlements in Minnesota were clustered in two areas. First, beginning in the 1870s, Finnish immigrants established a farming community in Cokato county, about 60 miles west of the Twin Cities. But it was the second area of settlement, far to the north, that would attract the greatest concentration of Finns - the counties in and around Duluth: St. Louis, Aitkin, and Carlson. This area proved initially attractive for three reasons: the Mesabi iron range (producer of a quarter of the world's iron ore), the logging and lumberjack camps, and the availability of cheap, poor quality land. Known as the 'cutover region,' this was farmland that had been cleared of its treecover by rapacious logging, leaving behind thousands of stumps. This land was advertised specifically to Finns by various land developers. As one land broker's pitch read: "The only language the stumps understand is Finnish."[27] The land was desolate, filled with tree stumps and rocks.[28] Furthermore, a great fire had swept through the region in 1918, leaving great swaths of the countryside burned. An older Lincoln, Pete Jorgensen, was living in the area at the time. His

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what is now Target Field. That market (1891-1937) was the second of three, the first (1876-1891) at 1st and Hennepin and the current at Lyndale and Glennwood.

[26] Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota,* 3.

[27] Ibid., 204.

[28] Alanen, *Finns in Minnesota*, 10-12; 31; Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 42.

sister remembered how the fire had burned across their property and then ignited the peat soil: "the only thing that [will] put out peat is water [...] on top of it. It burned all summer, all winter." Out of the more than five-hundred killed, one hundred and seventy-five were Finns.[29] It was into this general area that the greatest number of Finnish Lincolns were born.

Yet if Clarence's birthplace did not fit the larger pattern, his behavior as a young adult did. Although greater numbers than expected were raised on farms, the future Lincolns did not stay in the countryside. In this respect, the Lincolns did fit into the broader pattern of population geography. By 1937, fifteen of the twenty-one rural-born Lincolns had moved to large regional or national cities and only six had remained in their place of birth or moved to a similarly sized rural town. This reflects the larger regional trend. In the midwest, the percentage of urban dwellers rose from 38 percent in 1920 to nearly 60 percent by 1930.[30] Their reasons for moving mirrored Clarence's: urbanization was almost invariably for economic reasons, particularly after the Great Depression began.

Of course, it was not only Finns that lived in the Minnesota north. In 1922, the newly christened George Zlatovski (the twelve year old Alexander adopted "George" because it sounded more American while the entire family dropped the extra "k" from the surname) was newly arrived in the St. Louis county seat. He later described his life in Duluth as "so bitter that it is hard for me even now to write about it." To George, Duluth's cultural life felt how the place looked - "lunar." With only two newspapers, no bookstores, no theatre (until the 1930s), and no orchestra, the provincial town was far removed from what George had been accustomed to in St. Petersburg. While he found solace in the single public library, George began to wither in the company of townspeople he described as utterly uninterested in intellectual pursuits, faddish, and superficial.[31]

Compounding George's sense of intellectual isolation was the cultural alienation he felt from Duluth's citizens. Although the city did not harbor the same antisemitic impulses as Minneapolis did at the time, ethnic tension abounded.[32] The old stock immigrants - English and Scotch - controlled the natural resources in the area, particularly the mines. As a new immigrant, George received his share of mockery. Once a fellow student asked him casually, "Say Trotsky, do Russians live in houses, like we do?" "Trotsky," adopting a sarcastic tone, replied, "No, the Russians live in igloos." Evidently, the sarcasm was lost on the

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[29] Clara Jorgensen, et al, interview with Steve Trimble and Tom O'Connell, Oral History (transcript), Askov, Minnesota, AV1990.228.65, Twentieth Century Radicalism in Minnesota Oral History Project; Alanen, *Finns in Minnesota*, 39.

[30] Census Bureau, *Population and Housing Unit Counts* from 2010 Census of Population and Housing CPH-2-1, Washington, D.C., 2012, http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/cph-2-1.pdf, (accessed 2014-05-06), 23.

[31] Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 50-51.

[32] Iric Nathanson, *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century: The Growth of an American City* (Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010), 96-97; Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 44. Zlatovski's claim that little antisemitism existed in Duluth is striking, but is borne out by other Jewish oral histories such as: Myrna Katz Frommer and Harvey Frommer, *Growing Up Jewish in America: An Oral History* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 71.

schoolmate. In spite of his efforts to fit in with his schoolmates - playing sports, joining the YMCA - George continually failed to achieve the coveted status as a "clean-cut, classy, Christian, American boy." Eventually, he "earned the right to be an eccentric," a distinctly unsatisfying achievement.[33]

Zlatovski's disaffection with American society seems to have largely stemmed from the difficulty he had integrating into American culture. George had entered the country while the Americanization movement, a holdover from the populism of WWI, was still strong. Another Minnesota Lincoln to experience the travails of American racism was the Chinese student Chi Chang. Chang had come to the United States to study mining engineering at the University of California. After his first year, he transferred to the University of Minnesota to complete his degree, along the way working various jobs to earn his necessary expenses. One summer, Chang joined a group of Chinese actors and musicians for a midwest tour. The group's performances were designed to "bring a better understanding between the two 'sister republics'" (the Chinese Civil War was ongoing at the time). Chang was disgusted at the spectacle the performances entailed, which he described as "a group of awe-inspired children watching the tricks of a few 'sports model monkeys.'" He regularly encountered Americans of the belief that the only good extant across the ocean was American - chiefly that of missionary work in China. Although Chang found solace in a group of friends who could frankly and openly acknowledge their racial differences, he was disturbed by the racism in mainstream society that he witnessed.[34] Thus, the continuing ethnic tensions Zlatovski felt as an immigrant were hardly unique. Moreover, even native-born Lincolns often expressed dissatisfaction and disillusionment with American culture. Those feelings were generated in part by Depression-era economic distress and, as in Zlatovski's case, ethnic pressures. The most significant form of disillusionment though, was political - a feeling held by nearly every Lincoln.

In 1928, George graduated from High School, where he had earned middling marks in all subjects except literature, history, and French, for, in spite of being an excellent student capable of academic brilliance, his disaffection with the town led him to abandon all by the most perfunctory interest in school. At his mother's insistence, he did not enroll in the University of Minnesota the next year, but began seriously studying for a piano scholarship to the Juilliard Institute in New York. Although he quickly realised his prospects as a pianist were poor, and at any rate, the plan was interrupted when his mother contracted tuberculosis in 1930. By 1931, his mother was dead; her last words to her only son were: "Coward! Why are you crying? We all must go through this."[35] The experience shattered the twenty-one year old and launched him into a two-year depression, punctuated by reckless behavior.

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[33] Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 49-50, 59.
[34] Chi Chang, "Going Through College," *Chinese Students Monthly* 21:2 (1925): 36-40.
[35] Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 62.

On this sensitive point, researcher Peter Carroll has identified an interesting trend. Highlighting the overrepresentation of Lincolns from what might be called "broken homes" - homes in which a separation or death has removed one parent - Carroll concludes that familial disruption appeared to be a common problem in 1930s America, and that children who came from such homes "may have formed psychological patterns - anger or aggression or outrage at injustice - that made them more likely candidates for a volunteer army."[36] Carroll's conclusions seem tenable, and the death of a parent certainly shaped more than one Minnesota Lincoln's life in significant ways. In Clarence Forester's life, the death of his father pushed the family into deeper poverty. For George Zlatovski, his mother's death "destroy[ed] the foundations of [his] existence."[37] While too much should not perhaps be made of these examples, the existence of the trend is worth noting.

The year before his mother's death, George had enrolled in the University of Minnesota's new Duluth branch campus as a civil engineer. After her death, he transferred to the main campus in Minneapolis where he "wasted" the next two years.[38] Eschewing the mandatory ROTC classes, George pursued a life of "dissipation," as he admitted fifty years later: he had been obsessed with sex for years, but according to the "Byronic" view he held of himself, exercised great pains to keep himself chaste. After his mother's death, George's self-imposed puritanism died too, and he allowed himself to fully participate in the libertine atmosphere of the city. Graduating in 1932 or '33, George entered the worst labor market in decades. With no hope of finding an engineering job, he embarked on a series of low-skilled jobs - building roads in Wisconsin and surveying timber in Ely.

Clarence Forester too, was frustrated at his inability to find work in Minneapolis. Just a week after arriving in Minneapolis, the fifteen-year-old Clarence decided to head north and join his older brothers, Walter and Rudolph, in Superior Wisconsin. Both brothers were deeply involved in Finnish communist work - Walter headed the Workers and Farmers Cooperative Unity Alliance and Rudolph edited the *Työmies-Eteenpäin* (*Workers, Forward!),* a radical weekly. Clarence evidently found better prospects in Superior than in Minneapolis as he appears to have stayed there for several years. In Superior, Clarence evidently spent much time discussing left-wing concerns, but never became particularly politically active. Like George, Clarence was able to find piecemeal work. Once, he assisted his brother on a tour of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan where he learned the film projectionist's trade.

The desperate job searches that both Clarence and George carried out illuminate another common trend among the Lincolns: they changed residences and jobs frequently. Over a period of six months,

[36] Carroll, *Odyssey,* 17.
[37] Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 60.
[38] Ibid., 62-63.

George lived in Minneapolis, Ashland Wisconsin, Ely Minnesota, and Duluth, with as many jobs.[39] Clarence travelled from North Dakota to Minneapolis, and back north to Superior within a little more than a week. Other Lincolns experienced frequent relocation as well. While relocation appears to have been generally more frequent in the 1930s, the Lincolns seem to have moved especially often, seeking work or pursuing political goals.

Their continual relocations suggest a partial explanation for the low marriage rate among the Lincolns. Out of the thirty five men whose marital status is known, only five were married. Although the Depression pushed marriage ages up across society, this effect still does not account for the singleness of most Minnesota Lincolns.[40] Besides the economic hardship that supporting a wife brought, the constant movement of the men mitigated against marriage. George's experiences with women suggest a further explanation. Although 1930s society still disapproved of extramarital sex, the Lincolns largely operated outside of respectable culture. Perhaps the benefits marriage provided were simply obtainable by other means. This hypothesis is tentative at best - George is the only Lincoln who reflected on such matters - but remains a possibility.

By 1934, Clarence was back in Minneapolis, having found work as a projectionist for a movie house on 7th and Hennepin. He, like many Finnish Lincolns, lived in the northside Finnish community - an small area south of Olson Highway to the west of the downtown.[41] This area had been home to Finns since the 1870s and, although it had functioned as a hotbed of Finnish radicalism, by the time Clarence took up residence the political tenor had subsided considerably.[42] Nevertheless, it was here that Clarence continued the connection with his Finnish roots that had begun in Superior. Among the friends he made during this time were Howard Stone and Martin Maki - both Finns who would eventually go to Spain.

