

D.P. (Pat) Stephens

A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War

An Armenian-Canadian in the Lincoln Battalion



Edited and with an Introduction by
Rick Rennie

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SPANISH CIVIL WAR:

AN ARMENIAN-CANADIAN IN
THE LINCOLN BATTALION

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The front cover shows Pat Stephens (in dark coat on the far right) with comrades at the Jarama Front, 1937. (Courtesy of Phyllis Stephens)

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Dedicated to
my son, Douglas, my daughter, Patricia,
and to my beloved wife, Phyllis.

D.P. (Pat) Stephens
November 1986

Introduction

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in the summer of 1936, it was the culmination of a long history of political, economic, religious, and social conflicts within the country. The immediate background to the war can be traced to 1931, when the constitutional monarchy under Alphonso XIII effectively went into exile after republicans captured a large share of the vote in urban municipal elections. The republican provisional government took power in April 1931.

The new government took measures to address some of the problems which had long plagued the country. It introduced labour and land reforms, as well as measures designed to curb the power of the church and the clergy. The initial appearance of unity soon gave way, however, to real divisions. Labour reform, for example, did not satisfy more radical elements such as the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajo* (CNT), an anarcho-sindicalist union which began staging strikes and protests against the government as early as 1932. The government members themselves spanned the political spectrum, from moderate liberals to fiercely anti-clerical socialists. By 1933, radical leftists within government were openly critical of what they perceived to be an overly moderate program. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the government showed signs of breaking down, and that right-wing elements began to exploit its weaknesses. In the elections of November 1933, the government lost a large share of its support to the *Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas* (CEDA), an umbrella group of right-wing parties. After just two years in power, the government had made political enemies to its left and right.

The government survived until 1936 as a Popular Front of anti-fascist forces which was formed in 1935. The Popular Front was victorious in the election of February 1936, but more radical leftists continued to block attempts at compromise with centrist or right-wing members. The right, meanwhile, took advantage of the situation to accuse the government of failing to control the escalating chaos which had gripped the country. A crucial point in this deteriorating situation was the assassination on 13 July of José Calvo Sotelo, a leader of the parliamentary monarchists, who was allegedly killed in retaliation for the murder of a member of the leftist

Assault Guard. Among those advocating a military solution to the political turmoil and street rioting was General Francisco Franco. On 18 July a military revolt began in Spain and in Spanish Morocco. On 30 July troops from Morocco began pouring into Spain, and the country was plunged into a bloody civil war.

Considering the political and military situation at the time, it might have appeared that the Franco forces (who called themselves the “nationalists”) would encounter little sustained resistance, especially since almost from the outset the insurgents had military support from both Germany and Italy. That the Republican forces were able to maintain a three-year military effort against Franco was due in large part to an enormous international volunteer effort. By July 1937, one year after the outbreak of war, 24 battalions of international volunteers had been formed, and over the course of the war some 40,000 volunteers from Germany, France, Russia, Great Britain, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Italy, the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, the United States, Canada, and elsewhere, poured into Spain to fight on the side of the republicans.

The main organizational force behind this effort was the Communist International in Moscow, which undertook a major recruitment and transportation campaign. For committed communists, the war was an opportunity to put their political principles into action. For others, the Communist Party seemed to be the only major international force prepared to confront Franco, and the Party’s recruitment campaign provided the means for participation. To many, regardless of their political beliefs, stopping Franco in Spain appeared crucial when one considered the implications of a fascist victory for the rest of Europe and the world, especially with the Hitler and Mussolini regimes increasing in both influence and aggression.

Communist Party of Canada (CPC) leader Tim Buck visited Spain during August-September 1936 and saw the situation firsthand. At the time, Buck said he thought that about 250 volunteers could be found in Canada.¹ By 1 July 1937, about 500 Canadians had volunteered to serve in Spain, and an official Canadian battalion, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of the 15th International Brigade, had been formed. An association known as the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion had also been established, and many Canadian cities had Spanish Aid Committees in place. Estimates vary, but some 1,400 Canadians are believed to have volunteered for duty in Spain.²

¹*Yours in the Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck*. William Beeching and Phyllis Clarke, eds. (Toronto 1977), 265-6.

²In *The Mackenzie Papineau-Battalion: The Canadian Contingent in the Spanish Civil War* (Ottawa 1986), 12, Victor Howard claims that about 1,200 Canadians went to Spain. William C. Beeching, in the *Dedication of Canadian Volunteers: Spain*,

There are several reasons why it is difficult to arrive at an exact number of international volunteers, Canadian or otherwise. Some Canadians (such as Pat Stephens) served in battalions other than the Mackenzie-Papineau and are therefore difficult to track using records and informants from that unit. Also, because the International Brigades were not composed of professional military forces, record-keeping was simply more difficult and less stringent. In some cases, for example, people may have volunteered for Spain, but not actually have got there.

In addition, much of the recruitment and volunteering process took place illegally and therefore secretly. At the outbreak of the civil war many countries attempted to isolate the conflict and adopted a policy of non-intervention. By September 1936, an official Non-Intervention Committee had been formed with representation from Great Britain, Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Russia, and Belgium. (Russia dropped its non-interventionist policy when Germany and Italy began supplying military aid to the fascists in September 1936.) The Canadian government followed the lead of Britain, and introduced measures designed to prevent Canadians from volunteering in Spain. On 31 July 1937, the government extended the Foreign Enlistment Act so that it applied to the Spanish war. This made it illegal for Canadians to volunteer for either combatant in Spain, and imposed a \$2,000 fine or 2 years in prison for violators.

The Canadian state's attempt to prevent CPC recruitment and to stem the flow of volunteers was not confined to legislative changes. The RCMP, in conjunction with the Department of External Affairs, also conducted surveillance operations designed to identify and intercept volunteers.³ On 23 June 1937, for example, the Office of the Commissioner, RCMP, informed External Affairs that the CPC was successfully recruiting volunteers, and that as many as 20 individuals a week were being secretly processed through Montreal on the way to Spain. Others, the correspondence stated, were passing through Winnipeg and Toronto, and many were going to Spain by way of the United States. The RCMP warned External Affairs that the CPC

1936-1939 (Regina 1989), puts the number at 1,448. According to Mark Zuehlk's *The Gallant Cause: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Vancouver 1996), xi, the memorial monument to the Canadian volunteers in Toronto's Queen's Park claims that 1,500 Canadians served. Another list, compiled by Mackenzie-Papineau veteran Lee Burke, has 1,438 names. This list is referred to in Myron Momryk's "Hungarian Volunteers from Canada in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939." *Hungarian Studies Review* XXIV, 1-2 (1997), 3-13.

