

## Ernest Hemingway, Wartime Spy

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During World War II, Ernest Hemingway happily devoted much more of his time and energy to the field of intelligence than to his normal literary pursuits. He had relationships with the intelligence section of the US embassy in Havana as well as with at least three US intelligence agencies: the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In addition, he dealt with the Soviet Union's intelligence service at the time, the NKVD.<sup>a</sup>

The threshold question for each organization was, what could, or should, Hemingway do for the war effort? Two of the organizations decided officially not to have anything to do with the novelist; the others tried to put him to work as an auxiliary spy. In that capacity he more than once demonstrated willingness to take risks and work hard, but in the end, no matter what others had in mind for him, Hemingway made his own way through the war and, for the most part, did not produce much for anyone

except himself and his literary executors.

Although many of the details of Hemingway's wartime work are not well known, the general outlines of the story are. At the beginning of 1941, before the United States entered WW II, Hemingway and his third wife, Martha Gellhorn, were living in Cuba. In the first quarter of that year, the two went to China on an assignment for *Collier's Weekly*, a well-regarded magazine that featured investigative reporting and commentary.<sup>1</sup> Upon their return to Cuba, they settled back into their comfortable routine at Finca Vigia, a spectacular hillside estate by the sea, a few miles outside Havana.

There, Hemingway had a remarkable circle of friends and acquaintances, from literary figures and artists, to barmen and prostitutes, sailors and hunters, and even some government officials. Among those officials was Spruille Braden, the colorful and energetic American ambassador, and his subordinate, Robert P. Joyce.

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<sup>a</sup> The NKVD, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, was a predecessor of the KGB, the Committee for State Security, which was established in 1954.

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Hemingway (right) and Martha Gellhorn (second from the left) were met en route to China in January 1941 by film star Gary Cooper and his wife. Photo © Bettmann/CORBIS.

Both Braden and Joyce were, by chance, Yale graduates and willing not only to think outside the box, but also to invent new boxes if necessary. In his unpublished memoir, Joyce remembered that

*I first met Ernest Hemingway...in the early summer of 1941.... I felt in him a mild but polite hostility and a complete lack of interest in any future meetings. This attitude, I soon learned, was his habitual stance of dislike and suspicion in all his dealings with civilian government officials and authority in general. [But] Ernest soon found out I was a poorly disciplined, inefficient, and unenthusiastic bureaucrat.<sup>2</sup>*

This meant that Hemingway and Joyce could become friends. By the time the United States entered the war in December 1941, Joyce had been invited to many long dinners at the Finca—where he and his wife were often the only guests—and felt that he knew Hemingway well:

*I suppose the reason why we got on so well was that we agreed in hating the same things such as Hitlerism, Marxist-Leninist totalitarian*

*communism, ... petty bourgeois conformity, and all abuses of state power to police and restrict human freedom.<sup>3</sup>*

When they met in the summer of 1942, Hemingway and Braden discussed what the writer could do for the war effort. It is not clear who first broached the idea of intelligence work. Hemingway may have volunteered his services in a general way, leaving it to Braden to come up with the idea for Hemingway “to organize an intelligence service” to keep an eye on fascist sympathizers in Havana.<sup>4</sup> What Braden had in mind was actually more of a counterintelligence service than an intelligence service: Hemingway was to use his contacts in

Havana to keep an eye out for Axis spies, especially in the city’s large Spanish community. Hemingway readily agreed—ever since his experiences in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway had been a dedicated antifascist—and got to work on what he came to call “the Crook Factory,” his variation on “crime section,” which was the more bureaucratic term that the embassy used for the operation.

As head of the Crook Factory, Hemingway reported to Joyce, for whom Braden had created the unusual position of chief of intelligence. For the unfortunate Joyce, this meant that he would have to do his best to coordinate his own intelligence operations, like the Crook Factory, with the work of other sections in the embassy that were also conducting intelligence operations in Cuba: the naval and army attaché offices and the FBI. For a few months in the second half of 1942, Hemingway appears to have tried his best to uncover Axis spies for Joyce. He found none, although he produced a number of reports of varying quality. Some of them were wildly implausible; others were accurate but not important.<sup>5</sup> The man who was probably the only bona fide Nazi spy in town, Heinz Luening, was unmasked, not by anyone in Havana, but by British censors in Bermuda who detected anomalies in his correspondence and found that it contained secret writing. (Ironically, Luening was a heavy drinker and ladies’ man who ran in the same kinds of

circles as many members of the Crook Factory.<sup>6)</sup>

While Hemingway was working for the embassy, Braden and Joyce added another group to his target list: communists. Braden was an early anticommunist and claimed in his memoirs that he had told the members “of [his] amateur intelligence organization” to keep an eye on local communists and “find out who [the] most dangerous enemies were” so that he could attempt to tamp down Cuban enthusiasm for Stalin and the Red Army.<sup>7</sup> A draft of a note from Joyce to Hemingway written in the summer of 1942 captures the diplomat’s frame of mind:

*As you know, Commies are putting on in Mexico City, starting next Monday, September 5th...their traveling peace circus. Commie big shots throughout Latin America are scheduled to attend. Plus fuzzy-minded liberals from universities... I have discussed this matter with Spruille [Braden]... and think it would be an excellent idea if you could find yourself in Mexico City next week...in a position to make...comment on peace conference of a deflationary nature.<sup>8</sup>*

There is no evidence that Hemingway went to Mexico to attend the “peace circus.” He did travel to Mexico City in 1942, but not in September. Hemingway’s trip took place in March 1942, and it came to the

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attention of the FBI because, according to a confidential informant, the author was residing in a hotel in Mexico City “under an assumed name” and having what appeared to be secretive meetings with the disillusioned communist Gustav Regler, a good friend from the time of the Spanish Civil War.<sup>9</sup>

A major by-product of Hemingway’s work in the Crook Factory—and one of Joyce’s biggest headaches—was friction with the FBI. The extent of the enmity emerges from FBI memorandums and even more clearly from Joyce’s memoirs. Though Joyce liked to think of himself as an unenthusiastic bureaucrat, he knew enough about the art form to consult the legal attaché at the embassy, an FBI agent named R. G. Leddy, before enlisting Hemingway’s services. Leddy described the meeting to his headquarters in Washington saying “that Mr. Joyce was advised that there was some question of the attitude of Mr. Hemingway to the FBI,” to include Hemingway’s signature on a denunciation of the FBI and his remark upon meeting Leddy for the first time that the FBI was “the American Gestapo.” Joyce promised to ask Hemingway whether this was an accurate reflection of his views on the FBI and, not surprisingly, soon got back to Leddy with the answer: Hemingway had explained that he

was always signing one petition or another without focusing on its content, and that he had been joking when he compared the FBI to the Gestapo.<sup>10</sup>

This was not true, and Joyce knew it. As Joyce himself wrote, “Ernest reacted with violent hostility to the FBI and all its works and personnel.” For one thing, Hemingway believed that, because many FBI agents happened to be Roman Catholics, they were Franco sympathizers. He liked to refer to the FBI as “Franco’s Bastard Irish” and “Franco’s Iron Cavalry.” Hemingway also believed that, in Joyce’s words, the FBI understood “nothing about the subtleties of sophisticated intelligence in wartime” and was undermining his work in Cuba. In one instance, the Cuban police picked up a member of the Crook Factory. Hemingway was certain that the FBI was behind the arrest, and he drove immediately to Joyce’s apartment even though it was after hours. Joyce remembered that Hemingway was “in a towering rage” when he arrived. Joyce summoned the FBI agent on duty and, while Hemingway and the agent glared at each other, asked that the FBI intervene on the Crook Factory’s behalf, which it apparently did.<sup>11</sup>

Hemingway was wrong when he accused the Bureau of lacking sophistication. Declassified FBI records show a nuanced

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reaction to his encroachment on its turf. While at least one agent believed that the amateur needed to be confronted and revealed as “the phony” that he was, J. Edgar Hoover himself stepped in to ensure that the Bureau trod carefully in the Hemingway case. On the one hand, Hoover directed that his agent in Havana relay his concerns about using a volunteer for intelligence work, instructing him “to discuss diplomatically with Ambassador Braden the disadvantages” of allowing someone like Hemingway, who was not a government official, into the fold.