One of the largest drains on the Finnish northside radical community was the departure of nearly eight-thousand radical Finns for the Soviet-controlled Karelia, an area between the Russo-Finnish border.[43] They left between 1931 and 1934; their goal: to establish a Finnish socialist republic. Although the group did not fare well and were eventually persecuted by Stalin for disagreements over Marxist doctrine, they set a precedent for other Finns to follow their example and embark on trans-Atlantic excursions. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the Finns as a group demonstrated the clearest ethnically-based international

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[39] Zlatovski, "Anti-Hero," 69-72.

[40] "Median Age at First Marriage by Sex: 1890 to 2010," U.S. Decennial Census (1890-2000), American Community Survey, 2010, http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/marriage/data/acs/ElliottetalPAA2012figs.pdf

[41] Alanen, *The Finns in Minnesota,* 17. This area is bordered clockwise around the compass (beginning in the north) by Glennwood Avenue, Girard Avenue, Bassett Creek, and Penn Avenue North. Finns had clustered here since the early 20th century.

[42] Forester, interview by Carl E. Ross.

[43] Alanen, *Finns in Minnesota*, 58-59; Harry Siitonen, "Memoirs of Harry Antero Siitonen," Harry Siitonen Papers, IHRC2403, Finnish American Collection, Immigration History and Research Center, University of Minnesota, 41-42.

consciousness of all of the Lincolns. They alone had corporately experienced an overseas expedition similar to the International Brigades.

An examination of the Lincolns' demographics, their personal stories, and the trends that link them to each other suggests several points of entry for understanding why the men went to Spain. Ethnic identity, personal experience of hardship, and the struggle to find work during the Depression all help explain why the men left: most did not leave stable jobs, spouses, or deep family and social connections behind in the United States. Yet, to rely on these explanations entirely excises the single most important aspect of the men's identity: their political commitment. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the Lincolns without understanding the ideologies that motivated them.

Not least because it was the Soviet Union that organized, recruited, and paid for the passage of the International Brigades, communism was the organizing ideology for the preponderance of the Lincolns. Sixty-three percent were full CPUSA members; three were Young Communist League (YCL) members who for whatever reason did not eventually obtain full party membership. Moreover, three men joined the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) once in Spain - in addition to their domestic membership. Clearly then, communism - whether doctrinaire or that of the fellow traveler - was the political language most of the men spoke. Even those those who were not party or party affiliate members orbited in communist circles - self-consciously or not. For the 1930s were the glory years of the CPUSA, a decade in which the apparent demise of capitalism and democratic legitimacy gifted it with a rapidly expanding membership, an increasing mainstream acceptance, and a geopolitical message of international relevance.

The organization known in the 1930s as the CPUSA had a twisting and confusing history. Initially, two communist parties were founded in 1919. Later, at the behest of Lenin and the Comintern, the two were merged. Factional battles wracked the organization through the early 1920s as the party's eclectic founders - orthodox marxists, International Workers of the World (IWW or 'wobblies') members, and foreign language sections - jostled for power. Various shifts in tactical approaches left the party weakened through the 1920s, a situation which came to a head in 1928 when secretary Jay Lovestone was expunged from the party. Lovestone had insisted, in opposition to the new tactical line from the Comintern, that the United States was not subject to the same conditions as other democratic capitalist countries were. That insistence was in direct opposition to the decision of the 6th World Congress held by the Comintern that summer. Lovestone was removed and replaced by Earl Browder who would remain as Party secretary until 1945.[44]

[44] Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 7-8.

The new Comintern policy - known as the Third Period - was issued in the summer of 1928. A tactical shift, the new analysis predicted the imminent collapse of world capitalism. The world capitalist powers, the Comintern argued, had allowed their decadence to rot away the foundations of their power. As a result, the Third Period would be marked by mass working-class radicalization as the capitalist system devoured itself. According to classic Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the vanguard Party needed to position itself to instigate, harness, and direct this working-class energy. This meant that collaboration with other leftists was impossible. Reformism among any political element was derided as "social fascism" as such a strategy compromised the true revolutionary nature of the times.[45] A key strategy the Party began to utilize nation-wide was that of direct action. In other words, the Party sought to employ masses of workers to press governments and employers for change.

One Minnesota Lincoln perhaps best exemplifies direct action activity. Ben Gardner was certainly one of the most active Minnesota Lincoln communists, holding positions in Minnesota and on the East coast. His whereabouts in 1928 are a mystery. After working as a painter for four years since 1924, he next surfaced in 1930 or '31 as an active Communist in the Duluth area. A letter to his wife while he was in Spain mentions the National Guard, which may explain the missing years between 1928 and 1930-31.[46] At any rate, Ben emerged from the early years of the Depression as a militant communist labour organizer, brought to the Party by his older brother. In 1930, he helped organize Duluth's unemployed, concurrently founding the Unemployed Council. In 1932, he was at the head of a communist-organized Hunger March on the town city hall which succeeded in drawing fifteen-hundred people from the surrounding area.[47]

Another strategy of the Party during the Third Period was that of Dual Unionism. Rejecting their former strategy of "boring within" such groups as William Green's AFL, the Party now sought to build dual, overlapping unions that were under exclusive communist control. This was in keeping with the Third Period's emphasis on non-cooperation with other leftist groups. Although these efforts occurred nationally, a particular area of focus for the strategy was the anthracite region of Pennsylvania where communists sought to create a dual union in opposition to John L. Lewis' United Mine Workers.[48]

Here again, Ben Gardner is a prime example. Although Gardner's work in Duluth was proceeding well, it could not continue; the Party needed him in Pennsylvania. There, he was to assume partial leadership

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[45] Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 9-14.

[46] Gardner to Alice, June 5, 1937, quoted in Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, *Madrid, 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 65-66.

[47] Richard Hudelson and Carl Ross, *By the Ore Docks: A Working People's History of Duluth,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 176-177.

[48] Walter T. Howard, *Forgotten Radicals: Communists in the Pennsylvania Anthracite, 1919-1950,* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005), 48.

of the anthracite coal mining union. The union was affiliated with the UMW at the time, but was founded and led by communists. This much was consistent with Third Party doctrine as the Locals were entirely communist-run. Ben was involved in several violent incidents in Pennsylvania. In 1932, when the Communist presidential campaign came to the anthracite, Gardner was among those who protested the arrest of William Foster, the candidate.

The militant tactics and tone set during the Third Period were given legitimacy when the country entered the Depression; the prophetic rhetoric issued since 1928 had come true. As unemployment soared and living conditions became harder for working class people across the country, Communists stood poised to take advantage of the new conditions. Indeed, it is difficult to overestimate the impact the Depression had on political thought in the United States. As historian Cary Nelson writes, "the crisis of the Thirties pushed people to the limit of capitalist ideology and sometimes a bit beyond in their daily struggle to exist." Ordinary people across the nation embraced working class radicalism as a means of protest against a system which had failed to work for them.[49] It was during this period that Minnesota Lincolns first began to join the party. In 1928, Minnesota Lincoln party membership stood at two - Ben Gardner and an older Greek Lincoln, Louis Privolos. By 1933, CPUSA membership had grown to ten and YCL membership had doubled from four to eight.

In response to the Depression, the Party embarked, not without organizational difficulty, on a series of Hunger Marches which occurred in cities across the nation. The party also started a national push for unemployment insurance, a campaign that would dominate communist efforts through 1934. In addition, communists would prevent evictions by returning renter's belongings, protest cuts to food relief, and organize against mortgage repossessions. By marrying idealist rhetoric with direct action, Communists both articulated a compelling vision of a new society and provided concrete examples of how that vision could be actualized.[50]

In January of 1933, Ben was arrested for doing just that - attempting to actualize the communist vision of society. During his attempts to organize a Hunger March on the city hall and the local food relief board, Gardner was arrested and thrown in jail. The town magistrate, a virulent anti-communist, dressed Gardner down in court - a humiliating experience. Throughout the rest of 1933 Ben was arrested, indicted, and jailed numerous times as he attempted to relieve the crisis of unemployment gripping the anthracite region.[51]

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[49] Cary Nelson quoted in Howard, *Forgotten Radicals*, 125.
[50] Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 60-62.
[51] Howard, *Forgotten Radicals,* 99-169; Jessica Weglein, "Guide to the Benjamin Gardner Papers," ALBA.141, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

These activities suggest why the party was attractive to both Minnesotans and Americans. Most basically, the Party plausibly diagnosed the causes of the economic distress and offered solutions. But the Party did more than that. Membership opened doors to a social community that stretched from coast to coast and across the world. The sense of class-solidarity the Party provided was almost religious in tenor. Indeed, George Zlatovski later compared Communism to a secular religion, complete with its own hagiography, saints, and martyrs.[52]

Above all, the Party appealed to a certain type of person: those commonly described as dreamers, idealists, or utopians, and those with a compelling concern for the poor and downtrodden. Among the Minnesota Lincolns this language is pervasive: Chi Chang described himself as "full of romantic ideals" and commented on his "youthful faith in Utopias." Clarence Forester saw himself as "an idealist," and Norman Dorland confessed to going to Spain "as an Idealist." Fellow Finn Martin Maki was eulogized as "a very incredible idealist." George Zlatovski was an "incurable romantic" and Veikko Lindfors always looked out for the "little people." John Blair "couldn't stomach the dog-eat-dog approach."[53] To such men, communism's ethos of equality, justice, and fair treatment for the working person was compelling - for good reason.[54] Economic issues aside, the Communist party of the 1930s advocated a startlingly progressive and inspiring vision of society. Communists sought to create a genuinely open Party that welcomed all, no matter one's national origin, race, or sex. Indeed, even solidly anti-Communist scholars such as John Haynes and Harvey Klehr acknowledge that "for many black Americans the party was the only predominantly white organization willing to confront Southern racism head-on."[55] The Party was also seen to transcend petty national issues with a worldwide scope of action - an appeal made stronger as the Thirties wore on.[56]

International events in the spring of 1933 through 1934 would cause the Comintern to abandon the Third Period tactic. The rise of Hitlerism in Germany and the growing power and bellicosity of fascist Italy prompted the Comintern to reassess its policy of non-collaboration with other leftists, particularly as it was increasingly apparent that Germany viewed the Soviet Union as an enemy state. By 1934, the Comintern had

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[52] Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 74-75.