³The response of the Canadian government, the Canadian public, and the RCMP is well documented in Martin Lobigs, "Canadian Responses to the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, 1936 to 1939." Unpublished MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, May 1992.

intended to recruit 500 volunteers, and that 500 were already in Spain.⁴ On 30 July, the day before the Foreign Enlistment Act was extended, the RCMP requested from External Affairs a list of passports which had been issued between 1933 and 1937, which they hoped to use to identify and intercept volunteers.⁵

With the government and the police joining forces to outlaw and prevent their participation, and with little idea of what to expect in going off to fight with an unconventional army in a distant country, why did so many Canadians go to Spain? It is important first of all, as historian Martin Lobigs has pointed out, to distinguish between the official response of the state and the response of the general public. Lobigs has shown that the attitude of the general public, and even of some Liberal politicians, toward the volunteers differed in many instances from the official policy of the government. Many supported and encouraged the volunteers throughout and after the civil war.⁶ To many, despite the dangers and the opposition, their duty must have seemed clear — to fight Franco and quash fascism in Spain. In many cases, only they know, and their reasons were no doubt various and complex. It is important to bear in mind, when considering their motivations, the political and economic climate in Canada at the time. The Great Depression had created mass unemployment across the country, and shattered many people's faith in the liberal capitalist state. The government of R.B. Bennett, especially, did little to reassure them with its repressive social welfare policies.⁷ Experiences of the work camps and of mass protests such as the On-to-Ottawa Trek had created a highly politicized population.⁸

Many Canadian volunteers were immigrants. One source estimates that of 1,043 volunteers for which we have ethnic origins, 810 (or about 75%)

⁴NAC MG 30 E173 Vol. 5, File #6.

⁵NAC MG 30 E173 Vol.5, File#6. Beeching claims that the RCMP and the government were fearful not so much of involvement in the Spanish war as such, but of the implications of the CPC's activities and the war experience for the domestic scene: *Canadian Volunteers*, 12-13. For an account of the growth and activities of the RCMP and the Canadian state surveillance system in this period, see, Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years*, vols. 1-4 (St. John's 1993-1998). Lobigs makes extensive use of RCMP and other state documents in "Canadian Responses."

⁶Lobigs, "Canadian Responses," 133-84; 219-76.

⁷Victor Howard, for example, claims that the Depression and the Canadian government's policy's toward the unemployed left many Canadians feeling bitter and marginalized, and this contributed to the Canadian involvement in the Spanish war: *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, 27.

⁸See Lorne Brown, *When Freedom was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator and the State* (Montreal 1987); and James Struthers, *No Fault of their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto 1985).

were Western European, Scandinavian, or Eastern European.⁹ Many of them brought experiences of European war and politics with them to Canada, and were especially aware of the implications of the Spanish situation. Nor was Canada itself immune to the influence of far-right politics. The 1930s was a period of alarming growth in right-wing movements across the country, and this brought the fascist threat home in a very tangible way.¹⁰ In short, the general climate in the country at the time likely encouraged volunteers to act on their personal and political convictions.

One person who did so early in the war was Douglas Patrick (Pat) Stephens. Stephens was born in Armenia on 22 November 1910. His given name was Badrig der Stepanian, and he was the fourth of five boys born to Esther Bedrossian and Solomon der Stephanian. Solomon, a pharmacist and a landowner, was married twice so Stephens also had two stepbrothers and two stepsisters. Stephens' experience with war and politics began early in life. During World War I, in which Turkey sided with the Axis, the Armenian minority was subjected to extreme persecution at the hands of the Turks. Stephens' father and his uncle, Mugerditch, were active in local politics, and early in the war Mugerditch was taken away and executed. Stephens' father narrowly escaped the same fate, but died shortly after. Stephens' family experienced other, similar tragedies during the war, which he relates in this memoir.

After the war, the family began selling off their property, and on 9 July 1921, they left Armenia. They made their way through Turkey and from there to Syria, where they stayed until 1926. They hoped eventually to join relatives in America, but immigration laws made that difficult, so they chose Canada instead. They went to Beirut, boarded a ship called *Canada*, and arrived in Quebec City in July 1926, when Pat Stephens was sixteen.

The family settled in Windsor, Ontario, partly to be close to the US border in case of opportunity to emigrate there. Stephens enrolled in Walkerville Windsor High School to take a Commercial Course, but his great love was history, at which he excelled. In August, 1928, however, he began work as an accountant with General Motors. His mother was eventually granted a visa to go to the US, and she settled in Detroit, where she died in 1929. Not long after this personal loss, Stephens was dealt another blow when he became a victim of the Great Depression. In the fall of 1929, he was laid off from General Motors. In January 1930 he arrived in Toronto, where he took a number of low-paying restaurant jobs before heading back to Windsor to try his hand at selling refrigerators. When that did not work out he went to back to Toronto to try selling electric signs. Throughout this

⁹Momryk, "Hungarian Volunteers," 11.

¹⁰See Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto 1975).

period, he kept company primarily with other Armenians, and in 1930 he began working as a houseman for a Mr. Babayan in Toronto.¹¹

Stephens' civil war memoir picks up in Toronto in 1936, when he was 26 years old, and some of the details about his life during the years 1930-36 are mentioned in the early pages of the memoir. One of the things he must have done during these years was become associated with the CPC: he volunteered for Spain through his connections in the Young Communist League (YCL) in Toronto. Stephens volunteered in December 1936 and travelled to Spain via New York and then Paris (with a brief side-trip to Boston). According to his official service file, he arrived in Spain on 14 February 1937.¹² As such, he was one of those approximately 500 Canadians who went to Spain before the promulgation of the Foreign Enlistment Act in July 1937. He served in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the 15th Brigade (to which the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion also belonged). Though it is often considered the American battalion, the Lincoln contained soldiers from other countries, including Canada, just as the Mackenzie-Papineau contained non-Canadians.¹³ Stephens began duty as a Machine Gunner, but also served as a Chief of Intendencia (a supply post), and later as military investigator.