On the other hand, Hoover did not want to press the case because Hemingway had the ambassador’s ear, as well as connections to the White House. (Hoover knew this because the president had told him about a request by Hemingway for the US government to help Europeans interned in Cuba, most of whom were victims of fascism.) None of this, Hoover added, changed his conclusion that “Hemingway is the last man, in my estimation, to be used in any such capacity. His judgment is not of the best.” Hoover continued with an apparent expression of concern about Hemingway’s evident lack of sobriety in the past.<sup>12</sup>

Before long, Hemingway tired of the Crook Factory and suggested that the embassy make arrangements for a Spanish ref-

ugee named Gustavo Durán to come to Cuba to run it.<sup>13</sup> This would free Hemingway up for another project that interested him far more. Hemingway pitched the idea to Braden, Joyce, and the ONI. According to Braden, Hemingway claimed that the embassy should “pay” him for starting the Crook Factory by supporting another one of his schemes, patrolling the waters on the north coast of Cuba in his cabin cruiser, the *Pilar*, in search of Germans.<sup>14</sup>

While other American sailors were volunteering their boats and their time along the East Coast to spot U-boats, Hemingway’s concept of operations went further. He would pretend to be fishing, wait until a German submarine came alongside to buy fresh fish and water, and then attack the enemy with bazookas, machine guns, and hand grenades. Hemingway would use Basque jai alai players to lob the grenades down the open hatches of the unsuspecting U-boat.

Hemingway had a good ONI contact, the redoubtable Marine Col. John A. Thomason, who was the writer’s kind of man: a veteran of World War I infantry combat, a distinguished short-story writer and sketch artist, a heavy drinker, and an intelligence officer. Thomason told Hemingway that he and his crew would stand no chance of success against the highly trained submariners of the

Third Reich, but the Marine could not say no to Hemingway, especially since the author had the support of the ambassador. In the end, the ONI arranged for Hemingway to receive just enough gear—guns, ammunition, grenades, a direction finder, and a radio—to make the mission viable. The ONI even threw in an experienced Marine to sail with Hemingway. It would all be highly secret. Hemingway clearly relished the secrecy and the danger. He especially enjoyed developing his cover, which was that he was performing oceanographic research for the American Museum of Natural History. The *Pilar’s* war cruises lasted from the second half of 1942 through most of 1943. Although Hemingway patrolled diligently for much of the time, he only spotted one German submarine, which sailed away on the surface as he approached.<sup>15</sup>

By late 1943, it was clear that the focus of the war had shifted eastward. The submarine threat in American waters had receded. The Allies had invaded North Africa in late 1942 and ejected the Germans from Tunisia by the summer of 1943. It was now only a matter of time before the Allies would invade the mainland of Europe. Gellhorn traveled across the Atlantic in the fall and started working as one of the few female war correspondents. She wrote back to Cuba to urge Hemingway to join her. Hemingway resisted stubbornly, urging her instead to return to Cuba to keep him company.



Hemingway on his beloved boat, *Pilar*, in an undated photograph. During the war, he patrolled the Caribbean on the *Pilar* for more than a year in search of German submarines. Not content merely to find them, he hoped to sink any that he and his armed crew encountered. They saw only one U-boat and didn't get close enough to do (or suffer) damage. Photo ©Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images.

Gellhorn did not give up easily and, in February 1944, went so far as to ask the OSS for help in getting her husband into the war.

Gellhorn encountered Joyce in Bari, Italy, where he was serving as the OSS base chief. Like many others, he had joined the OSS in search of excitement. He found it easy to separate from the Foreign Service, which he thought was too stuffy and hidebound for a free spirit like himself.<sup>16</sup> With his background in Cuba and friendship with Hemingway, Joyce was just the kind of man Gellhorn was looking for. She laid the family issue out for Joyce: she was having a good war, but Hemingway wanted her to come home.

She told Joyce that she was prepared to obey “the orders of her lord and master,” but was desolate about the prospect of giving up her plans to cover “the big show,” meaning the Allied invasion of France. She thought that Hemingway might have made plans to come to Europe in some capacity, but that he seemed to have run into transportation and perhaps passport difficulties.<sup>17</sup>

The record is silent on whether Gellhorn then asked for Joyce's help, or if Joyce offered to do what he could. In any case, Joyce cabled OSS headquarters with the suggestion that OSS Director Donovan and Whitney Shepardson, the sophisticated international

businessman who was head of Secret Intelligence (SI, the espionage branch of the OSS), consider approaching Hemingway about working for SI.