[53] Chang, "Going Through College," 36-40; Jim Klobuchar, "He Tried the Strength of His Ideals in Spanish Civil War," *Minneapolis Star Tribune,* January 15, 1994; Norman Dorland, "To My School Mates and People of Memphis," Steve Nelson Papers ALBA.008, Series III, Box 4, Folder 32, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives; Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 1; Lindfors interview by author; Kavita Kumar, "Matin Maki Dies, Fought Spanish Fascists," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 25, 2001; John Blair, "Summary of Life," Robert Steck Papers, ALBA.104, Series II, Box 4, Folder 34, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

[54] While not *all* of the men listed here were CPUSA members, all were either CPUSA, YCL, or reliably known to be fellow travelers to varying degrees.

[55] Quoted in Hudelson et al, *By the Ore Docks*, 205.

[56] This view of the Party is somewhat ironic considering how closely tied its policy was the the Comintern and thus to Soviet geostrategic goals. For more on this line, see Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 128f.

pivoted and embraced the "Popular Front" tactic. Doing so meant postponing the revolution and widening the sphere of cooperation between all leftists. "Social-Fascism" was a thing of the past. Instead, the Popular Front came to mean virtually one thing: vehement anti-fascism. The Popular Front gave a coherence to global events in the mid 1930s by linking fascism in Spain, Japanese imperialism in Asia, and Germano-Italian aggression in Europe as separate manifestations of the same reactionary phenomenon. Even small children in Spain were influenced by this theory. Minnesotan Chi Chang encountered a boy of twelve or thirteen who, upon confirming Chi was Chinese, told him: "Little ones in China are bombed too! Fascists, no good, all over the world."[57]

Indeed, it was the Communists' opposition to fascism that seems to have drawn the most support from Minnesota's Lincolns. Membership in the CPUSA skyrocketed with the inauguration of the Popular Front, nearly tripling from twelve to thirty-four. The biographies of the men reveal that, in addition to most of the men's acute awareness of society's "have-nots," it was the Party's global and unified opposition to fascism that animated their identification as Communists most. In particular, the Lincolns' collective love of reading seems to have provided the channel through which they were first alerted to the threat posed by global fascism. Once aware, they sought more information and were likely to encounter the voluminous Popular Front literature on the subject. Through these materials they gained an international consciousness that fit neatly with the Popular Front.

However, their international consciousness was often largely just that - a vague awareness of the import of international events, gained largely from avid consumption of news material: mainstream newspapers such as the Minneapolis Star, ethnic and class-based radical weeklies, and CPUSA material. Such analyses of international events, particularly those found in overtly ideological sources, often lacked subtlety and suggest the Lincolns had little contextual understanding of the issues facing the Spanish working class. As a result, the Lincolns tended to see international issues as extensions of the domestic struggles they were familiar with. Even so, entirely dismissing the international dimension of the Lincoln's outlook - unsophisticated though it might have been - would be a mistake. Moreover, as is often the case, what is more important than technical accuracy is what the men themselves *thought* was true, and in this case, the Lincolns certainly saw themselves as actors in a global community.

Ben Gardner was one Lincoln who did not need to be convinced of Communism by the Popular Front. He was already deeply committed to the Party and so took the tactical shift with good nature. By 1934, he was no longer needed in the anthracite and left for Philadelphia with his wife Alice (they had married in 1931). There, he was involved in one of the numerous Popular Front organizations, the American League Against War and Fascism. Arrested again during a protest at the German consulate, Gardner was

[57] Chi Chang, "Spanish Vignettes," *The Volunteer* XXIX:4 (2012): 14-15.

sentenced to a year in prison. During that time, he and Alice only saw each other for fifteen minutes, three times each month. After his release in 1935, Gardner resumed his work with the unemployed councils in Philadelphia where he would stay until leaving for Spain.[58]

For most volunteers though, the Popular Front was their entry point into the Party. George Zlatovski was one. His commitment to Communism was accomplished in stages. His family had always been progressive and this political ethos was transferred to the son, although not without starts; in 1925, after seeing an Italian propaganda film, the teenage Zlatovski came home and told his father, "I want to be a fascist!" The older Zlatovski turned livid - "I do not think I have ever seen him so angry against me as at that moment," the son later recalled - and dressed his son down. These early flirtations with rightist politics gave way as George grew older. He remembered being displeased at the news of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria on his birthday in 1931, and was later impressed with future Comintern head Gregori Dimitrov's defense after the Reichstag fire in 1933.[59]

The next stage in George's radicalization came as he was working in Ely Minnesota as a logging surveyor. The poor conditions in the logging camps worked to increase the young man's sympathy for unionization. In the spring of 1933, events came to a head. Washington's birthday, as a state holiday, ought to have allowed the loggers a day free from work. Instead, a supervisor announced that "it was much too good for us" and ordered the men to work. George offered to bring the men's grievances to the supervisor. A meeting was granted, but after George had made his speech, the supervisor turned to each man in turn and asked: "Are you in agreement with this Red agitator?" The men, cowed, refused to defend George, who was promptly fired.[60]

That fall, George moved beyond sympathizing and began to actively engage in party work. A younger cousin had asked him to attend a meeting of the International Labor Defense, a party front organization. As he threw himself into the ILD work, George "found real happiness for the first time in [his] life in America." He began reading Marxist literature which, he recalled, influenced him to become a full party member. His love of literature and theatre led him to increasingly identify with the "cultural front," the name the Party gave to its attempts to create a proletarian culture. George and several friends produced communist-themed plays as part of the burgeoning Little Theatre movement in Duluth. In one of them, George and future Lincoln Chi Chang both acted. By this point, Chi had graduated from the University of Minnesota and was working as an engineer in one of the Mesabi mines. The play was "Waiting for Lefty," a progressive play about company violence towards workers. The performance was a disaster, as was most of

[58] Howard, *Forgotten Radicals,* 99-169; Gardner to Alice, October 24, 1937, Box 1, Folder 1; Jessica Weglein, "Guide to the Benjamin Gardner Papers."
[59] Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 68-69.
[60] Ibid., 71-72.

the theatre George was involved with. Besides George's knocking out an actor with an unpulled punch, Chi forgot to crank the victrola for an important scene. The last act concluded with another actor forgetting the crucial line of the play. Even so, the Little Theatre movement was an enjoyable venue for George and his friends to explore working-class themes in an artistic setting.[61]

After a modestly successful May Day march in 1935, the local party, emboldened, decided to embark on a program of street speaking. George's name was submitted, and he gave a fiery speech denouncing the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Meanwhile, one hundred-fifty miles to the south, Clarence Forester was back in Minneapolis. He had moved there from Superior in 1934 and he found work variously as a movie projectionist, a dog-biscuit baker, and a dishwasher. That year, he remembered hearing dozens of political speeches - like Zlatovski's - given around the city. Communists, anarchists, Socialists, and Salvation Army speakers all literally held forth on street corner crates.[62]

But Clarence was doing more than listening to political speeches. That year, he was one of thousands of Minnesotans who participated in a series of Trucker's Strikes. Led by two Trotskyite organizers, the Trucker's Strike were aimed at breaking the power of the Citizens Alliance - a business cabal that had mitigated against labor organizing in Minneapolis since the 1920s. The strikes brought thousands of working-class people to the streets where several people were killed during clashes with police and company men. In the end, the Truckers won after the Roosevelt administration intervened and threatened to freeze banking services to the trucking firms. Clarence wasn't a member of the trucker's union, but felt that "sometimes to get the rights you should have, they're not given to you, you have to fight for them." It didn't hurt that one of his Communist friends, Jimmy Flowers, was heavily involved in the strike.[63]

Back in Duluth, a few days after his debut as a street speaker, George Zlatovski was called into the Party headquarters and offered full membership in the Party. At the occasion, he was warned that membership likely meant destroyed career prospects, low pay, and probable violence. George accepted anyway.[64]

After joining the Party, George worked to organize the Duluth steel plants with limited success. Eventually, he was elected to the Section Committee for North Minnesota and even attended a Chicago convention. However, George was eager to leave Duluth and so, with the toss of a coin, decided on New York City over San Francisco. There, he joined the ranks of the most densely concentrated communist party in the country. As a party member, he was placed in a Works Progress Administration job in a district

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[61] Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 73-81.
[62] Tice, *Minnesota's Twentieth Century*, 96.
[63] Clarence Forester, interview by Carl Ross; Nathanson, *Minneapolis in the Twentieth Century*, 61-91; Tice, *Minnesota's Twentieth Century*, 95.
[64] Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 80-83.

controlled by a fellow functionary. His job: to offer recommendations on improving the New York Subway system. Besides this rather lackluster work, George became something of a bon vivant, indulging his appetite for culture - and for women. The Party carried on a thriving social scene in the New York of the Thirties, and George threw himself into it with vigour.[65]

Meanwhile in Minneapolis, Clarence's avid reading had convinced him of the danger fascism posed. He frequented the Minneapolis Public Library, and while there, read of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. The Spanish Civil War, unlike almost all other wars, was a war that aroused literary passions. With the exception of the Catholic and Hearst empire news outlets, most editorial boards favoured the Republic, so Clarence would have had ample material from which to form Republican sympathies.[66] One particular news account stuck with him: an Italian bomber pilot, when asked to describe what it was like to bomb crowds of people, responded that it was "just like a rose coming into bloom." Clarence remembered feeling sick about the response, thinking, "there's got to be something wrong with people like that, that something should be done about them." Clarence, who although he had joined the YCL never moved to a full Party membership, became a convinced anti-fascist. His International Brigade ID card would be stamped *anti-fascista* within the year.[67]

When the Spanish war broke out in July 1936, it "became immediately the touchstone [...] for all the communists, socialists, progressives, and liberals," George Zlatovski remembered. The proposition that a military coup backed by Hitler and Mussolini could defeat a legally elected democracy was outrageous to Leftists around the world. Worse were the measures quickly adopted by the western democracies, including the United States. Under Roosevelt, Congress extended the 1935 Neutrality Act to ban U.S. sales of weapons to either side (Minnesota's 8th district congressman John Bernard was the only vote against it). Further, the Act banned U.S. travel to Spain. The United States also tacitly joined the Non-Intervention Pact which had been established by Britain to prevent arms sales to Iberia. Both actions contravened the Spanish government's right as an established government to purchase arms on the open market. Yet from an American perspective, neither action was unexpected. Public polls from the time indicate that while nearly twice as many Americans supported the Republicans as did the Francoists, still, the majority had no preference. When it came to jeopardizing American neutrality, opinion was even more against intervention: 76 percent opposed modifying the Embargo and 79 percent opposed the sale of arms.[68]

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[65] Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 86-98.
[66] Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernández, *Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 2007), 33-35.
[67] "International Brigades ID booklet," P1822, Box 1, Clarence Forester Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
[68] Hadley Cantril, ed., *Public Opinion 1935-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 807-808.