Stephens' account of his civil war experience is especially revealing because of his background and his range of experiences. His Armenian heritage, the fact that he was a Canadian serving in a primarily American battalion, and the variety of posts he held in Spain, combine to give him a special insight into the war and the international brigades.

While Stephens' manuscript has been left mostly intact, I have deleted some material which was clearly superfluous. I have made corrections in some cases where Stephens was factually wrong about something (he wrote the memoir nearly fifty years after the events). I have also pointed out on occasion that there exist alternative accounts of a given incident. The chapter breaks and chapter titles are also mine. In some instances, Stephens related potentially embarrassing or defamatory anecdotes about certain individuals — ordinary volunteers like himself. In such cases I have related the story as Stephens told it, but omitted the name. It is important to include such stories: they show us what people do in very trying and unusual

¹¹This summary of Stephens' early life is taken from an unpublished memoir entitled "An Armenian Childhood," in the possession of the Canadian Committee on Labour History.

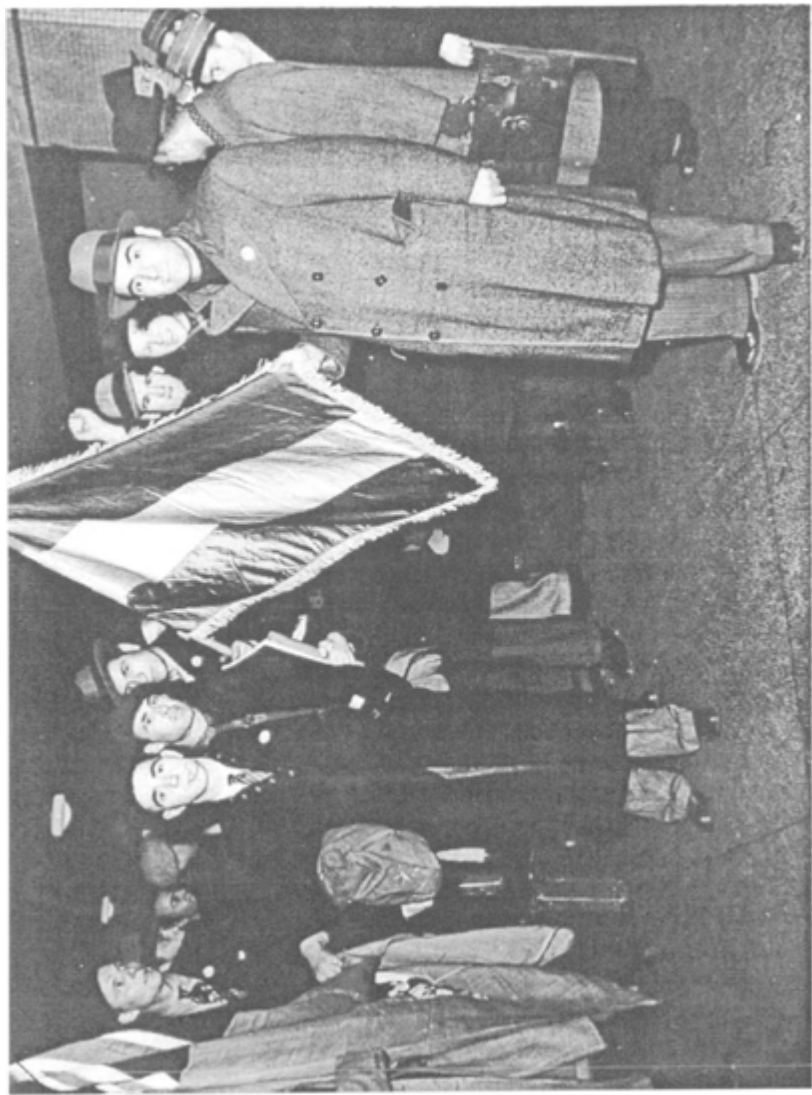
¹²NAC Reel K265. These microfilm reels contain the personal, military, and political assessment reports conducted by the War Commissariat of the International Brigades in Barcelona at the conclusion of the war.

¹³The 15th Battalion is often referred to as the "Lincoln Battalion" or even the "Lincoln Brigade." Stephens, for example, uses the terms interchangeably.

circumstances, and tell us a lot about the nature of discipline in the brigades. Removing the names, however, does not detract from the story or its intent, and I felt there was little to be gained at this stage by naming names. This is not a history of the Spanish Civil War, but of one man's experience and interpretation of the war. For the purpose of orientation, however, I have provided a chronology of events and a list of the Lincoln Battalion's major engagements. I have also provided footnote references intended to explain various things in the text, or direct the reader to other sources.

The civil war manuscript, as well as the "Armenian Childhood" manuscript just cited, came to the Canadian Committee on Labour History by way of Dr. Gabrielle Scardellato and the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, to whom I am grateful. Thanks also to Gregory S. Kealey, Irene Whitfield, and Josephine Thompson of Memorial University, to Myron Momryk of the National Archives of Canada, to Ingrid Botting, and to Doug Stephens. Special thanks to Phyllis Stephens for providing so much practical assistance and valuable information.

Rick Rennie
Memorial University of Newfoundland
2000



Canadian volunteers with flag of Spain. Montreal, Québec. (NAC C-067461)

Chronology of Events

- 1931 April - Second Republic proclaimed.
 October - Manuel Azaña becomes prime minister.
- 1934 August - Hitler becomes Fuhrer of Germany.
 October - Worker's uprising in Asturias crushed by Army of Africa units under Franco.
- 1935 October - Fascist Italy invades Ethiopia.
- 1936 February - Popular Front coalition wins elections.
 July 17-20 - Military revolts in Spain and Spanish Morocco
 July 30 - Army of Africa begins moving into Spain.
 November - Spanish people, aided by international volunteers, defend Madrid.
 German and Italian forces begin supplying military assistance to Franco's "nationalists".
 December - First American volunteers leave for Spain.
- 1937 February - Battle of Jarama.
 July - Battle of Brunete.
 August - Republican offensive at Belchite.
 December - Republican offensive at Teruel begins.
- 1938 February - Nationalists victorious at Teruel.
 March - Nationalist offensive at Aragon.

