

New book details Canadian involvement in The Spanish Civil War Reveals how RCMP spied on surviving veterans

Toronto, March 2008 The RCMP spied on Canadian veterans of the Spanish Civil War for decades after the war was over, and kept files on the aging veterans until at least 1984 – almost 50 years after they had fought in Spain – a new book about Canadians in the Spanish Civil War reveals.

Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War, by veteran journalist Michael Petrou, tells the story of the 1,681 Canadians who, between 1936 and 1939, defied Canadian law to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil war. The war pitted a left leaning, democratically elected, Spanish government against a military uprising led by Francisco Franco and supported, with weapons and tens of thousands of troops, by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. By the time it was over, fascism had triumphed in Spain, and more than 400 Canadians were dead.

Until now, little was known about these men and women, and about those who survived. Petrou has changed this. He has drawn on recently declassified archival material, interviewed veterans, and visited the battlefields of Spain to write the definitive history of Canadians in the war. Jack Granatstein, one of Canada's leading military historians, concludes: "Based on massive research, this is the best and most complete account of Canadians in the Spanish Civil War we are ever likely to get."

Renegades reveals that Spanish Civil War veterans were pressured to become police informers, with the cooperation of the federal government; that a 1970 application by a veterans' group for non-profit status was opposed by the federal government, out of fear that approving the application might offend Spain's fascist dictator, Francisco Franco; and that the RCMP spied on Canadian veterans at least until 1980, when one police report noted that the veterans' "political motivations are more in keeping with the NDP philosophies."

Other highlights include:

- Detailed and vivid descriptions of the battles the Canadians fought, and their lives in Spain between action. The stories of Canadian prisoners of war are also told – as are accounts of Canadians who were imprisoned and otherwise punished, sometimes severely, by their own commanders.
- New and sensational information about Dr. Norman Bethune, whom Spanish authorities accused of espionage and of having a secretly fascist lover.
- The story of a young University of Toronto student who was jailed as a suspected spy and was lucky to leave Spain alive. After reading recently declassified documents from Soviet archives about this man, Petrou tracked him down and interviewed him at the age of 90.

Author Michael Petrou, a senior writer at *Maclean's* magazine, has covered wars and conflicts across Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. He holds a doctorate in modern history from the University of Oxford.

Renegades will be published April 12, 2008 by University of British Columbia Press, in cooperation with the Canadian War Museum.

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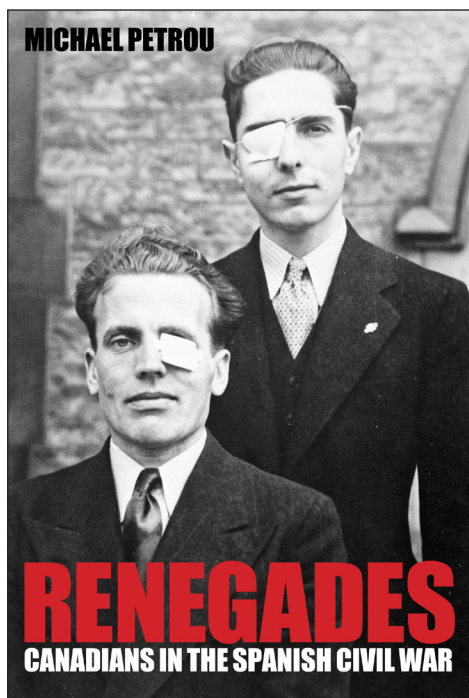
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Renegades

Canadians in the Spanish Civil War

April 12th, 2008

Michael Petrou

About the Author

Michael Petrou, a senior writer at *Maclean's* magazine, has covered wars and conflicts across Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. He has a doctorate in Modern History from the University of Oxford.

Petrou earned a bachelor of arts in Canadian Studies from Queen's University in 1997. He then moved to Halifax to study at Saint Mary's University. Upon graduation, he spent two years working for the CBC in Halifax, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Charlottetown, and Sudbury. During this time, he travelled and freelanced extensively from Europe and the Middle East.