As the western powers collectively turned their backs on Spain, the Soviet Union began to intervene on behalf of the Republic. Stalin's motivations for doing so are among the most hotly contested issues of the war. In all probability, Stalin thought of Spain as useful for several reasons: as a geostrategic bargaining chip to build collective security against Hitler and as a way to satisfy domestic pressures to promote revolution.[69] By November, the Comintern had begun assembling a network to funnel volunteer soldiers to Spain.[70]

When it came to actually choosing to fight in Spain, each Minnesotan made his decision differently. For some, the process was intensely personal. Ben Gardner, while working in the American Committee Against War and Fascism in Philadelphia, was one for whom the decision was a private matter - so private that he did not even consult his wife before announcing that he would fight in Spain. With what was perhaps unwarranted optimism, Gardner later wrote in a letter to Alice, "I felt I had to decide one way or the other and I also [knew] that you probably would have agreed with me that I had to go."[71] Evidently, Alice would come to resent this lack of consultation, feeling that her husband did not fully understand the position he had left her in.

For others, what was initially an individual choice quickly became communal. When Clarence Forester decided to go to Spain, he did so along with two Finnish friends. On January 21, 1937 a group of Spanish students from the University of Madrid spoke at the Minneapolis Auditorium in a meeting organized by future-Lincoln Martin Maki. Forester, who was in the audience that night, remembered how the student's pleas for American backing for the Republic affected him: "After listening to them and talking with them after they were through [with their speech], I decided that if I could go there, I would."[72] Later that night, Forester was approached by Eric Burke, a local communist organizer, who inquired if Clarence would like to go to Spain. "I said sure I'll go," Forester remembered replying.[73]

Some days hence, while visiting Harold Stone of Minneapolis at a mutual friend's house, Clarence mentioned that he planned to fight in Spain. As Clarence remembered, Stone was quick to agree the two should go together. At that moment, the pair were joined by a third friend, Veikko Lindfors, who had stopped by the house on an errand. Clarence and Howard quickly agreed amongst themselves that they ought to take Veikko with them. "With you where?" Clarence remembered Veikko wondering. "To Spain, which is a long way from Minneapolis."[74] Veikko too, joined the group.

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[69] For more, see Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism.*

[70] Carroll, *Odyssey,* 9-10. Much has been made over the question of Soviet responsibility for the International Brigades. While it is irrefutable that the Soviets planned, executed, and funded the Brigades, it seems equally clear that the Communists merely created an organization to funnel existing sentiment.

[71] Gardner to Alice, August 30, 1937, ALBA.141, Box 1, Folder 1.

[72] Forester, interview by Jay Hutchinson.

[73] Forester, interview by Carl E. Ross.

[74] Ibid.

Others felt compelled to go by political commitments. After following the news of the war avidly, George Zlatovski learned at the end of 1936 that some number of Americans were departing for Spain. By March, George decided to volunteer. As he told it, "being a romantic and a passionate Communist made it impossible for me to sit on the side lines while the future of the world was being decided." Although he wished to fight as a combat soldier, the Party told him otherwise. As one of the few engineers among the volunteers, George was needed in that capacity. He would be joining the American Medical Bureau, a separate unit from the combat Brigades. As such, its members could travel legally to Spain in spite of the American travel embargo.[75]

For all of the Minnesotans who eventually volunteered, what is often surprising is the ease with which they made their decision. Even those who well understood the danger felt little fear. Pete Jorgensen, a Danish-born dairy farmer from Askov Minnesota, remembered volunteering in spite of his expectation that he would not survive the war. For Jorgensen, whose assessment of the Republic's chances was bleak, there was no other realistic mindset. After all, he reasoned, those who hoped to fight Franco's well-armed military with little more than bows and arrows ought not to expect an easy victory.[76] While Jorgensen's analysis was accurate, the seemingly flippant nature of many of the men's decisions suggests that a youthful sense of invulnerability permeated the volunteers.

Perhaps another thesis better explains the nonchalance the men exhibited - particularly since few of the Lincolns *were* young men. I suggest that M. W. Jackson's "One Fight" thesis does much to explain the ease with which the men went to Spain. As Jackson explains it, the thesis states that "the oppressor in Spain is related materially and morally to the oppressor in the United States,"[77] a feeling which finds ample confirmation among Minnesota's Lincolns. Ben Gardner wrote to his wife that they were "still carrying on the same fight together, only on a wider and more separated front." Clarence Forester reasoned that fighting in Spain was his first chance to strike back at the German and Italian aggression he'd read about: "For me, it wasn't that different from going on that [truck driver's] picket line in 1934." For other Lincolns, their writings shift between domestic and Spanish activity with little sense that the two are different. In and oral history of Martin Kuusisto, a communist lumberjack organizer, Kuusisto moves from discussing a 1937 logger's strike to Spain and back to Minnesota in the space of one sentence.[78] This much was keeping with the rhetoric of

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[75] Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 107.

[76] Peter Jorgensen, et al, interview by Thomas O'Connell and Steven C. Trimble, Oral History (transcript), Askov Minnesota, 1976. AV1990.228.65, Twentieth Century Radicalism in Minnesota Oral History Project, Minnesota Historical Society.

[77] M. W. Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994), 86.

[78] Gardner to Alice, July 12, 1937, ALBA.141, Box 1, Folder 1; Tice, *Minnesota's Twentieth Century*, 99; Martin Kuusisto, interview by Irene Paull, Oral History (transcript), Minnesota, 1968, [Uncatalogued], Minnesota Historical Society.

the Popular Front: the struggle against Fascism was global - fighting Fascists in Spain was exactly the same as fighting company strikebreakers in Minneapolis.

Having made the decision to fight in Spain, the men had to get there. For some, doing so was easy. George Zlatovski and Frank Bissel both went as members of the American Medical Bureau - a group which had legal access to Spain. For most though, the Embargo meant they would have to sneak into the country.

Shortly after deciding to go, Clarence Forester was given a bus fare to New York. Travelling with him were Pete Jorgensen, Veikko Lindfors, and Howard Stone. Unfortunately, Clarence was delayed from his travel plans and had to join the others in New York. Clarence remembered being told to stand on a certain corner with his suitcase in his left hand and someone would be there to meet him. Someone did, and Clarence joined the others. The group would head into the New York hills to train for two short weeks with a former Army Lieutenant before shipping out on the SS. Rotterdam.[79]

The journey to Europe was not unpleasant. George Zlatovski recalled forming close friendships with the crew of his ship, the SS Aquitania, most of whom were strongly proletarian. His fellow passengers, too, sympathized with the Republic and welcomed the several hundred Lincolns on board. Indeed, their purpose was virtually an open secret, made all the more transparent by the matching boots the men had been given in New York. Clarence too, remembered having matching suitcases - all of which did a poor job of disguising the volunteers. Once in France - the standard entry point that most Lincolns used to get across the closed Spanish border - the men stayed in various Parisian hotels, waiting for their transit to Spain.[80]

The easiest way into the country was through a Mediterranean port. On May 30th, 1937, the ship *City of Barcelona* departed Marseilles for Barcelona. On board were more than two hundred Lincolns, including Minnesotans Casper Anderson, Martin Kuusisto, and Waino Palen. Although the ship hugged the coast, she was spotted and torpedoed by an Italian submarine. Within seven minutes, the ship was underwater. Waino, a non-communist, remembered being impressed by the discipline of the Party members: "The whole sea seemed covered with men. I was shaking like a leaf, but those communists! You know what they did? They started singing the 'Internationale' in nearly every cocky-eyed language you ever heard. I did not know what it was, but it did me a lot of good." Waino and Martin survived the sinking; Casper did not. For him, the war had ended before he even set foot in Spain.[81]

Other Minnesotans were brought into Spain across the Pyrenees. Clarence and Veikko were two that entered the country this way. The trip took them more than ten hours on foot, aided by Basque guides. The transit had to be accomplished at night, for French gendarmes and patrols were tasked with sealing the

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[79] Forester, interview by Carl E. Ross.
[80] Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 110-111; Forester, interview by Jay Hutchinson.
[81] K. E. Heikkinen, *Meidän Poikamme Espanjassa*, author's translation (New York: Finnish Workers Federation, U.S.A., Pub. Dept, 1939), 132; Chang, "Spanish Vignettes," 14-15.

border. The trip was treacherous. Veikko's diary records the experience: "A group of weary men soft from waiting a month, groped their way through the darkness in single file following their guide as best they could, gashing their skin and cursing the man in front when a branch would whip back and strike one across the face."[82]

However the men crossed into Spain, the experience was one of which most took careful note. Indeed, a border-crossing story was one of the most likely elements the men recalled about their Lincoln experience. This is little wonder; crossing the Spanish border was a deliberately transgressive action. In doing so, the men were defying the wishes of their own government and of most of the other countries of the world. Beyond the border, their status as American citizens meant little, and once they entered the country, it would be nearly impossible to leave. Thus, in whatever manner they did so, entering Spain was the distinct end of one experience and the beginning of something new.

Minnesota Lincolns served almost without exception in the English-speaking XV International Brigade.[83] Made of up variously of seven Battalions, Minnesotans served primarily in two: the Lincolns-Washington (the result of a merger between the Lincolns and Washington Battalions) and the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. Within these Battalions, the most common Minnesota position was that of Machine Gunner. Minnesota's non-combat Lincolns served in units as diverse as the American Medical Bureau, the 1st Regiment de Tren (an auto and transport regiment), and the political commissariat.[84] Minnesota Lincolns fought in every major engagement save for Jarama: Brunette, Aragon, Teruel, the Retreats, and Ebro. As the Minnesotans were so diverse in both role, unit, and engagement, it is not prudent to attempt a complete military history of their actions.[85] More interesting are the ways in which the men encountered the Spanish conditions and how they reacted to them.