July - Republican offensive on Ebro River.

October - Battle of Ebro ends, International Brigades begin withdrawal from Spain.

December - Nationalist offensive in Catalonia.

1939 March 27 - Nationalists enter Madrid.

Major Engagements for the 15th Brigade

February 1937	Jarama
July 1937	Brunete
August 1937	Quinto
September 1937	Belchite
October 1937	Ebro
December 1937	Teruel
February 1938	Belchite
March 1938	Caspe
March 1938	Gandesa
April 1938	Mora la Nueva
July 1938	Corbera
August 1938	Sierra Pandolls/Sierra Caballs

Chapter One

Volunteering and the Voyage Over

The Spanish Civil War had started, and the newspapers were full of reports of the heroic Spanish people's struggle against the Fascist military forces of Franco. A column of Moorish forces¹ led by Franco was advancing on Madrid. Saragossa and Badajoz were in the hands of the rebels. Barcelona and its Catalan people were fighting the insurgents on the streets. The Spanish people raised the slogan "*No Pasaran*" ("They shall not pass"), and the people rushed to the barricades to defend Madrid. In August 1936 the first groups of international volunteers, consisting mostly of French, German, and Polish anti-Fascists arrived in Madrid. The accounts of how these international volunteers were helping the people fight the Fascists at the very gates of Madrid created a heady euphoria in the minds of the leftist intellectuals that wanted to join in the struggle.

I heard that some of my friends had volunteered for the International Brigades. Larry Ryan and Tom Beckett were already on their way to Spain.² Canadians were volunteering through their communist connections for the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, which was being organized in New York. I decided to join and after some discreet inquiries I contacted Roy Davis, a well-known communist and Chief Organizer of the Young Communist League (YCL) in Toronto. I had been on very friendly terms with Roy through my connections in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). I had cooperated with him and the YCL on a few joint projects, such

¹That is, the army of North Africa, where Franco began the military revolt.

²Ryan and Beckett were among the first five Canadians to be dispatched. The group also included Henry Scott Beatty, Clifford Budgeon, and Frederick Lackey. Like Stephens, these first volunteers were members of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. See Victor Howard (with Mac Reynolds), *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion: The Canadian Contingent in the Spanish Civil War* (Ottawa 1986), 71-2. First published Toronto 1969, under the name Victor Hoar (with Mac Reynolds) and with the subtitle *Canadian Participation in the Spanish Civil War*.

as strikes, street demonstrations, educational seminars, and socialist propaganda. In early December 1936 I met Roy for lunch at Bowles (in Toronto) and he promised to see what he could do for me. A few days later he phoned me and asked me to meet him at 48 Wellington Street. When I arrived, Roy was there with Stanley Buchanan, a well-known communist who had been to Moscow and trained at the Marx-Engels Institute.

Buchanan said, "You know, Pat, it is no picnic there. You could well get killed."

I said, "Comrade Buchanan, I am well aware of the implications. It is high time to take positive action in support of my ideals. If death is a part of it, so be it. We have to take a stand, and there is no place like Spain to test one's dedication."

After some more leftist dissertations and pleasantries, I was asked to write a short autobiography, stating my background, my relatives' social position in life, my father's name, his position or profession, and my financial and political situation. This was to be presented to Roy Davis as soon as possible. The next day I gave the résumé to Roy and he said he would give it to the recruiting committee and let me know. He said he wanted the whole thing to be absolutely secret. I was not to discuss this meeting with anybody. On my promise, we parted.

Two days later I received a phone call from Stanley Buchanan, who asked me to meet him in the same place, 48 Wellington, Room 214, at 8:30 that night. By now I was feeling quite tense. Would I be accepted or not? I arrived and was met by Roy Davis, Stanley Buchanan and another person whom I did not know. I was introduced to this gentleman. His name was given as Comrade John and he informed me that he was from the Recruiting Committee. He spoke English with an indistinguishable foreign accent. He asked about my health, and whether I had any military training. I replied yes, that I had been in a High School Cadet Corps. He smiled, took notes, shook my hand, and said my application had been accepted and I would make an excellent volunteer. Roy poured four drinks of rye whiskey, and we drank a toast to Spain and to victory.

When Comrade John left, Comrade Buchanan started giving me instructions. I was to present myself at White Star Shipping Line the next day and ask for Mr. Murray Stein, who would arrange for my passport. They would inform me when it arrived. I was asked to take four passport photos and my Canadian citizenship papers. In a few days my passport arrived, and I was asked to go to White Star and pick it up. The day after I got my passport, Roy Davis phoned and told me to get ready to go. He said I should travel light: a couple of changes of socks and underwear, shaving kit, and a good supply of razor blades. I was asked not to reveal my date of departure, to arrange my affairs and then go see him at Wellington Street.

At this time I was working as cook/houseman for a Mr. Carl Benlian, and I would not have time to give him a full notice. I was really embarrassed about this as the man had been good to me. I went to the bank and withdrew my savings, which amounted to forty-five dollars. I also wired my brother Jack in Detroit, and he wired me fifty dollars. The Thursday before the Monday I was to leave, I informed Mr. Benlian that I had to leave his employ on the following Monday. He was taken aback and said I had not given him advance notice of at least two weeks. I gave him a cock and bull story about winning a literary contest in a magazine for a trip to France. I said I was sincerely sorry, but hoped that he could find someone in short order. I suppose he realized there wasn't much point in further discussion. He said he was glad for me and wished me good luck. He also gave me twenty dollars as a present to spend in France. That weekend I went and said goodbye to all my friends, telling them that I was going on a trip to France.