Petrou worked briefly for the *Financial Post* before travelling again, this time from Beijing to Islamabad, including in Pakistan's tribal areas. He returned to Canada and began writing for the *Ottawa Citizen*. On September 11, 2001, the newspaper sent him to New York, and within weeks to Afghanistan, where he spent much of the fall, reporting also from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. He returned to Canada and wrote for the *National Post* for several months before moving to the United Kingdom to begin a doctorate at the University of Oxford. His thesis was about Canadians in the Spanish Civil War.

While living in the United Kingdom, Petrou continued to freelance for Canadian publications. In 2004, he travelled to Iran and secretly met with democratic dissidents who had been jailed with murdered Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi and who revealed new details about her death. He began writing for *Maclean's* and travelled throughout Europe and the Middle East. Petrou has also worked for BBC World Service and has written for several of the broadcaster's current affairs shows.

Petrou returned to Canada again at Christmas 2005 and has lived here since, making his home in Ottawa, though he continues to travel widely for *Maclean's*. He has most recently reported from Haiti, Venezuela, and Chad.

Michael Petrou is married to journalist Janyce McGregor, with whom he has a daughter, Norah Jayne Colleen Petrou.

For Discussion with Michael Petrou

- 2008 will mark the 70th anniversary of the last major battles in which Canadians were involved in the Spanish Civil War. Little is known of this war and it does not occupy a significant place in Canadian history. Why do you feel this war has been overlooked by historians and politicians and what prompted your own interest in it?
- One of the most shocking revelations to come out of *Renegades* is the claim that the RCMP, spied on Canadian veterans of the Spanish Civil War for years after they returned to Canada. How did you get this information?
- You also conclude that the vast majority of the Canadian volunteers were Communists. Where did this information come from?
- *Renegades* unravels the mystery of exactly how and why Norman Bethune, the famed Canadian physician, left Spain so suddenly – accused by some of espionage and by others of having a fascist lover. What was his role in the Spanish Civil War?
- Many of the relevant documents pertaining to this war were kept hidden by the Soviets for over six decades and have only recently been declassified. What material did you uncover in these documents that deal with Canadian involvement in the war? Why do you think the Soviets kept the material classified for so long?
- 1,681 Canadian volunteers fought in Spain, 400 died there. Yet the Canadian government did not support the involvement of its citizens in this conflict. Why were Canada's political leaders of the time so opposed to offering support? Why did so many Canadians defy the government and volunteer to fight anyway?
- You have assembled an amazing biographical database of the 1,681 volunteers that details their ethnic backgrounds, political affiliations, and share life experiences -- all of which played a role in their decision to enlist. This provides a truly unique and personalized picture of these soldiers. What are some of the more notable stories you uncovered?
- How were these soldiers treated after returning to Canada? Did the government offer any help or support?
- How many Spanish Civil War veterans have you personally met and/or interviewed?
- You also conclude that the vast majority of the Canadian volunteers were Communists. Yet, many Canadian volunteers were criticized by Communist commanders for political reasons that had little or nothing to do with the volunteers' dedication and skill as soldiers. What impact did this have on individuals and group morale?
- What would you say is the legacy of this war, and of the Canadians who fought in it?

Michael Petrou

Author Appearances, Spring 2008

Michael is available for media interviews either by phone, or in person. He will be in the following cities. To book an interview please contact Pat Cairns at 905.569.0002 or by email at creativeconnect@rogers.com.

- Ottawa - April 10 to 17
- Toronto - April 23 and 24
- Montreal - April 30
- Thunder Bay - May 5
- Winnipeg - May 6
- Calgary - May 7

He will be doing events at:

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| April 17th, 7 pm | Canadian War Museum,
Barney Danson Theatre, Ottawa, ON |
| April 23rd, 7 pm | Ben McNally Books,
366 Bay Street, Toronto, ON |
| April 30th, 7 pm | Paragraphe Books,
2220 Avenue McGill College, Montreal, QC |
| May 5th, 7:30 pm | Thunder Bay Museum,
425 Donald Street E., Thunder Bay, ON |
| May 6th, 7 pm | McNally Robinson Grant Park,
1120 Grant Avenue, Winnipeg, MB |
| May 7th, 5 pm | McNally Robinson Calgary,
120 8th Avenue SW, Calgary, AB |
| May 8th, 7 pm | SFU Harbour Centre
515 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC |
| May 11th, 2 pm | Jewish Community Centre, L'Chaim Room,
950 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver, BC |