Spain was the first war fought using truly modern weaponry. Nearly all of the tactics employed by the German war machine in the Second World War were debuted and tested in Spain: blitzkrieg, close air support, aerial bombing of cities. Minnesotan George Leiviska described modern battle conditions during the Teruel campaign:

> The valley below is a giant panorama of artillery flashes, smoke, planes and fires. Struck me that it is a giant amphitheatre and the battle a play, but when I looked over the edge of the

[82] Veikko Lindfors, "Let Me Take You Back" (diary), author's personal collection. The complete diary entry appears in Appendix D.
[83] Clarence Forester was attached to a Spanish-speaking unit in the XI Brigade for a time.
[84] For a complete listing of unit assignments, see Appendix C.
[85] That task (of chronicling the battles of the Lincoln Brigade) has been accomplished by other writers. Some important works are: Arthur H. Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York: Citadel Press, 1967); Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left*; and Cecil D. Eby, *Comrades and Commissars: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

> track several hundred feet below at the base of the cliff and saw the smashed trucks and tank that had rolled over due to the narrow road and bombing, I knew it was WAR with a vengeance.[86]

Unfortunately, very few Minnesota Lincolns wrote or talked about their reactions to combat itself. Those who do mention their feelings do so only obliquely, such as Ben Gardner. After his first action during the Battle of Belchite, he remarked to his wife only that, "after the first few days, one gets so used to bullets flying around that it becomes an ordinary matter."[87] As most of the writings of Minnesota Lincolns extant were directed to friends and family, perhaps it is expected that they not reflect deeply on the experience of combat out of an unwillingness to frighten loved ones. More often, they simply describe what they did in a particular action. Clarence Forester was one other Lincoln who directly addressed combat: he did not want to talk about it. Beyond remembering that "a lot of the Lincolns got killed," he was unwilling to discuss war stories with his interviewer.[88]

One topic Minnesota Lincolns did talk about at length about was bombing. Although bombs had been dropped from balloons and from aircraft during the First World War, organized tactical bombing was an innovation in Spain. The Lincoln's writings betray a moral outrage at the practice that extended beyond the propaganda effect of denouncing fascist violence. Until the Second World War normalized the practice, the bombing of women and children was viewed as an abhorrence. Ben Gardner wrote to his wife:

> I must tell you about the bombings of the helpless women and children. We were behind the lines in our battalion headquarters when the bombings began... not only did the building shake but a part of it was demolished. How we got out of there I still can't remember. There was much confusion, screaming and noise. Labels and souvenirs from Fascist Italy and German. I'm asking you and our friends, imploring you to do all you can to convince our government to lift the embargo on Loyalist Spain.[89]

Martin Maki, a Finn from Minneapolis, also wrote at length about bombing:

> I have to tell you, Kalle, that I myself have prepared for my death when those Black Vultures soared overhead. Many times I have thought that surely now is my Waterloo. Especially at those times that one is stuck in a position that has no low spot in the terrain and no ditch either. But even if you are in a crater you will break out in a sweat. I remember, especially at the Madrid front, the fascist planes came and circled around for hours. When they started to drop their "eggs" the ground shook so strongly from the explosion that it felt as though they were coming this way and soon we will have a bomb on the nape of our necks. Behind the bomber planes came "strafers." They flew, one behind the other, in a long line and fired at our boys. This lasted for some time. When their work of the Devil [The

[86] George Leiviska, diary entry of February 21, 1938, Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Records ALBA.019, Box 2, Folder 16, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.
[87] Gardner to Alice, September 8, 1937, ABLA.141, Series I, Box 1, Folder 1.
[88] Tice, *Minnesota's Twentieth Century*, 99.
[89] Gardner to Alice, January 1938, ABLA.141, Series I, Box 1, Folder 2.

> word Devil is profane in Finn.] was finished I felt it and came out of the trench, a sigh of relief escaped, then we were amazed that we were not hit. At the same time we swore a bit in a Finnish manner.[90]

The Minnesota Lincolns' fixation on the terror of bombing is sustained by empirical research conducted by Yale sociologist John Dollard in the early 1940s. Dollard was interested in studying the effects of fear in battle as a means to help the Allied war effort during the Second World War. The sample group that Dollard employed were the veterans of the Lincoln Brigade. Dollard's findings suggest that bombs were the most terrifying weapons used in the Spanish Civil War. Being wounded by bomb shrapnel was the most-feared type of battle wound; likewise, the sound of bombs falling was ranked as the most terrifying sound of battle.[91]

If stories of specific combat experiences are lacking, the Minnesota Lincolns provide a plethora of interesting stories from Spain. To Howard Stone, Veikko Lindfors and Clarence Forester - all three stationed at the Albacete autoparc - Ernest Hemingway provided several entertaining diversions. On the fourth of July 1937, Hemingway brought a keg of beer for the men. Until Clarence arrived, no one knew how to tap the keg, which remained on the ground, surrounded by longing men. Another time, tired of the constant diet of garbanzo beans, Hemingway took Lindfors with him to shoot a bull. Hemingway reasoned that with the war going on, the Spaniards were in little need of bull fights.

Other stories are less light-hearted and demonstrate the often confusing nature of combat in Spain. As Pete Jorgensen and some of his unit were traveling through a town they encountered a tank. The men went up to talk to the tankers but communication was difficult as none of them spoke Spanish. Suddenly, both tank crew and Lincolns realised they were not on the same side. Diving through the tank hatches, the Francoist soldiers opened fire point blank. Jorgensen was hit in the leg, lost a testicle, and spent the next three months recovering in a hospital in Barcelona.[92]

As most Lincolns went to Spain for explicitly political reasons, the great majority being communists and most of the rest being fellow travelers, how did their experiences in Spain - whether in battle or as members of the support staff of the International Brigades - change their ideological commitments? For the most part, Minnesota Lincolns do not seem to have experienced the war as a shattering force, with certain exceptions.

For George Zlatovski, his experience in Spain was demoralizing. Tasked with building a water purification installation, George spent much of his time in Spain seeking the needed parts and attempting to transfer to the front lines. One of the first discrepancies between his expectations and reality came when he

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[90] Martin Maki to Carl Paivo, *The Volunteer* XVIII:1 (2011), 2, 13.
[91] John Dollard and Donald Horton, *Fear in Battle* (Washington: The Infantry Journal, 1944), 14-16.
[92] Jorgensen, interview with Carl Ross.

first arrived at Albacete: "I was amazed almost as soon as I got to Spain at the enormous amount of bitching going on among the Brigaders about their commanders and commissars and about various situations and conditions." Although George grew to tolerate the discontent, the experience hardened him. Later, he reflected that "one could always tell a newcomer to Spain by his naive phraseology and childish faith." All of the slogans and Party truisms that he had believed so fervently in the relative comfort of the States "went out of the window very quickly."[93]

For most other Minnesotans however, Spain did little to challenge their commitments to Communism. Martin Kuusisto, a lumberjack organizer from northern Minnesota transitioned directly from Spain to his old union activity in the north woods. For him, Spain only recommitted him to the struggle for justice. Likewise, Martin Maki evidently found Spain invigorating. Writing in 1939 from Minnesota, he remained just as committed to the Popular Front as he was before the war.[94] Clarence Forester and Veikko Lindfors were two other Minnesotans who were not discouraged by Spain. Lindfors particularly was the same steady man after the war as he was before.[95]

In September 1938, the Republican prime minister spoke in front of the League of Nations. There, he promised to withdraw the International Brigades from Spain as a gesture of goodwill. Evidently, he hoped that doing so would force Mussolini and Hitler to withdraw their nearly one hundred thousand troops from Spain. Although the maneuver had no effect on the two fascist dictators, it meant the end of the International Brigades.

Before withdrawing, the Brigades organized a farewell parade in Albacete and Barcelona. With the Brigade command officers in the lead (Minnesota Political Commissar Donald Thayer among them), the Lincolns marched down the streets. Clarence Forester drove a large artillery tractor to throngs of cheering workers. Ben Gardner described the scene:

> All afternoon, delegation from unions, factories, women, youth, children's organization came marching with flowers and took posts assigned. Overhead in the beautiful Spanish sky squadrons of our fighting planes roared back and forth. Unit after unit of Republican infantry with bands playing, followed by artillery, anti-aircraft, aviation and sailors, all with full military equipment. [...] It wasn't just a show like any ordinary parade. You could see and feel that from the bottom of their hearts the people loved the Internationals. Men from fifty-one countries in our ranks from all over the world. It was an indescribable spectacle. It was the highest expression of unity of the international working people and the Spanish people.[96]

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[93] Zlatovski, "Anti-hero," 132.
[94] Heikkinen, *Meidän Poikamme Espanjassa*, author's translation, 169-178.
[95] Lindfors, interview with author.
[96] Gardner to Alice, November 1, 1938, ALBA.141, Box 1, Folder 3.

The League sent international observers to Spain to organize the withdrawal of the Brigades. After being counted and registered, the veterans were shipped back to their home countries. Martin Kuusisto's experience was roughly typical. Loaded onto a freight train, Martin and other Lincolns were shipped across the French border. In Paris, their cars were boarded up and shunted to a side siding - the French government wished to keep their presence a secret, fearing demonstrations if they were known. Not too long later, the French workers found the rail cars and brought wine, chocolates, tobacco, coffee, and cigarettes. Eventually, the trains made their way to Le Havre, where the Lincolns boarded ships back the United States.[97]

The December 21, 1938 edition of the Minneapolis Star announced the return of five local youth back from Spain: Clarence Forester, Harold Stone, John Snyder, Frank Aho, and Jack Laine. The five announced that they were "glad to be back" and were going to begin working to lift the American Embargo on Spain. While there is no record of any of them having done so, Minneapolis was home to several Lincoln veterans organizations, including a branch office of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB).

Ben Gardner, like Clarence, left Spain much as any other soldier did - on a train across the Franco-Spanish border, then on a ship to New York. Reuniting with his wife Alice, Ben went to work as the executive director for the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He also helped raise money for the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, a group which continued to raise funds for the Spanish Republic. By 1941, Ben was working for R.C.A. and was active in the United Electrical Radio union and in 1943, was drafted into the Army, landing in France after D-Day. On October 2, 1944, he was killed at Luneville France, leaving his wife and their son behind.

George Zlatovski drifted back to New York after the war. Broke and depressed, he eventually met one Jane Foster in 1941. After his service in WWII, George and Jane married. In a bizarre turn of events, Jane ended up working for the OSS office in Washington, D.C. with Julia Child who would later become a celebrity cook. Even stranger, Jane was allegedly recruited for the Soviet secret intelligence by Martha Dodd, the daughter of the U.S. ambassador to Germany in the 1930s. In 1957, George and Jane were accused of leaking sensitive materials to the Soviets. They promptly fled the country to France, where they remained in exile through the 1980s, eventually rekindling their friendship with Julia and her husband. Although George's autobiography depicts himself as disillusioned with communism after Spain and thus unlikely to work for the Soviets, Julia Child always suspected that he was in fact guilty. Both Zlatovskis denied the accusations.[98]

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[97] Heikkinen, *Meidän Poikamme Espanjassa*, author's translation, 166.