I had to leave for New York Monday night at six, and I was very tense. I didn't know how I would pass the weekend in this state of excitement. Sunday night I prepared my luggage. I decided to carry only one suitcase. I hated to leave my books behind. There was a complete set of Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; a two-volume copy of Marx's *Das Kapital*; and works by Engels, Voltaire, Plato, Rousseau, Bakunin, and many others. Finally, Monday, 7 January arrived, but I still had a day to kill since I was not to meet Roy until five. Around noon I went to the store of Mr. Babayan (Mr. Benlian's brother-in-law and a former employer of mine). There were my friends, Armenag, Seth Adoorian and George Semerjian. They had already heard from Mr. Benlian that I was going to France. Seth Adoorian knew me better than the others and he also knew of my socialist connections. He took me to lunch at Stoodleigh's on King Street West. After lunch I went back to the store to pick up my suitcase and Seth took me to one side and asked me outright if I was going to Spain. I said no, that I was going to France but was uncertain where I would go from there. I went to say goodbye to Mr. Babayan and he gave me ten dollars. I now had a total of a hundred and twenty-five dollars.

I went to Wellington Street as arranged, and met with Davis and Buchanan. Roy gave me my railway ticket to New York and steamship ticket on the *Berengaria*. I was also given a letter of introduction to the committee in New York, along with a letter of introduction from one accountancy firm in Toronto to another in New York. I was to show this to the American inspector if the need arose. Stanley Buchanan said he wanted to see what I was carrying in my suitcase, so I opened it for him. I had packed a pair of riding boots and britches. He asked what I was going to tell American customs about those. I said that I would tell them I planned to go horseback riding with friends in New York. After some discussion, it was agreed I could

bring them with me; they could come in handy in Spain. Stanley asked me if I had enough money with me for the trip to New York, and I said I would be fine. I said goodbye to Roy and Stanley and left.

When I arrived at the Union Station, I decided to exchange my coach ticket for a first class ticket and a Pullman berth. I thought it would be easier for me to get across to Buffalo in a first class car than in a coach. The train left Toronto for Buffalo at six, and I was on my way. As the train puffed its way out of the maze of tracks at Union Station, I gazed at the familiar sights of my beloved Toronto, the city of so many heartbreaks, hard times, friendship, and joy. When we passed through Sunnyside, all the amusement booths and rides were lit up. There were couples strolling arm-in-arm down the midway. I sighed and wondered if I would ever see those sights again. The train passed through Oakville, Hamilton, and St. Catherine's. Then the American Customs and Immigration Inspectors entered the car and started inspecting the passengers and their luggage. They came to me and asked where I lived, where I was going, and for how long. I told them I was from Toronto and I was going to New York for two weeks. Then they asked where I was born and when I said Armenia, they wanted to see my citizenship papers. I showed them the papers, and the letter of introduction from the accountancy firm. He glanced at them and passed on to the seat behind me. The customs man wanted to know if I had anything to declare, and I opened the suitcase for him. He barely noticed it, and passed on. Soon we were at Fort Erie, crossing the bridge over to Buffalo. Once we crossed the border, all my tension lifted. The Pullman porter came in and made my bed. I crawled in and went fast asleep.

When I awoke, we were on the outskirts of New York. When the train pulled into Pennsylvania Station, I found a clean looking lunchroom in the station and went in for breakfast. Then I went to barber shop for a nice shave. I got into one of the cabs lined up outside the station and gave the driver the address. Unfortunately, that address has escaped my memory after so many years (this was forty-six years ago). What amazed me about New York on my first visit there were all the people with foreign accents. The barber was definitely Italian, the cabdriver had a Hebrew accent, and the waitress in the coffee shop was probably Greek.

The taxi stopped in front of an ancient office building in Manhattan. I walked up to the second storey and to the room with the number I had been given in Toronto. A giant of a man was stationed at the door, and he asked what I wanted. I told him I had come to see Comrade Gold. He looked me over and then took me to a man sitting behind a small desk. He asked me what I wanted with Comrade Gold. I told him I had come to enlist in the International Brigade. He too looked at me in an unfriendly, suspicious manner. I was very well dressed in a grey pin-striped suit and expensive

looking overcoat, and I suppose he thought I was either a secret agent or a reporter. He said he didn't know anything about International Brigades and thought I was in the wrong place. By now I realized he was just being cautious. I gave him my letter to Comrade Gold from Roy Davis. He read the letter and entered an inner office. When he came out he still looked unfriendly, but he ushered me into the inner office. Comrade Gold was a more friendly person. He shook my hand and greeted me with a broad smile. He asked for my passport, which I gave him, along with the ticket for the SS *Berengaria*. He examined my passport and the ticket and asked me to leave them with him for safekeeping. After some pleasantries, he came to the purpose of my visit. He said he knew Roy and Stan very well. They were both good friends and he trusted their choice. He told me to go to the Union Hotel on Union Square and get a room. He would phone them and make arrangements for my stay. The room rent would be paid for by the Committee. He wanted to know if I had money for my daily expenses and I said yes. He informed me that there had been a change of plans, and the next draft would not be sailing on the SS *Berengaria* but on another ship. The name would be given to me later along with a new ticket for that ship, which would be sailing in about ten days. He then presented me with a card signed by him, and gave me instructions to go and get my equipment after I had registered at the hotel and gotten some rest.

I took a cab to the Union Hotel. It was a dingy old place. I registered and was taken upstairs by a porter to a second-storey room, which was fairly clean. I had a shower and a rest and then I went out for lunch. Now it was time to go for my equipment. I got a cab and went to the given address, which turned out to be a corner cigar and variety store. I presented the card given to me by Gold to the man behind the counter. He smiled and took me to an inner room behind the counter, opened a trap door on the floor and yelled down, "Norm, here is another one!" I went down the stairs to a big basement warehouse, where Norm took over. I was given a big, cheap-looking black suitcase, and then the equipment to put in it: two pairs of heavy woollen socks, two flannel khaki shirts, two pairs of woollen underwear, a WWI leather hat, a pair of heavy boots, a ground sheet and wool blanket, American Army Service britches and puttees, a backpack, a side haversack, an army belt with two pouches, and a water bottle. These were neatly packed into the suitcase and I was ushered out a side door on the stairs to the street. I took a cab back to the hotel and had a long nap. When I awoke, I went out for a walk to try and find a good restaurant. I don't think I have seen a dirtier city than New York, with its old tenements, newspapers and garbage strewn all over the place, and poorly dressed people walking the streets with desperate, forlorn looks. I took a stroll to Broadway and

had supper at a little Italian restaurant. When I arrived back at the hotel, I was given a message to go and see Mr. Gold in the morning.

