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"Flyers of Fortune: American Airmen in the Spanish Civil War"

<http://www.libs.uga.edu/flyers/>

by

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The American volunteers in the Spanish Civil War have long been overlooked in their own country. When mentioned, they are usually grouped under the misnomer Abraham Lincoln Brigade; actually, the two largest groups with whom Americans served were the Abraham Lincoln and George Washington battalions. These two units, along with British, Irish, Canadians, and others, made up the Fifteenth International Brigade. The "Flyers of Fortune" website, a companion to a Georgia Public Radio documentary and the book *Airmen Without Portfolio: U.S. Mercenaries in Civil War Spain*, details an even lesser-known group of volunteers; the flyers who fought with the Soviet *la Escuadrillas de Moscas* in the skies over Spain against the forces of Franco.

The site contains none of the lionization that one might expect in dealing with these heroes and martyrs of America's brief flirtation with socialism, but rather a fair, even treatment. The website details the true nature of the mercenaries' contracts, noting that they received a \$1,500 per month salary and a \$1,000 bounty on every Axis plane downed; it also deals with the flyers' public presentation, which was often less than professional. Useful as well are the biographies of some of the pilots and their reasons for fighting: the righteous indignation of the young Communist and New York *Post* reporter Benjamin David Leider, to the thrill-seeking, Indiana Jones-like Frank Glasgow Tinker, America's only "ace" of the Spanish Civil War, with eight downed enemies to his credit. Tinker and fellow pilot Whitey Dahl would later figure in their friend Ernest Hemingway's story, "Night Before Battle."

The website makes important connections between the American government's treatment of the airmen and the cool reception extended to American Vietnam veterans. While the material presented is suitable for scholarly use, it is still readable and accessible without being weighed down with excessive jargon, making it easier to read as a hypertext document. The multimedia potential is well exploited with clear photos and scanned newspaper clippings of pleas for money to build a monument to airman Benjamin David Leider. However, there is no sense of how old this information is or when it will be updated. "Flyers of Fortune" has a clearly readable menu, allowing the user to surf from link to link in a logical fashion, creating a feeling of continuity through its consistent use of color and icons. A concise and helpful bibliography and list of Internet links and contact addresses rounds out this useful site for scholars of the Spanish Civil War or students of the American Left.