[98] Conant, *A Covert Affair*, 215-220. The entire story is convoluted, bizarre, and slightly thrilling. The Martha Dodd mentioned is the subject of a book by historian Erik Larson entitled, *In the Garden of Beasts* (New York: Random House, 2011).

Other Minnesota veterans took diverse paths. Chi Chang did not return to the United States after Spain. Instead, he made his way back to China where he fought with Mao's army against Chiang Kai Shek. He published a handful of letters from the Spanish war in 1939 and was never heard from again.[99] Martin Kuusisto returned to his union activity in northern Minnesota where he successfully organized a CIO Local for the timberworkers. He remained the union head through the mid-1950s.[100] Veikko Lindfors returned to Minneapolis, married, and worked as a machinist until his death in 1965.[101]

For Clarence, life in 1939 Minneapolis was not significantly different than it was when he left in 1937. He was appreciative of the reception he received: "there [were] an awful lot of people that were helping us back and applauded us for doing what we had done." Yet there were also those who disapproved. While Clarence would move back to the Northside Finnish community after Spain, his life would not be the same again.

After Pearl Harbor, Clarence was drafted into the United States army. He was one of several hundred Lincolns to fight during WWII. But his experience in the 'official' army would be haunted by his actions in Spain. When Clarence reported to the recruiters office at Fort Snelling for his physical, he was asked if he had previous military service. "yeah, I was a year and a half in the Spanish Republican Army," Clarence replied. The recruiter, looking nervous, excused himself. Forty-five minutes later, he returned: "you're in the army."[102]

Clarence would go on to land at Utah Beach and later fight in the Battle of the Bulge. His unit was present when Buchenwald was liberated. To Clarence's surprise, he found seven-hundred Spanish Republicans. The Spaniards had fled to France after Franco's victory and fought with the French Resistance during WWII. Clarence remembered being "real impressed with them people" for having survived two wars and for the tenacity they displayed.

After the war, Clarence settled down in Minneapolis, got married, and worked as a machinist. But as the McCarthy era dawned, Spain would rise again in Clarence's life. For his role in the war, Clarence earned a coterie of FBI who watched his house and followed his car. Eventually, the surveillance stopped, but Clarence remained bitter about the United States government's refusal to acknowledge the role of the Lincoln Brigade in fighting fascism.[103]

In 1996, Clarence and the remaining sixty-seven American Lincoln veterans were invited to Spain to be honored for their role in the war. There, he was awarded honorary citizenship to the country he had

[99] Chang, "Spanish Vignettes," 14-15.
[100] Hudelson et al, *By the Ore Docks*, 269.
[101] Lindfors, interview with author.
[102] Forester, interview by Carl E. Ross.
[103] Ibid.

helped defend sixty years earlier. The 1996 remembrance was touching to Clarence, both for the validation it offered his youthful actions and for the genuine love he felt from the Spanish people. Although it took sixty years, Clarence and his fellow veterans had fulfilled the wish of La Pasionaria, who, at the occasion of their departure in 1938, had thundered, "We shall never forget you, and when the olive branch of peace blossoms interwoven with victory laurels of the Spanish Republic - Then do return to us."[104] They had returned.

[104] La Pasionaria, "Speech to Departing International Brigades," 1938, author's personal collection.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Critical Data of Minnesota Lincolns

The data in this appendix are drawn largely from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Database. In certain cases, the data have been supplemented or corrected by my own research. The database drawn from the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade records, government, archival, print, and other resources and in an ongoing project of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive.

I. Accuracy Cross checking every piece of data in these records would be a truly herculean task. As such, I have not made the attempt. I have however, made an effort to spot check the data against my own research to the extent possible. The results of this exercise lead me to conclude the data has, on the whole, reasonably substantive integrity. As such, I have largely assumed the accuracy of the data and consider it trustworthy for broad-level analysis.

II. Appendix Data The data presented below are a set of select, important measures of the Minnesota Lincolns. The full data set can be viewed at the following URL and is available for further use: http://tinyurl.com/MNLincolnsDataSet

Name	DOB	Place of Birth	Ethnicity	Passport Address	IWW	YCL	CP	PCE	Employment	KIA/POW	Return Date
Aho, Frank Oscar	1901	Cedar Valley, MN	Finnish-American	Floodwood, MN	x		x		Timber Worker		1938-12-15
Anderson, Melvin	1910	Escanaba, MI	N/A	Escanaba, MI			x		Steelworker		1938-12-31
Anderson, Ray	1908	Lake City, MN	N/A	Los Angeles, CA					Unemployed		1939-05-06
Anderson, Casper Warren	N/A	N/A	N/A	Pillager, MN					N/A	KIA	
Belau, Carl Gustave	1907	St. Paul, MN	German-American	St. Paul, MN					Unemployed		1938-10-18
Bissel, Franklin E., Jr.	1908	Minneapolis, MN	German-American	Berkely, CA			x		Physician		1938-10-26
Blair, John Clarence	1898	Little Falls, MN	N/A	Milwaukee, WI			x		Organizer	POW	1940-03-17
Brown, Kenneth	1911	Canada	Canadian American	St.Paul, MN		x	x		Barber	KIA	
Budish, Nathan Norman	1914	St. Paul, MN	Jewish	St. Paul, MN		x	x		N/A		1938-02-04
Buska, Henry Alfred	1916	N/A	Jewish	N/A			x		Laborer	KIA	
Chang, Chi	1900	Changsha, China	Chinese	N/A			x		Engineer		1939
Danculovic, Paul Nicholas	1904	N/A	Croatian-American	Aurora, MN					Steelworker		
Dorland, Norman Edward	1912	St.Paul, MN	N/A	N/A					N/A	POW	
Dubovich, George	1910	N/A	South Slav-American	Duluth, MN					N/A	KIA	
Erkkila, John	1907	N/A	Finnish American	Duluth, MN			x		Lumberjack	KIA	
Forester, Clarence Michael	1915	Alfred, NE	Finnish American	Minneapolis, MN		x			Truck Driver		1938
Gardner, Benjamin	1907	Uman, Ukraine	Ukrainian-American	N/A		x	x		Organizer		
Garofalo, Patrick J.	1913	St. Paul, MN	Italian American	St. Paul, MN			x		Truck Driver	KIA	
Hakamaki, Erick	1907	Finland	Finnish American	East Lake, MN					Seaman		1938-12-12

Name	DOB	Place of Birth	Ethnicity	Passport Address	IWW	YCL	CP	PCE	Employment	KIA/POW	Return Date
Halliday, James	1903	Sandstone, MN	N/A	St. Paul, MN			x		Nurse		1939
Halonen, Oiva Ronald	1912	Chisholm, MN	Finnish American	Seattle, WA		x	x		Truck Driver		1938
Hanson, Francis Edward	1919	MN	Finnish American	Minneapolis, MN			x		Painter		
Holm, Elmer	1908	N/A	Finnish American	Duluth, MN			x		Apprentice		1938
Johnson, Howard Marion	1908	Winchester, WI	N/A	South Minneapolis, MN			x		Truck Driver		
Johnson, Lloyd C.	1896	St. Paul, MN	Norweigan-American	White Bear Lake, MN					N/A	KIA	
Jorgensen, Hans Peter	1901	Denmark	Danish American	Minneapolis, MN			x		Farmer		1938
Ketola, William Eino	1908	N/A	Finnish American	Angora, MN			x		Truck Driver		1938
Kozjak, Stephen	1908	Hibbing, MN	Croatian	Cleveland, OH		x	x		Laborer	KIA	
Kukkola, Walter	1915	Cromwell, MN	Finnish American	Cromwell, MN		x			Truck Driver	KIA	
Kuusisto, Martin Arwar	1910	Duluth, MN	Finnish American	Duluth, MN		x	x	x	Organizer		1939
Laine, John Albert	1916	St. Louis, MO	Finnish American	Duluth, MN			x		Truck Driver		1938
Leiviska, George Henry	1910	N/A	Finnish American	Ironwood, MI			x		Machinist		1938-11
Lindfors, Veikko Olavi	1911	De Kalb, IL	Finnish American	Minneapolis, MN					N/A		1938
Lund, George R.	1906	Minneapolis, MN	N/A	Duluth, MN			x		Truck Driver		
Maki, Martin David	1911	Newberry, MI	Finnish American	Minneapolis, MN		x	x		Organizer	POW	1939
Mani, Freeman Woodson	1910	Sisseton, SD	Souix Indian	Milwaukee, WI					Salesman		
Metsonen, Thomas	1915	Duluth, MN	Finnish American	Rockford, IL			x		Machinist		
Moshier, Harry Charles	1911	SD	N/A	Minneapolis, MN			x		Steelworker		1938
Muscala, Edward Ferdiand	1912	Minneapolis, MN	Italian American	Minneapolis, MN					N/A	KIA	
Nivala, Robert Gustavanpoika	1915	N/A	Finnish American	Tamarack, MN					N/A	KIA	
Olson, Leonard Evan	1902	Virginia, MN	N/A	South Virginia, MN			x		Seaman		1938
Orton, Carl Fred Gutherz	1905	St. Paul, MN	N/A	Palo Alto, CA			x		Seaman	KIA	
Palen, Waino	1907	N/A	Finnish American	Duluth, MN					Liquor Store Owner	KIA	
Privolos, Louis	1887	N/A	Greek American	New York, NY			x		Cook		
Pylkki, Ragnar	1916	Minneapolis, MN	Finnish American	High Bridge, WI			x		Laborer		1938
Reinholm, Axel	1919	N/A	Finnish American	Blackberry, MN		x			N/A		
Rogalla, Edmon John	1909	Winone, MN	Polish American	Winona City, MO			x		Cook	KIA	
Rovainen, Adolph	1898	Franklin, MN	Finnish American	Minneapolis, MN			x		Ironworker		
Rundgren, Paul William	1911	Minneapolis, MN	N/A	Duluth, MN			x	x	Construction		1938
Simpson, Donald Arthur	1910	Minneapolis, MN	N/A	Long Beach, CA			x	x	Mechanic		1938
Smith, Benjamin Carr	1914	Round Lake, MN	N/A	Clinton, MN			x		Longshoreman		
Snyder, John William	1913	Aurora, MN	South Slav	Crosby, MN			x		Mechanic		1938
Sprungman, Walter Howard	1900	N/A	N/A	Minneapolis, MN					Truck Driver		1938
Stone, Harold Wilhelm	1915	Bismark, NE	Finnish American	Minneapolis, MN		x	x		Truck Driver		1938
Tanttila, Reino Herman	1908	N/A	Finnish American	Zim, MN					Lumberjack	KIA	
Thayer, Donald Arthur	1911	Cedar Rapids, IA	N/A	Rochester, MN			x		Law Student		1938
Troxil, Stephen Edward	1911	MN	N/A	Youngstown, OH					Barber		
Waaranen, Nils Jacob	1895	N/A	Finnish American	Eveleth, MN					N/A		1938
Woimala, Ralph Antos	1915	Gilbert, MN	Finnish American	Superior, WI			x		Pressman		1938
Zlatovski, George Michael	1910	Kiev, Ukraine	Russian American	New York, NY			x		Engineer		

APPENDIX B

Charts and Graphs of Minnesota Lincolns

This appendix summarises some key measures of the Minnesota Lincolns including age distribution, ethnicity, employment, and party affiliation.

