

Reissue of 'Bell Tolls' Sparks Another Look at Spanish War

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS.

A Paramount re-release. Screenplay by Dudley Nichols. Based on the novel by Ernest Hemingway. Produced and directed by Sam Wood. At the Translux, Normandie.

By ALVAH BESSIE

Alvah Bessie, novelist and screen writer fought with the Volunteers of the Lincoln Brigade in Spain. His latest novel is "The Un-Americans" published by Cameron Associates.



INGRID BERGMAN

IF YOU WANT to be cynical about it, you can say that this film, made 14 years ago, has been released again because of the re-emergence of its star Ingrid Bergman. Certainly it is not because the producers and/or distributors suddenly decided to commemorate the 20th anniversary of American participation in that war.

For, as its male star Gary Cooper told this reviewer in 1943, "it takes no sides." And not only does it take no sides but anyone seeing the picture for the first time, and not having read the Hemingway book, would be hard put to know what the war was all about.

The novel itself, while its author would deny it (and has denied it vehemently) is objectively an anti-Spanish Republican story, even though Hemingway was vehemently pro-Republican and played an honorable role during the entire war.

And the film follows the novel so respectfully that it becomes an anti-Spanish Republican film. For it reveals that Soviet Communists "ran" the war (which they didn't); and while it hints verbally at Fascist atrocities, one of its most brilliantly conceived and executed sequences is an explicit demonstration of Loyalist atrocity—and this was true of the novel as well.

Consider the guerilla band whose activities make up the action of the story. In Spain these people were highly politicalized; they were the best developed and most conspicuous of the Spanish people. They had to be; they oper-

ated behind the Fascist lines at the momentary risk of torture and death.

In the film the guerilla band hasn't the slightest concept of what the war is about. What is worse, its leader is a half-mad anarchist who does not hesitate to kill his own people (other guerilla fighters) to get the horses he needs for his own mission.

Consider the American "hero" of this film; and there were American guerrillas in Spain, too—a handful. Most were killed. All were steeled soldiers who knew exactly what they were doing and why.

In the film Gary Cooper is a "non-political" soldier. What he is doing there is never made plain, except that he has strong feelings about his grandfather who fought in the American civil war; and he is "for the Republic."

And when he carries out his mission—and dies in the attempt—the foreground of the picture (like the novel) is his absurd romance with a sleeping bag with the Spanish heroine, Maria, who has no more consciousness of what the war is all about than he has himself.

Objectively, therefore, the film is a slander of that war, which presented so pure an issue of democracy against fascist reaction that it commanded the allegiance of

millions of the world's people.

It is a slander of the Spanish people and of the 3,000 Americans who fought in the ranks of the Spanish Republic, and who left 1,800 of their number in the Spanish earth.

Hemingway's portrait of Andre Marty, organizer of the Brigades, who is portrayed as a maniac when he is not merely incompetent, requires some reconsideration. For we were never entirely honest about this man, and we defended him because of the objective role he played in Spain.

But no American Brigadier who encountered Marty ever liked him; and while he was no maniac, he was a rigid sectarian with an impossible personality whose insufferable egotism undoubtedly bolixed up the works on more than one occasion.

There is much excitement in this film—largely in the sequences leading up to the blowing of the bridge to stop the fascist advance—and there is one performance: that by Katina Paxinou, as a Spanish guerilla modeled frankly and movingly upon the appearance and motivations of the great Dolores Ibarruri, la Pasionaria.

But the re-release of "For Whom the Bell Tolls" will not commemorate the 20th anniversary of the American volunteers, nor move our people to reconsideration of that great and crucial struggle. Nor does it do honor to the memory of those Americans who fought and died there, nor to their surviving comrades who have never forgotten why they went, why they fought, nor ceased to struggle against fascism ever since.

Many have become victims of the American fascists and un-Americans. Nor is it without significance that the late director of this film and its male star were "friendly" witnesses before that some committee in 1947.

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