This message caused some head scratching as it worked its way around the OSS. Just what could Hemingway do for the OSS? wondered Lt. Cdr. Turner McWine, the chief intelligence officer for the OSS in the Middle East. The author's prominence and reputed temperament would make it hard for him to fit in.<sup>18</sup>

Joyce addressed these concerns in a long letter to Shepardson a month later. He enumerated Hemingway's attributes: he was an authority on Spain; he knew more non-Franco Spaniards than “any other American”; he had run intelligence organizations himself; and, from the Spanish Civil War, he had a firsthand and extensive knowledge of guerrilla warfare and special operations. Joyce defended Hemingway from traditionalists like the head of military intelligence, Maj. Gen. George V. Strong, a perennial thorn in the side of the OSS. Joyce claimed that Strong's criticism of Hemingway was related more to the author's lifestyle and sympathies for the Spanish Republic than to his abilities. What did it matter to the OSS if Hemingway had been married three times? Joyce summed up that Hemingway was a man “of the highest integrity and loyalty,” about as much of a communist or fellow

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traveler as the head of Chase National Bank. Joyce repeated his suggestion that Shepardson consider inviting Hemingway to Washington for high-level discussions to explore how he could be useful to the OSS, perhaps in Spain or Italy.<sup>19</sup>

The record shows that the OSS staffed the request carefully. Shepardson solicited the opinions of Donovan's inner circle and received comments from OSS Deputy Directors Brig. Gen. John Magruder and G. Edward Buxton. Like others, Magruder expressed reservations about Hemingway's temperament and left-wing politics, adding the snide comment that Joyce was "an extremely intelligent and somewhat temperamental individual who would not be improved by association with...Hemingway."<sup>20</sup> For his part, Buxton wondered if Hemingway might have more potential for Morale Operations (MO), the OSS's black propaganda arm, than for the work of SI.<sup>21</sup> Hemingway's file duly made its way over to MO, whose leaders concluded a few days later that Hemingway was too much of an individualist even for their unconventional mission.<sup>22</sup> No one suggested that the 44-year-old Hemingway was suitable for a role in OSS's paramilitary branch. In the end, Shepardson cabled back to Joyce that he had

*decided in the negative about Hemingway. We may be wrong, but feel that although he undoubtedly has conspicuous ability for this type of work, he would be too much of an individualist to work under military supervision.*<sup>23</sup>

It was a good call. Hemingway's attitude toward the OSS was typically ambivalent, and he probably would not have been any more of a company man, even in a relatively unconventional organization like OSS, than he had been as an adjunct member of the US embassy in Cuba.

There were some people in OSS that Hemingway admired, and some that he was quick to criticize. He was endlessly proud of his son, John Hemingway, an OSS paramilitary officer who parachuted into occupied France with his fly rod, and there was never any question about his feelings for men like Joyce, once it was clear that they were more comfortable outside the box than anywhere else. Similarly, he was positive about men like Milton Wolf, a wartime member of the OSS who had been with the Lincoln Battalion, a

unit made up of left-wing Americans who had gone to Spain to fight against Franco. But for those who were a little more conventional, even though they were in the OSS, Hemingway had nothing but scorn. As he wrote to Wolf after the war, "many things...about O.S.S. when [I] had contact with them were chicken and others really excellent."<sup>24</sup>

Another of the OSS officers Hemingway found excellent was David K. E. Bruce, a Virginia aristocrat who headed the organization's operations in Europe and who after the war became a prominent diplomat. Theirs is a colorful, oft-told story.<sup>25</sup> Hemingway had decided to travel to France as a war correspondent. He was eager to



David K.E. Bruce in 1961. He would become the chief US negotiator in peace negotiations with North Vietnam for the Nixon administration and the first envoy to the People's Republic of China after relations were restored in 1973. Photo © Bettmann/CORBIS.

participate in the liberation of Paris and by 19 August 1944 had set off on the road to the capital.

Along the way, he bumped into a small group of communist Maquis from a group known as the *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans Français* (FTP) and helped to arm and clothe them from US Army stocks. The Maquis subordinated themselves to the charismatic American who spoke their language and, with Hemingway almost literally calling the shots, the small group made its way to Rambouillet, a town outside Paris.

Hemingway then went on briefly to a US divisional headquarters at Chartres, where, by

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chance, he ran into Bruce, who wrote in his diary that he had been "enchanted" to meet Hemingway.<sup>26</sup> (Bruce was usually more reserved, but he appears to have idolized Hemingway, describing him as "patriarchal, with his gray beard, imposing physique, much like God, as painted by Michelangelo."<sup>27</sup>) The author persuaded Bruce to meet him in Rambouillet, which was closer to the front lines and a good stepping-off point for Paris. Bruce seized the opportunity and, with Hemingway and a leader of the FTP, established a small tactical intelligence headquarters.