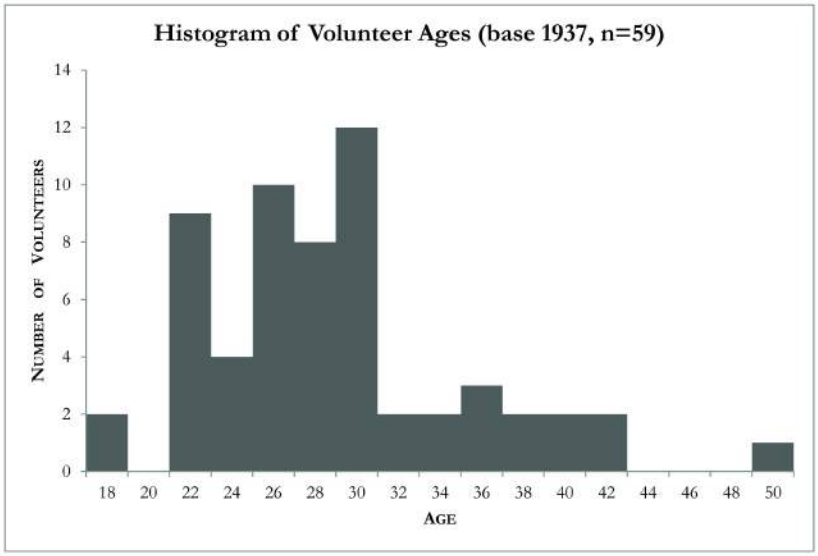


Figure 1. Histogram of Ages

Mean = 28.4 years
Mode = 27 and 29
Median = 27
Age data available for 59/60 veterans

Figure 2. National Origin of Volunteers

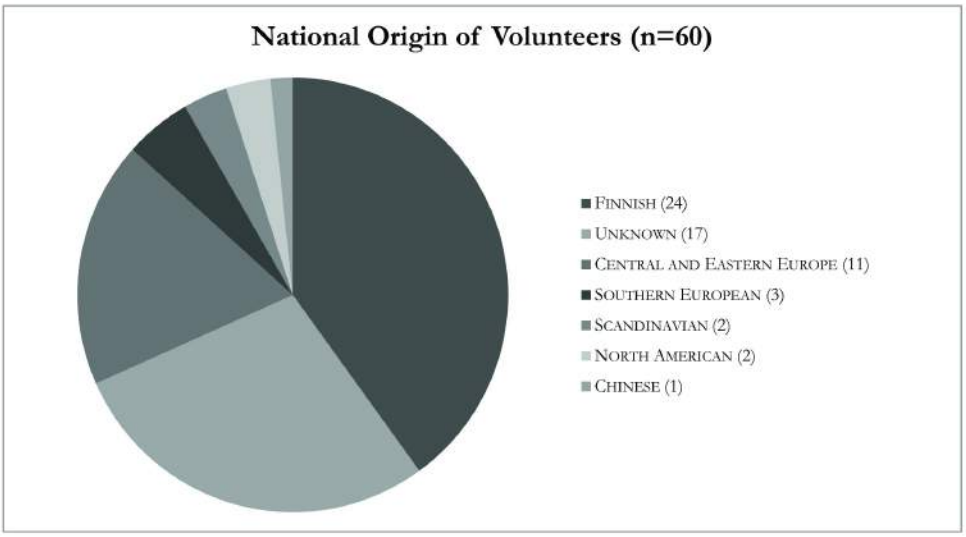
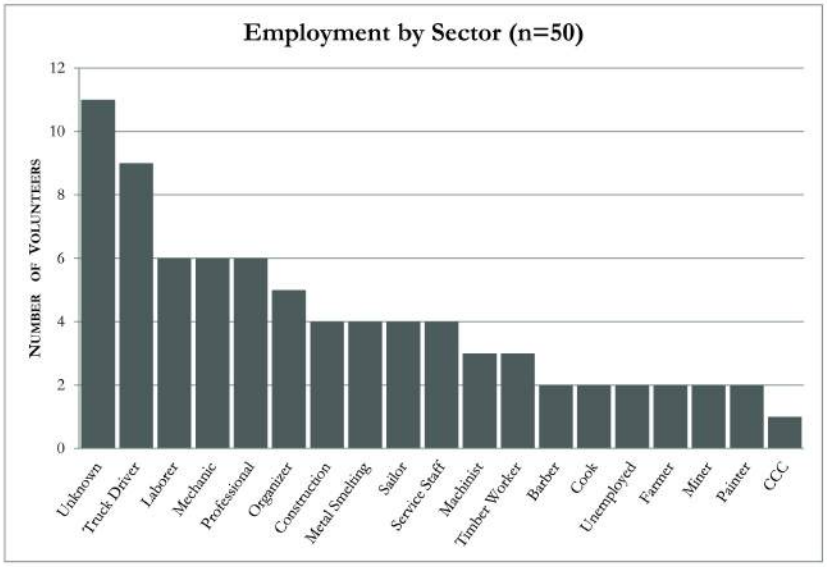


Figure 3. Employment (unadjusted) by Sector

This graph sorts volunteers into employment sectors based on the types of jobs listed in the ABLA database. While data for only fifty volunteers is shown, the total number of jobs is greater; several men have multiple types of jobs listed.



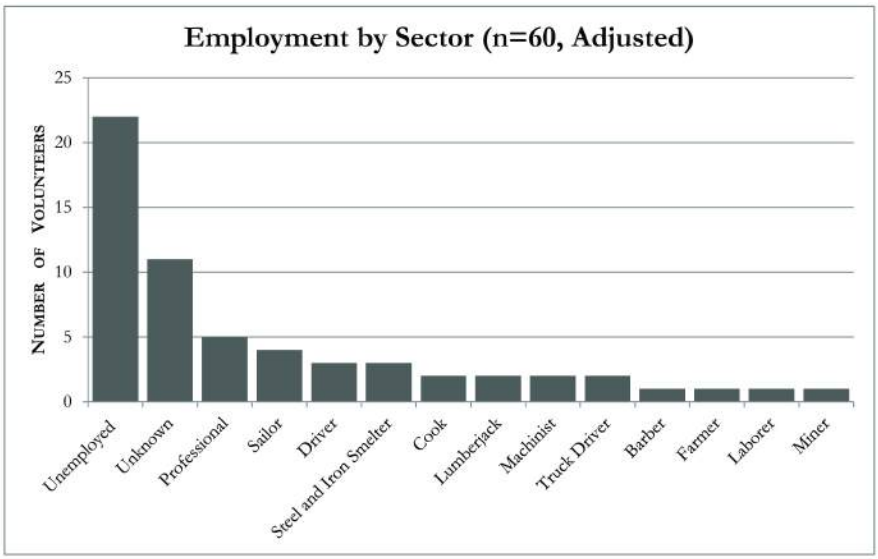


Figure 4. Employment (adjusted) by Sector.

This chart makes adjustments to the numbers given in Figure 3. Figure 4 is a more probable distribution of employment based on the unemployment rate in key sectors of the economy.

In certain cases, certain types of jobs have been lumped into other categories. For example, "political organizer" jobs have been grouped with "unemployed."

Figure 5. Young Communist League Membership

Young Communist League Membership		
	Percent	Number
YCL Member		
…Who joined CP	73%	8
… Who did not	27%	3
Total	18%	11
Non-Member	2%	1
Unknown	80%	48
TOTAL	100%	60

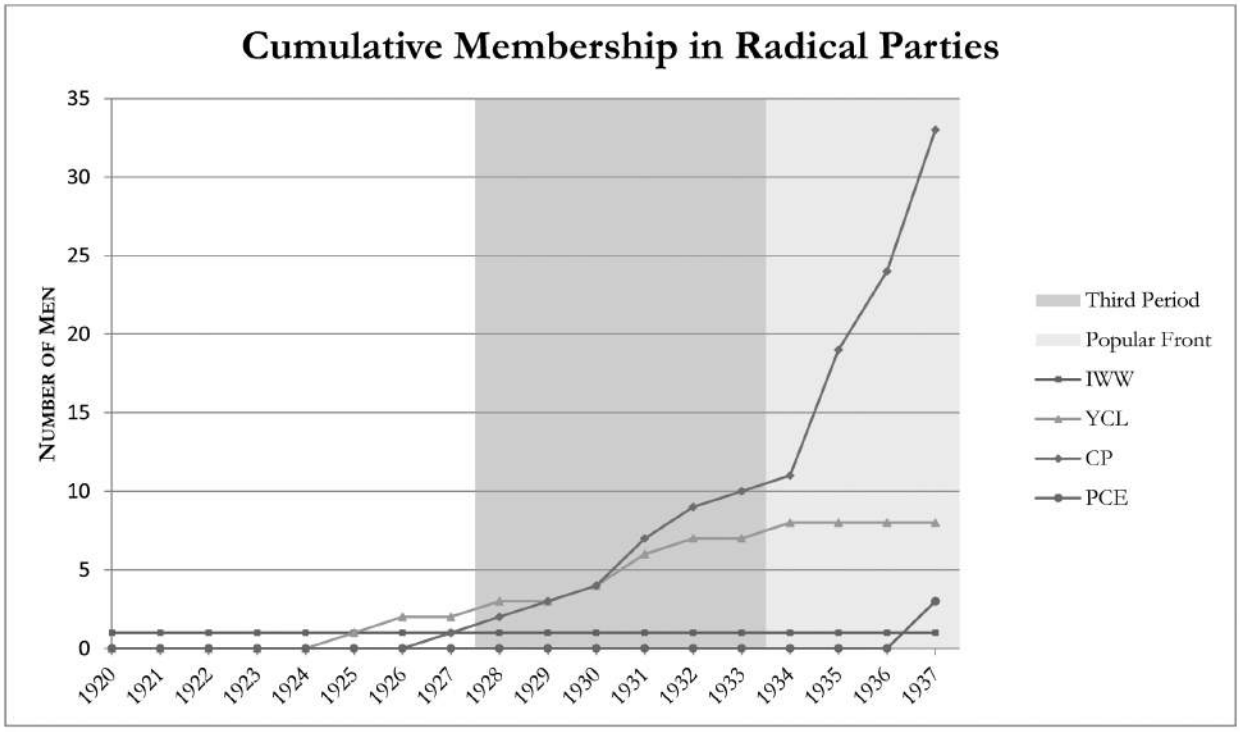
Figure 6. Communist Party Membership

Communist Party Membership		
	Percent	Number
CP Member	65%	39
Non-Member	2%	1
Unknown	33%	20
TOTAL	100%	60

Figure 7. Cumulative Membership in Radical Parties

Figure 7 plots party membership across time, with the appropriate Comintern tactical periods shaded. The graph is cumulative, i.e., each new party member is added to the previous total.