The next morning I went to see Mr. Gold and he told me that I was to sail on the SS *Paris* on 21 January. He gave me back my passport along with a steamship ticket. I had about two weeks to spend in New York, so he gave me twenty dollars toward my expenses and said I would be contacted later. I asked Mr. Gold if it would be all right for me to visit my relatives in Boston. I had uncles and cousins living there. He said that was fine as long as I reported to him on 19 January. He said I could leave my equipment at the hotel room and not to tell anyone in Boston where I was going. When I got back to the hotel, I found another young man in my room, and another black suitcase just like mine. His name was Frank Kraszewski and he was from Detroit. His parents were from Poland and he was a student at Wayne University. They had put a cot in the room for him, but I told Frank I was going to Boston, so he could use my bed. We went out for lunch and then I went to Central Station and got on the train for Boston.

I arrived in Boston in late afternoon, got a cab and went to my Uncle Jacob Bedrossian's house, at 24 Union Street in Watertown. I knocked on the door and my cousin Ruth answered. We had never met before and she was very surprised to see me. Her brother Johnny, whom I had not seen since he was a little boy, was at school and would soon be home. My Uncle Jacob operated a pharmacy on Galen Street in Newton and Ruth said her mother, my Aunt Siran, had gone to the store to help him. Ruth phoned her father to inform him of my arrival. When Johnny got home from school, we all went to the drugstore. Uncle's drugstore was not too far from their house. I had not seen my Uncle, who was my mother's brother, since my mother's death in 1929, and had not seen his Aunt Siran since we arrived in Canada in 1926. It had been a long time. Aunt Siran left the store early to go home and get supper ready, and Johnny went with her. Ruth had already gone, so was left alone with my uncle. The store was not busy; hardly anybody came in all the time I was there. Uncle complained that the depression had ruined his business. He thought he would give up the drug store and go to work for a chain pharmacy. At least he would be sure he would have a salary coming in every week. It is a shame that, after so many years of hard work, the depression might force him to go and work for somebody else. He was not alone; there were thousands in the same predicament.

After we closed the store we went back to the house and had a delicious meal with lots of Armenian delicacies. We all had a drink, including the young ones, in honour of this special occasion. After supper Uncle asked me what brought me to Boston, because he knew that if I had come only for a visit I would have notified them in advance. I told them I was on my

way to France and my boat would not be sailing for a few days, so I had decided to come to Boston to visit my relatives instead of waiting in New York. He wanted to know the reason for my trip to France, so again I had to fabricate a lie. My uncle, ever since his youth, had belonged to the Armenian *Hunchag*, the revolutionary party, whose aim was Armenian liberation. This party's political sympathies were with the European Social Democrats. I told Uncle there was a conference of Anti-Fascist League members in France and I was going as a delegate from Canada. My uncle was quite surprised; he was not aware that I took part in socialist activities. He said he was delighted that I did, and that I championed the cause of world anti-Fascism. Then he started telling me how he was sentenced to jail for two years in Harpooth, Turkey, for his political activities in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement, and how my father had helped free him and then helped him emigrate to America.

I asked Uncle Jacob to phone my cousins, Grant, Eddy, and Lucy and tell them I was in Boston. Soon I was on the phone with Grant. His voice was choked with emotion, and he said he would be over right away. His sister Lucy and brother Eddy were also phoned and they were coming too. My cousin Eddy and I were like brothers. We grew up together; we had a lot of fun and a lot of fights. Lucy was the only girl in our clan, and the oldest. She was very beautiful, a vivacious and attractive girl. She was like an older sister to all of us. If we had any disagreements or arguments she was the one who acted the part of the arbitrator, and we more or less accepted her decisions. She was now married to an Armenian businessman, and had two beautiful daughters and a handsome boy. Soon Grant, Eddy, Lucy, and Lucy's husband arrived and we had a very emotional reunion. They stayed well past midnight.

My adopted sister, Mary, also lived in Massachusetts, in a little mill town called Clinton, which was about seventy-five miles from Boston. Next day I decided to go to Clinton to see Mary and her family. I took the train early in the morning and arrived before noon. I took a taxi to Mary's house. When Mary came to the door, she got very emotional. We hadn't seen each other since 1926, when she married and went to America. She almost dragged me into the house, took me in her arms and started to cry like a baby. Soon her children, Yester, Ruth, and Sylvia arrived home from school and we had an Armenian lunch. That evening, Mary made *harpoot kuftha*, an Armenian lamb dish. Mary's husband, Zak, worked as a labourer. Zak was a friendly giant of a man, with strong working-man's hands. He welcomed me to his house and said that Mary spoke often of me and all her family. That night Mary had some Armenian neighbours over and we had a great time. The next morning I took the train to Boston and Mary and her family came to see me off.

That night I stayed at my uncle's in Watertown, and then went to spend a few nights with Lucy. They were living in Belmont, another suburb of Boston. Lucy had three children, a boy named Diran, and two daughters named Mary and Louise. I had met Lucy's husband, Misak Du Bagdasarian, in Detroit when he was courting Lucy. After the way they greeted me, it dawned on me I had missed all this warmth and hospitality for so many years after the passing of my mother.

Lucy's husband was considerably older than Lucy and he was from our part of Armenia. He was a young man when he left Armenia for America. He remembered my father and uncle well and told me some interesting stories about my father. He told that one time my father had asked the Armenian poet Telgadentzi, who was seeing his daughter Gayane clandestinely, to stop seeing her, as he would never consent to a union between them. The poet had written about this incident in one of the anecdotes about his life in Armenia. Lucy's husband had a rare copy of this autobiography, and he turned to the pages pertaining to this meeting between Telgadentzi and my father. The poet wrote that my father had led him to his luxuriously furnished, well-appointed study. Here the poet describes in detail the decadence of the wealthy, and describes my father in sarcastic detail, dressed in a rich silk dressing gown, smoking an expensive cigar, and wearing a look of disapproval for impoverished poets and intelligentsia. I can't remember the rest of this meeting, but the outcome was that the poet never visited my sister again. This poet Telgadentzi and my sister Gayane both became the victims of the Armenian massacres in Turkey in 1915. It is a pity what ironies history dictates in our short lives. I spent the last night of my visit with Grant and his wife, Armenoohi, and their two sons and two daughters. The morning after my visit to Grant's, the whole clan came to Boston Bay Station to see me off.