For a little more than three days, Hemingway, Bruce, and the French irregulars ran paramilitary intelligence operations from Rambouillet. They sent agents out into the surrounding countryside to collect information from locals; they scouted for Germans; they captured and interrogated prisoners of war; and they reported their useful (but not decisive) results to the US and French armies. Along the way, Hemingway impressed Bruce with his talent for battlefield reconnaissance. When the time was right, they made their way to Paris, where they "liberated" the Ritz and started celebrating. It was, Hemingway would write to Bruce after the war, "a lovely story and one you and I can both be proud of."<sup>28</sup>

Since Hemingway had by far exceeded his brief as a correspondent, he turned to Bruce for protection in case of "trouble," by which the author apparently meant losing his accreditation (let alone capture by the Germans, who were given to shooting combatants not in proper uniform). According to a letter that Hemingway wrote after the war, Bruce had obliged him by writing out a simple set of orders, tantamount to temporarily attaching Hemingway to the OSS. If it ever existed, this bit of paper did not survive the war; Hemingway claimed that he had destroyed it to protect Bruce.<sup>29</sup> However, there is in the Hemingway archives a somewhat



Hemingway seen just before beginning a flight over France soon after D-Day landings began on 6 June 1944. Photo © Bettmann/CORBIS.

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formal handwritten note from Bruce to “Dear Mr. Hemingway,” dated in Rambouillet, 23 August 1944:

*I am leaving...for Paris in the morning. If you can conveniently arrange the transportation there of the twelve Resistance men who have done such excellent service here, I would be very grateful. I feel that it is important to keep them together to be used for certain future purposes that I have in mind.<sup>30</sup>*

Considering Hemingway’s ability to clothe and arm the Maquis using US military materiel, as well as his relationship with OSS officers in theater, some scholars have hinted that there might have been more to the story than meets the eye. Was there something else, some other kind of secret work, perhaps with the French resistance or American intelligence that Hemingway biographers have missed?<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, but the official OSS correspondence about using him ended less than four months prior to his time at Rambouillet, which would suggest that what happened there was nothing more than a momentary, unofficial collaboration between Hemingway and Bruce, governed by chance and personal chemistry. Supporting that conclusion is the fact that, after the liberation of Paris, Heming-

way went back to being a war correspondent with the infantry, staying through the Battle of the Bulge and then returning to Cuba in March 1945.

The liberation of Paris was the high-water mark of Hemingway’s history with US intelligence during the war. But it was not the end of his relationship with the NKVD, which had begun quietly in January 1941, possibly while Hemingway was in New York en route to China with Gellhorn. According to transcripts of NKVD files prepared by a Russian historian who subsequently fled to the West, Hemingway “was recruited for our work on ideological grounds” by an operative named Jacob Golos.<sup>32</sup> It is not clear exactly what transpired between the two men, only that Hemingway accepted a material password for contact with another, unknown NKVD operative and that Golos came away satisfied that Hemingway had accepted the pitch. Golos’s words were: “I am sure that he will cooperate with us and will do everything he can [to help the NKVD].” He was assigned the codename “Argo.”<sup>33</sup>

That Hemingway would have accepted the pitch is stunning. It is hard to reconcile with his individualism and many of his statements about communists and communism. He admired a number of communists and how they fought for their ideals, but he said that he did not sub-

scribe to their ideology. Like many others, Joyce remembered Hemingway as “apolitical”:

*The leftist intellectuals...were angry...because he always refused to enter their “camp”.... [Hemingway said,] “I like communists when they’re soldiers but when they’re priests, I hate them.” He was always particularly contemptuous of the “ideology boys.”<sup>34</sup>*

Considering the timing, it is especially hard to reconcile Hemingway’s becoming a spy for the NKVD with his long-standing antifascist views. In January 1941, when Hemingway reportedly accepted the pitch, the Hitler-Stalin pact was still in force; the Nazi and Soviet dictators were allies. More than 70 years later, it is hard to appreciate what a blow the cynical pact, signed in 1939, had been to many on the left, especially those who had seen Stalin as the only real counterweight to Hitler. Lifelong communists experienced agonizing doubts. More than a few, like Hemingway’s communist friend Regler, abandoned the party. Those who found a way to rationalize the Hitler-Stalin alliance were on their way to qualifying as true believers.

