



## The Good Fight "Classic" DVD Re-released

*The Good Fight: The Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War.* Kino International Corp., 1984, 2008; 98 minutes plus special features.

By Robert W. Snyder

In 1984, the documentary *The Good Fight: The Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War* introduced movie audiences to the American volunteers in Spain. Kino International has now released a new edition of the film, with added features, that reminds us why the original was acclaimed when it first appeared.

Written, produced and directed by Noel Buckner, Mary Dore and Sam Sills, *The Good Fight* has all the elements of the best historical documentaries of its time: historic film footage, still photographs, interviews, music, and a strong narration (in this case, delivered skillfully by Studs Terkel). Yet if you view this documentary in its new edition, you won't feel like you're watching an aging film about distant history.

The story itself, of course, is still gripping. But what makes *The Good Fight* engrossing is the opportunity to see the vets when they were decades younger. We glimpse them not just when they were in Spain, but as they look back on Spain from maturity with the passions of youth still visible on their faces. Bill Bailey, Abe Osheroff, Salaria Kea, and Milt Wolff

are all particularly effective on-screen witnesses. Their anecdotes and observations reveal not just the struggles of the Spanish Civil War, but the vets' efforts to understand the war decades later.

Yet this is a film of history as well as memory. *The Good Fight* provides brisk but comprehensive introductions to the Thirties, the origins of the Spanish Civil War, the major battles that defined the conflict, and the contours of the vets' lives after Spain. It recognizes the importance of the Communist Party in the formation of the Brigade, but it points out that not all the volunteers were members of the Party. It acknowledges differences among the veterans over the Hitler-Stalin Pact, but it illuminates their service in World War II. It also depicts the harassment and prosecution that many of the veterans suffered during World War II and the McCarthy years as "premature anti-fascists." At the end of *The Good Fight*, a coda shows the vets trooping off to demonstrations throughout the 1980s.

Most importantly, this is a film that admires the courage of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade without glorifying war. Film footage of men in elaborate casts, a still shot of a one-legged man, and Bailey's memories of lice all take the romance out of the war. So does Osheroff's recounting of wounded soldiers who responded to

bombastic exhortations with obscene and sarcastic ditties.

Fine as the movie was when it first appeared, the latest edition has valuable special features. A 1988 interview with the filmmakers fleshes out their motivations for making the film. An homage to the brigade includes photographs of international tributes and footage of Pete Seeger singing "Viva La Quince Brigada" with veterans at a symposium on the Spanish Civil War at Dartmouth College. A commemorative list documents the names of the American soldiers, nurses and doctors who served in Spain and those who died there. And a special selection of outtakes from interviews with Bill Bailey preserves the stories of a man who was a superb raconteur.

This edition retains the original's strong spirit but offers new formatting and special features that make it well worth owning. ■

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