“No man ever entered earth more honorably than those who died in Spain.”—Ernest Hemingway

In 1937, Hank Rubin, a twenty-year-old Jewish pre-med student at UCLA, volunteered for service in the International Brigades combating fascists in the Spanish Civil War. In his illustrated memoir, Rubin reflects on those events, making no apologies for his youthful impulsiveness, bravado, and ideology, but recalling the heroics and sufferings he witnessed and experienced in Spain, as well as the disappointing treatment he received upon his return.
My Personal Review:
One of my main historical interests is the Spanish Civil War and the role played in it by the International Brigades to combat Francos Nationalist forces. I read Spains Cause Was Mine a couple of years ago, but I recently revisited it and was once again struck by the humanity, nobility and idealism of Hank Rubin. Any historian of the International Brigades will tell you, that a good number of volunteers were college students. Rubin begins his account by retelling how, while sitting on the steps of the UCLA library, someone approached him and asked him if he would like to fight in Spain. He replied yes. So begins his journey from college student to volunteer, to medic, to casualty, and becoming ultimately, survivor. Rubin provides a simple yet poignant narrative of what went through his mind and what all the volunteers had to face in combat. While initially, disappointed that he was not assigned to front-line duty, he came to appreciate his role behind the scenes. This actually, allowed him to absorb it all and put down his thoughts in writing.

Rubin writes about some of the brutal campaigns from Brunete to Teruel and Grañen. He also places the Spanish Civil War in an international context, noting Germany and Italys aid to Francos troops and the US position of maintaining an embargo against the Spanish Second Republic. To anyone knowledgeable about the Spanish Civil War, this isn't anything new. However, coming from an actual participant, who was fully aware of his own governments indirect complicity in causing the demise of the Spanish Second Republic, it is worth reading.

I was touched by a poem written by Rubin following the death of a comrade at arms, who he was unable to save in the medic tent. It captures fear, hesitation and pain that too often accompanies any soldier who goes off to war. I quote it here: From far away, from Everett on the Puget Sound with the peace of its water the serenity of its green hills you came from so far to a dusty plain, to mountains without peace. You expected to fly to strike the enemy boldly from the sky, guns roaring your strong hands guiding your plane, triggering your guns. Instead you had to fight on foot, did you ever expect to die? To have a bullet in your head? To suffer your guts torn apart? And was it worth it? Was the pain too much? Was there even pain for you? Was the cost of death too high?

This is an excellent memoir from someone who participated in an event that far too many Americans are unaware of. I recommend this to anyone interested in learning more about the Spanish Civil War. Other recommended books along this vein: Peter Carrolls The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and American Commander in Spain, by Marion Merriman and Warren Lerude.

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Spains Cause was Mine: A Memoir of an American Medic in the Spanish Civil War by Hank Rubin - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!