Could Golos have misunderstood Hemingway’s response or reported it incorrectly? The short answer is that it is not likely that he made a mistake. Golos is an intriguing figure in



the history of Soviet espionage in the United States.<sup>35</sup> An old Bolshevik who emigrated to the United States before WW I, he eventually became a US citizen and a senior member of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). Along with his work for the party, he became a key contact for the NKVD stations in New York and Washington.

Golos appears to have started out as a support asset, using his contacts to obtain US passports for NKVD personnel. He went on to work as a spotter, case handler, and case manager. There is even a reference to him in the NKVD files as the de facto chief of station in the United States for periods when the service was shorthanded (which occurred more than once during Stalin's purges). He personally handled such famous and enormously productive spies as Julius Rosenberg and Elizabeth Bentley. In short, while Golos was not a professional intelligence officer, he was both experienced and successful when it came to spying in the United States. All of this makes it unlikely that he had somehow misinterpreted the meeting with Hemingway.

Nor was Hemingway a fleeting target of opportunity for the NKVD. Hemingway had come to the attention of the NKVD as early as 1935, when he had written an article for the far-left American journal, *The New Masses*.<sup>36</sup> The article was an angry denunciation of the US establishment for leaving a

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large group of veterans, who were working in government service, to die in the path of a hurricane. The NKVD was pleasantly surprised by the ideology that seemed to underlie the article.<sup>37</sup> It was just as pleased with Hemingway's speech in New York in June 1937, when he shared a podium at a writer's conference with CPUSA Chairman Earl Browder and forcefully attacked fascism, the "one form of government that cannot produce good writers." Without mentioning another type of government that also limited freedom of speech, he concluded, "A writer who will not lie cannot live and work under fascism."<sup>38</sup>

For the NKVD, the speech was said to have been pivotal. From that moment on, the NKVD would extend to "Hemingway *carte blanche* on any wish or endeavour he might hope to pursue on his return to Spain." The NKVD station chief in Madrid, Alexander Orlov, stepped in on more than one occasion to make sure that Hemingway got access to the people and places he needed for his stories, not to mention all the Soviet vodka and caviar he wanted in wartime Madrid, where shortages were the order of the day for most. Orlov even arranged for Hemingway to visit a secret NKVD training camp for guerrillas, where Hemingway took in sights and sounds that he would be able to use in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,

his best-selling classic novel about the war. When Hemingway met Orlov in Madrid on 7 November 1937 for a celebration of the Bolshevik Revolution, Hemingway thanked him for the unusually good bottle of vodka that Orlov had given him at the camp, and went on to "vehemently denounce Franco and the nationalists while...having nothing but praise for the [Communist] International Brigades' commanders and the Republicans."<sup>39</sup>

Orlov's literary executor wrote that the NKVD station chief considered Hemingway to be "a true believer." Despite numerous statements and actions to the contrary, Hemingway did occasionally write or talk like a true believer, especially in the cause of antifascism and, by extension, its communist and Soviet supporters. Robert Jordan, the American guerrilla who is the hero of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, is disturbed by atrocities on both sides of the Spanish Civil War, to say nothing of the cynical intrigues of at least one communist leader that undermine the war effort. But, for the greater good, he decides to suspend judgment for the duration of the war.

Is Jordan speaking for himself or for Hemingway when he extols the benefits of communist discipline—"the best...and the soundest and sanest for the prosecution of the war"? Then

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[Hemingway's] NKVD file reflects the service's frustration in keeping in touch with its agent, let alone getting him to produce....[and] summarizes Hemingway's poor record as a Soviet spy.

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there is Philip Rawlings, the hero in Hemingway's little-known play *The Fifth Column*. Rawlings is an American journalist who, behind the scenes, is happy to help a ruthless communist counterintelligence officer uncover fascist spies by spotting them in the cafes and hotels of Madrid, all in order to save the Spanish Republic.

In a remarkable letter dated 13 February 1947 and written in his own handwriting, Hemingway appeared to be speaking for himself when he defended the Soviet Union and its work in Spain. He started with the disclaimer that is familiar to generations of Hemingway readers: "It's politics I do not agree with." Then he continued with more passion than logic, sounding like many other true believers on the left who argued that the ends justified the means, to include political killings.