IWW = International Workers of the World
YCL = Young Communist League
CP = Communist Party (CPUSA)
PCE = *Partido Comunista de España* (Spanish Communist Party)



APPENDIX C

Minnesota Lincoln Unit Assignments

This appendix summarizes the unit assignments of Minnesota's Lincolns to the extent possible.

I. XI BRIGADE

A. Italo-Spanish Battalion (Lister Division)

1. Auto/Transport Units
    a) Clarence Michael Forester (Transport)

II. XIII BRIGADE

A. German-Speaking Battalion [Likely]

1. Auto/Transport Units
    a) Clarence Michael Forester (Transport)

III. XV BRIGADE

A. Lincoln Battalion (1937-01-31 to 1937-07-14 [merged with Washington Battalion])

1. Infantry Companies
    a) Francis Edward Hanson
    b) Stephen Edward Troxil

B. Washington Battalion (1937-07-04 to 1937-07-14 [merged with Lincoln Battalion])

1. Infantry Companies
    a) Norman Edward Dorland
2. Machine Gun Companies
    a) George Henry Leiviska
    b) Martin Maki
    c) Reino Herman Tantilla
3. Political Command
    a) Donald Thayer

C. Lincoln-Washington Battalion (1937-07-14 to 1938-09-23 [Demobilized])

1. Company 1
    a) Carl Fred Gutherz Orton (section commissar)
2. Company 2
    a) George R. Lund
3. Company 3
    a) Lloyd C. Johnson
    b) Leonard Evan Olson (Light Machine Gun)
    c) Edmon John Rogalla
4. Company 4
    a) Paul Nicholas Danculovic
5. Machine Gun Companies
    a) Oiva Ronald Halonen
    b) Martin Maki

c) Robert Gustavanpoika Nivala
d) Ragnar Pylkki
e) Reino Herman Tantilla

6. Political Command
    a) Donald Thayer (Battalion commissar)
7. Unknown Companies
    a) George Dubovich
    b) Benjamin Gardner
    c) Elmer Holm
    d) John Albert Laine (transport)
    e) George Henry Leiviska
    f) Freeman Woodson Mani
    g) Edward Ferdinand Muscala
    h) John William Snyder
    i) Walter Howard Sprungman

D. Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion (1937-07-29 to 1938-09-23 [Demobilized])

1. Machine Gun Companies
    a) John Erkkila
    b) William Eino Ketola
    c) Walter Kukkola
    d) Leonard Evan Olson
    e) Waino Palen
    f) Ragnar Pylkki
    g) Adolph Rovainen
    h) Ralph Antos Woimala (Sergeant)
2. Unknown Companies
    a) Erick Hakamaki
    b) Francis Edward Hanson
    c) Hans Peter Jorgensen
    d) John Albert Laine
    e) Benjamin Carr Smith
    f) John William Snyder

E. 11th Regiment, 2nd Group, 14th Battery "John Brown Battery" (155mm)

1. Martin Kuusisto (Sergeant)
2. James Halliday (First-aid)
3. Paul William Rundgren

F. 4th Group, 35th Battery (155mm, later 45mm and transferred to 129th Brigade)

1. Nathan Normal Budish (commander)

IV. 1st REGIMENT DE TREN, SECOND SQUADRON

A. Veikko Olavi Lindfors (Sergeant)
B. Clarence Michael Forester
C. Thomas Metsonen
D. Harold Wilhelm Stone

V. AMERICAN MEDICAL BUREAU

- A. Unknown Units
  - 1. George Zlatovski (Engineer)
  - 2. Frank E. Bissel Jr.

VI. 86th BRIGADE

- A. Unknown Units
  - 1. Walter Sprungman
- B. 20th Battalion
  - 1. Unknown Companies
    - a) Francis Edward Hanson
  - 2. 2nd Company
    - a) Stephen Kozjak

VII. UNKNOWN OR UNCLEAR HIERARCHY

- A. Frank Oscar Aho
- B. Casper Warren Anderson
- C. Melvin Anderson
- D. Ray Anderson
- E. Carl Gustave Belau
- F. John Clarence Blair (Medical)
- G. Kenneth Brown
- H. Henry Alfred Buska
- I. Howard Marion Johnson
- J. Harry Charles Moshier
- K. Louis Privolos
- L. Nils Jacob Waaranen

APPENDIX D

"Let Me Take You Back"
Except from the Diary of Veikko Lindfors
Middle of 1937

A group of weary men soft from waiting a month, groped their way through the darkness in single file following their guide as best they could, gashing their skin and cursing the man in front when a branch would whip back and strike one across the face. Around boulders, through brush and patches of scrub pine, then toward morning along rocky barren hills and "ever up."

"Courage born of Conviction in an Ideal." Now and then they'd cross some winding trail or road and wonder why they could not follow it a ways, but the guide knew better. Gendarmes or border patrols might come on them unexpectedly. Then that certain stretch of border would be closely watched necessitating finding other, harder crossings. Over there were many more such trips for him to make (the guide) and of course he'd be jailed if caught. They had been on the move over nine hours when the guide called another of his infrequent rest stops. The men just dropped in their tracks but their eyes perked up to lay sprawled whichever way they'd dropped. For they could tell by the tone of his voice that they had passed the frontier and the danger was past.

Cigarettes were gratefully pulled out and lit up either when the guide said it was alright for they hadn't smoked all night having added more to their discomfort. The sky had already begun to gray in the east when the guide roused them to their feet and on their way again. Some had to be shaken and dragged to their feet to get them going. From then on it became easier to pick their way through the rocks. The going was fairly level and with each passing minute the dawn dispelled the gloom, heartening the men more than the last stop had done. After an hour or so of slow work along a rocky hog back, they broke out into the sunshine and the southern slopes of the Pyrenees. For this was Spain that they were now looking down into.

The group stopped of it's own accord to gaze with awe at the still splendor of the panorama unfolding before them. Off to the east the mountains gradually sloped down to the Mediterranean. The sun had just peeped out from behind a low ridge of the mountains that reached way out into the sea and formed a beautiful bay. Parts of the sea could be seen behind low crown hills to the southeast and the wide valley way down below the foothills to the south was coated in its first green of the springtime, with here and there a village with its tiled church tower scintillating in the early morning sun. To the west the mountain peaks were white with snow which they would not shed for two months, and the highest of them, never to shed at all.

The guide pointed out a long low abode house lying in a little valley part way down the mountain in which he said coffee would be waiting. He then started off down an old goat path, the men trailing along single file behind him, their knees buckling under at every other step.

As they neared the little valley, smoke began to pour from the chimney of the house and two then three more figures emerged and stopped to look upward toward the group.

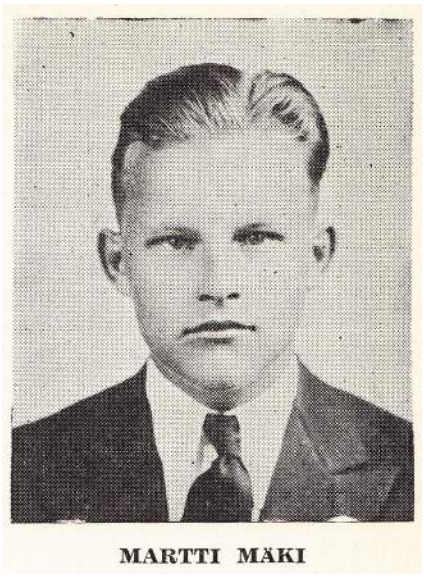
Veikko Olavi Lindfors
Abraham Lincoln Brigade
1st Regiment de Tren

APPENDIX E

Photos of Minnesota Lincolns

	**Kenneth Brown** Harry Randall: Fifteenth International Brigade Films and Photographs ALBA.PHOTO.011, Series B, item: 11-0619, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives
	**Chi Chang** "Spanish Vignettes," *The Volunteer* XXIX:4 (2012): 14-15.
	**Norman Dorland** Harry Randall: Fifteenth International Brigade Films and Photographs ALBA.PHOTO.011, Series C, item: 11-1022, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives

	**Clarence Forester** "International Brigades ID booklet," P1822, Box 1, Clarence Forester Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
	**Lloyd Johnson** Harry Randall: Fifteenth International Brigade Films and Photographs ALBA.PHOTO.011, Series E, Item: E0548, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives
	**George Leiviska** K. E. Heikkinen, *Meidän Poikamme Espanjassa*, author's translation (New York: Finnish Workers Federation, U.S.A., Pub. Dept, 1939).

	**Veikko Lindfors** VALB ID booklet of Veikko Lindfors, author's personal collection.
 MARTTI MÄKI	**Martin Maki** K. E. Heikkinen, *Meidän Poikamme Espanjassa*, author's translation (New York: Finnish Workers Federation, U.S.A., Pub. Dept, 1939).
	**John Snyder** Harry Randall: Fifteenth International Brigade Films and Photographs ALBA.PHOTO.011, Series B, item: 11-0925, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives

Howard Stone

Author's personal collection

Reino Tanttila

"Portrait of Reino Tanttila," UMedia Archive, Tyomies Society (Photographs) Records, Immigration Research and History Center, University of Minnesota, http://purl.umn.edu/66679

Donald Thayer

Harry Randall: Fifteenth International Brigade Films and Photographs ALBA.PHOTO.011, Series B, Item 11-0623, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives

George Zlatovski

Jennet Conant, *A Covert Affair: Julia Child and Paul Child in the OSS* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).