I arrived back in New York on 19 January. When I arrived at the lobby of Union Station who should I meet but one of my close friends from Toronto, Walter Dent.³ Wally and I had roomed together for a while in Toronto when we were very active in the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM). I did not conceal my secret of volunteering for Spain when I had said goodbye to Wally the night before I left Toronto. At that time he said nothing to me about his plans for going to Spain also. I guess he kept his secret better than I did. Wally and I went to a restaurant for supper that night, and I chided him for not telling me he had volun-

³Walter Dent was one of a group of Canadians, which also included Bob Kerr, Ed Cecil-Smith, Joe Kelly, and Ed Yardas, who came up with the idea of a separate Canadian Battalion (the Mackenzie Papineau). This group also tried to convince the Mackenzie King government to aid the Republican cause. See, William C. Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers: Spain, 1936-1939* (Regina 1989), 56-7.

teered for Spain. He just smiled and said I should have guessed, knowing his sentiments about the whole thing.

Wally had quite an experience crossing into the US at Buffalo. He was questioned by Immigration authorities, who by this time were aware that Canadian volunteers were crossing the border to go to New York and join the Lincoln Brigade. They asked him outright if he was going to New York to join the volunteers, which he repeatedly denied. Then they asked him how much money he was carrying with him, and he said a little over two hundred dollars. They asked to see the money, but all poor Wally could produce was a twenty-dollar bill. He was processed by an Immigration Board and deported back to Canada. So then he tried via Niagara Falls. He got on a bus and crossed over to Niagara Falls, New York, and had no trouble getting in. He just told them he wanted to see the American side of the falls, and showed them his Canadian birth certificate. He took a train from Niagara Falls to Buffalo and then another to New York City. He had registered in my hotel the morning I left for Boston.

The day after I arrived back in New York and met up with Wally, we were informed we should attend a meeting at a designated Union Hall for our final departure instructions. When we arrived at the hall the place was packed with all the volunteers who would be sailing on the SS *Paris*. We were given a final pep talk by the top committee members, and each of us was handed a five-dollar bill to spend on the boat. Our information was that the boat would be sailing at 10:30 the next morning, and we should start boarding the ship after 7:00. We were told not to arrive in big groups, as they were sure the FBI knew what was happening.

Wally, Frank, and I got up early the next morning and took a cab to the pier. We got there around 8:30. We watched taxis arrive and disgorge young men at the pier, all carrying identical black suitcases. We presented our tickets and I was about to start up the gangplank when a man tapped me on the shoulder, produced a badge, and said he was from the FBI. He wanted to know who I was and where I was going. I informed him that I was a Canadian bound for France. He apologized, telling me he had no jurisdiction over Canadians, and started to leave. Suddenly, he turned back and asked to see my passport. He examined it and then asked how I had crossed into New York, since I didn't have a Transit Visa from the American authorities. He turned toward an Immigration shed and started calling for an Inspector. I don't think he was a competent FBI agent, because he handed my passport back to me, and started looking for Immigration men. I grabbed my bags and ran up the gangplank while he was still calling out for an Inspector. When he turned around, I was halfway up the gangplank. He looked puzzled and did not know what to do. The sailors on the ship had noticed all this, and two of them came down the gangplank and helped

with my bags. Once I was on the ship, the sailors looked at my ticket and rushed me to my cabin. I think they knew where I was going. There was a strong Communist cell among the crew, and I think these sailors were put on the deck of the ship to assist the volunteers. I stayed in my cabin until departure time. Finally the gangplank was drawn, the tie ropes were retrieved, and two tugs started pulling the big boat from its pier. I climbed the ladder to the deck and watched people waving goodbye. The skyline of New York looked majestic. We passed the Statue of Liberty and started sailing down the Hudson toward the open sea. Soon the tugs picked up their cables and gave a cheery toot, and the huge boat was on its own. We passed Long Island Sound and were on the wide open ocean. The skyline of New York was gradually receding. Soon we could see no land at all.

There were four bunks in my cabin. Wally and Frank were assigned to other cabins, and my bunkmates were a German-American named Rudy Heine, and two Americans, Hy Stone and someone else whose name I cannot remember. They all appeared a little younger than I was. We became pals on the trip. Heine was a waiter at the Waldorf and Stone was a student at New York University. The other was a cabdriver. They were all active in the labour movement.

We went for lunch together and after lunch Stone returned with me to the cabin. He was a likeable young man, a first year medical student, and very active in the YCL at school. He was going to Spain against the wishes of his parents, but had made up his mind to go. After a chat with Stone I went on deck, where I met a young man from Montreal by the name of Ted Allen. He said he was a writer, and was going to Spain to report for the Communist daily *The Clarion*. I drifted down to the lounge, where I met some more volunteers, all eager and enthusiastic. I would say their average age was about twenty-one. Tea and pastries were served, compliments of the French line. The lounge was pretty full of volunteers, but there was a smattering of other passengers around. A dark Italian fellow was very friendly to us, and was buying rounds for the boys. But we knew who he was; he was pointed out to us by our leaders as an Italian agent. We had been asked to be careful in our conversations with him. Another friendly and jolly fellow was a German agent. I don't know how our leaders knew this, but the assumption was that the communist sympathizers among the crew had supplied this information.

The second morning on board, before any of us were awake, someone knocked on our cabin door. Rudy opened the door and a stranger walked in, sporting a bandaged head. He said he was a stowaway and needed our help. He had slept the night somewhere in the engine room and he had not eaten in a couple of days. We told him to stay in our cabin, and at breakfast we all put something in our pockets and fed him that day. We



Communist Party of Canada Banner, May Day, Toronto, 1937. (NAC, C-74966).