He wrote he had known the Russians quite well in Spain, and that none of the Russians whom he had admired had ever been executed. He had, however, known some people who had "deserved shooting" who had been shot. He knew nothing about the purges in Russia. Knowing Arthur Koestler, he found it hard to believe his book about the purges, although he admitted it was an excellent work. (This was an apparent reference to Koestler's famous

anti-Stalinist book, *Darkness at Noon*.)

Hemingway went on in the letter to lament that his good and brave friend Gustav Regler had left the Communist Party at the time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Hemingway said that he had visited Regler in Mexico, and that to hear him talk, one might have thought that "Spain was only [about] NKVD [Soviet intelligence] torture cells." Yes, men had been executed, "many times wrongly," but that was only "the smallest part of what went on." It was more important to remember the cause that they were fighting for.<sup>40</sup>

Regler, who was a literary figure in his own right, wrote about that March 1942 visit in his memoir. He remembered Hemingway's passionate plea for communism because it was still the best hope for beating the Nazis:

*Hemingway came from Cuba to see the bullfights ... [At one point] he clapped his hand on my shoulder and thrust me against the marble façade [of the Tampico Club]. "Why did you leave them [the Communists]?...[H]e would not let me go; he was in an alarming state of emotional confusion. "Why did you believe [in] them in Spain? There has*

*to be an organization, and they have one. Go back to them!... The Russians are the only ones doing any fighting."*<sup>41</sup>

If, then, the transcripts are correct, and the NKVD did recruit Hemingway for ideological reasons, what did the NKVD want from him? The record suggests that the NKVD wanted to start by carefully weighing his potential, and then steer him in the right direction. The fact that the NKVD referred to him as a journalist suggests that, for the NKVD, he might have had the same kind of potential as other well-placed American journalists whom it recruited: as a source of direct reporting and referrals to other potential spies, perhaps as a principal agent or agent of influence who could write articles for them.<sup>42</sup> Hemingway had an impressive range of contacts. He could report what prominent Americans were saying or thinking. He was also in a position to influence many members of the public through his writing. It was not too different from what Braden and Joyce had wanted from him, only on a grander scale.

The first thing that the NKVD needed to do after the pitch was to get Hemingway to the next meeting, which is why Golos gave him a material password. Hemingway did not make good use of the password. His NKVD file reflects the service's frustration in keeping in touch with its agent, let alone getting him to

produce. A NKVD operative met with Hemingway twice between September 1943 and April 1944 in Cuba, once in June 1944 in London, and once in April 1945 in Cuba. The NKVD file summarizes Hemingway's poor record as a Soviet spy:



If there was any suspicion about Hemingway's involvement with the NKVD, it is not evident in this 1947 ceremony in which he was awarded the Bronze Star medal from the US Army for his service as a war correspondent. Photo © Bettmann/CORBIS.

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*Perhaps Hemingway eventually concluded that working with the KGB was not patriotic —by all accounts, he always thought of himself as a loyal American.*

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*Our meetings with “Argo” in London and Havana were conducted with the aim of studying him and determining his potential for our work. Through the period of his connection with us, “Argo” did not give us any polit. Information [sic], though he repeatedly expressed his desire and willingness to help us. “Argo” has not been studied thoroughly and is unverified.<sup>43</sup>*

Perhaps the work that the NKVD had in mind for him did not suit Hemingway, just as the Crook Factory turned out to be less interesting than conducting a private war at sea aboard *Pilar* or operating with the Maquis and David Bruce to help liberate Paris. Perhaps he decided that it was no longer necessary to support the Soviets once it had become clear that the Axis would be defeated.

Hemingway eventually may have concluded that working with the NKVD was not patriotic—by all accounts, he always thought of himself as a loyal American. As he angrily wrote to an American correspondent who asked why he had gone to live in Cuba, it was “an unqualified obscenity” for anyone to wonder if he planned to become a citizen of any other country. He had revolutionary forebears “but none of them was named Benedict Arnold.”<sup>44</sup> Or perhaps he simply held conflicting sets of beliefs. It is impossible to know; there is just not enough information, and that situation is unlikely to change unless his entire NKVD file becomes accessible or previously unknown Hemingway letters come to light. We are left with the irony that four organizations that could not agree on much—the NKVD, OSS, FBI, and Department of State—all arrived separately at the same conclusion: Ernest Hemingway may have wanted to be a spy, but he never lived up to his potential.

