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Veterans consider civil war and future

By **Leah Garchik** Published 4:00 am, Tuesday, April 1, 2008

You couldn't be at Sunday's ceremonies on the Embarcadero for the dedication of the national monument honoring volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade without being moved. For some, it was a twinge of emotion as they recognized the fragility of the lineup of elderly veterans. For many more who had gathered at the edge of Justin Herman Plaza, it was a reminder of years of struggle, of the bravery of those who had stuck their necks out for freedom.

A brass band played anthems of the Spanish Civil War as the crowd gathered. Mainly, they were old lefties, people whose idealism is untarnished, who'd marched against fascism, for unions, for tolerance, against the war in Vietnam, and recently, just as ferociously against the war in Iraq.

Carlos Westendorp y **Cabeza**, Spanish ambassador to the United States, was there to express the gratitude of his country, and perhaps because of his presence, Protocol Chief **Charlotte Shultz** was there, too, with her husband, former Secretary of State **George Shultz**. As they settled down on a makeshift podium along the front of the monument, I watched Shultz and the crowd, and I thought, "They're going to eat him alive." When the band played the Socialist-Communist anthem "The Internationale," some of the vets and audiences raised their fists in salute. I couldn't see Shultz's expression, but several readers e-mailed later that it was stony.

When, after noting the presence of the ambassador, Mayor Gavin Newsom acknowledged the former secretary of state, there was a loud chorus of boos from one side of the crowd. "In San Francisco," he said, "we can always disagree, but we should never be disagreeable." It was a good line; it sounded as though he'd had to use it before for other occasions.

"The stuff we're made of will never go away," said vet **Abe Osheroff**, "with or without monuments. Because the bastards will never cease their evils, and decent people will never stop their struggles." There was talk about fighting for democracy and for freedom. But when the term "civil war" was mentioned, it brought me up short. The weekend's news was all about civil war in Iraq; every **Bush** pronouncement mentions the fight for democracy and freedom.

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We are "fighting against fascism for liberty," Shultz said when I asked him about it after the ceremonies, "and supporting people who are doing it." In the Spanish Civil War, "people picked up arms and fought." To this way of thinking, the administration's decision to join the battle is even more heroic.

Mentioning this will probably result in a deluge of mail from people whose principles I probably share. But in later ceremonies at the Post Street Theatre, when historian Peter Glazer talked about "blithering Bush and his vicious comrades" and then admiringly cited the words of a Spaniard to a vet ("How can we hate you who come from a rich country to a poor country to give your lives for an idea?"), I found myself pondering idealism, then and now.

Several readers noticed last week's paid obituary notices for HRH Princess Katherine A. Plantagenet, who died in Redwood City at the age of 86. The Plantagenets, of course, were the Frenchies who came to rule England in the Middle Ages, the sorts of people who traipsed among their subjects in glittering crowns and clanking armor. Indeed, the late princess was pictured in her obituary notice wearing three strands of pearls and a crown.

Don Bednarz, executor of the princess' estate, said he had met her 28 years ago, when she worked for the Social Security Administration and hired him. According to Bednarz, and to a Herb Caen item from 1986, she was a great-great-umpty-ump-greats-granddaughter of "a number of French kings." She was born in Newman, Ill., had been married several times, had no biological children and one adopted son. Her passion, said Bednarz, was researching "her entitlement."

"She assumed the name when researching her lineage," said Bednarz, who politely declined to provide her birth name. "She loved to use her titles among all her friends, and she wanted to be remembered in that regard."

She wore the crown "only on special occasions," he said. "Most people knew her as Katherine, but she lived for you to know her titles."

Lee Gregory got into an elevator at 450 Sutter last week and was stunned when her fellow passenger took off her coat, revealed herself to be wearing a midhigh-length Pucci-type top over cropped pants, and then took off her blouse. When Gregory got off the elevator, at the 23rd floor, "darn near the top," she says, the woman was in her brassiere, apparently searching through her purse for a T-shirt.

Meanwhile, today's 30th annual St. Stupid's Day parade, which starts at the Embarcadero at noon, is billed by **Bishop Joey** as the "next to last parade." That's because last year's was the last parade.

Public eavesdropping

"So how is it you came to know so many transgender rabbis?"
Woman to woman, overheard at Cafe Gratitude in Berkeley by Brian Smith

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