Canadian volunteers on board the SS *President Roosevelt*, c.1937. (NAC, C-67465).

were curious to know what had happened to him and why his head was bandaged, but we did press him with questions, and he volunteered no information. It was obvious he was running away from New York. We kept him and fed him for the rest of the voyage. To this day I don't know who he was or what kind of trouble he was in. I don't know what became of him at Le Havre when we left our cabin to disembark.

A sea voyage can be a monotonous trip on the North Atlantic run. For days you see nothing but water and sky. On the fifth day we sailed past the Irish coast, and were approaching Land's End in England. Soon a hazy mass was visible, which we first thought was the mist, but it was actually the land mass of France. In time we could distinguish landmarks, and we now knew we were approaching the coast of Normandy. Soon the red roofs of Le Havre came into view. It was a beautiful sight. There was the pilot tender sailing out to meet us. The stairs were lowered and the pilot and the French Immigration officers boarded our ship. We had our last lunch on the SS *Paris* while sailing in the estuary of Le Havre.

Chapter Two

Journey to the Front

We were asked to assemble in the lounge for our passport inspection. The inspectors sat at a long table, looking at our passports and stamping them. Next to the Immigration men sat another man who took the passports after they were stamped and registered the name and number off each passport on a foolscap paper. He looked at my passport but did not put my name down. He said he had nothing to do with Canadians.

When the last passport was passed to him for registration, this gentleman stood up and introduced himself. He said his name was Anderson and that he was from the American Embassy. He said he knew we were volunteers going to Spain, and informed us that the border between France and Spain was closed and that we would not be permitted to cross. The Ambassador, he said, had authorized him to tell us that we could be his guests in Paris for a whole week, and after that we would be shipped back to the US at the expense of the American government. The boys began protesting that we were not going to Spain, but had come to visit friends and relatives. Anderson simply said, "Well, so be it." The gangplank was lowered and we started to disembark. There we were, 345 young men with the same black suitcases, marching down the gangplank and walking to the Custom sheds. There were some spectators at the docks, and some of them apparently knew who we were because we could see clenched fist salutes here and there. Almost all the Customs men had big grins on their faces. They did not even open the suitcases, but just marked them as they passed. Next to the dock was the train all ready to receive us and speed us on our way to Paris. This train was a fast, modern electric train. Anderson, the American Embassy official, came along with us on the same train. Now he was more humane and friendly, cracking jokes with us, but still insisting that the border was closed and reminding us that if anyone changed their minds they could go to the Embassy and contact him, and the same offer would stand.

The train sped through the neat little villages of Normandy on the way to Paris. Now and then, railway crews would stop their work and cheer and wave clenched fists in solidarity with the American volunteers. I guess the news of our arrival was imparted to these friendly French workers through the grapevine. Soon the train arrived in Paris and we all got off with our black bags. There were taxis lined up outside the station and guides placed us in cabs. We were taken to the Union Hall for supper. After supper we were put in cabs again and taken back to the station to board the train for the Spanish border. The station was packed full of French soldiers and their relatives. It was obvious that the French Army was being semi-mobilized. Our train would travel all night and arrive in Perpignan the next morning. It was a long, tedious train ride that night. Early next morning the train arrived at Toulouse. Everyone looked tired and dirty. Breakfast was brought in and we started to cheer up a bit. The Jewish boys joked about there being no bagels. There were some French servicemen on the train. One soldier got very friendly, and told us that he knew we were going to Spain as members of an International Brigade. He said would gladly join us if he could, but being in the French Army, it was not possible to do so, as he would be classed as a deserter. He was very much interested in hearing from us in Spain and he asked me to write to him at a given address so he could send me parcels. I suspected that he was an enemy agent, and supplied his address to our group leader who was accompanying us on the trip.

It was just before noon when our train pulled into the Perpignan station. We could see the majestic peaks of the Pyrenees, and we knew that we would soon cross them on into Spain. The station was full of peasants, eyeing us curiously. There were no welcoming bands or speeches, just plain, inquisitive stares. We were marched off to an inn very close to the station for lunch. Here, friendly French comrades greeted us, and tables were set under swaying palm trees, with wine, cheese, and crusty French bread. This was a welcome sight; we hadn't had a good meal since we left Paris. The wine was good and plentiful and afterwards we sauntered around the country carving our names into the trunks of the trees. Some day if I am still alive, I'll go back to Perpignan to see if I can find my name on one of those trees.

Soon buses arrived and lined up on the street outside the inn. We mustered, boarded, and the buses rolled out. We were on the road to the Spanish frontier. When we arrived at the border, the French guards pretended they could not see us. They just turned their backs, and we crossed into Spain. On the Spanish side, the border guards were happy to see us, and greeted us as we passed. The buses did not stop, but drove straight on to our destination, the frontier town of Figueras. When we arrived, it seemed the whole population had lined up on both sides of the road to greet us. They held their fists high and shouted, "*Companeros, no*

passaran." We were being pelted with oranges through the open windows of the bus. The young ones were throwing baskets of oranges. It was a warm, welcoming gesture on the part of these brave people, who were appreciative of the help we were bringing them.

The buses drove up an incline into the mediaeval castle of Figueras, perched on a foothill of the Pyrenees. It was a huge castle, big enough to house a regiment or two. We lined up to listen to a welcoming speech by an Albanian comrade. Short and trim, he spoke perfect English with a very slight accent. We were assigned quarters directly off the huge courtyard. We made beds from a pile of fresh straw mattresses. Then we were called to the parade ground for a short pep talk, and told to parade to the dining room for lunch. When we got back to our barracks, the Albanian comrade was waiting for us. He told us to get all our civilian clothes together and follow him to a warehouse. Here we discarded our last ties to civilian life. We were now soldiers in the International Brigade. I hated to part with my new suit and overcoat. My tartan bathrobe was left in the hands of the Albanian commandants. He said some Spanish woman would cut it up to make a dress for her daughter. We also discarded our large black suitcases, and were given backpacks and duffle bags. After a rest, we were asked to line up at the parade ground and formed into sections, platoons, and companies, and officers were appointed. After some rudimentary drill, we were dismissed to our quarters.

We stayed in this reception depot for two days, but we were not allowed to go to town. The day we left for the base in Albacete, we were paraded through town to the railway station. A huge crowd had lined up to see us on our way. The Poles were leading our group, followed by the French, then the Italians, and the Americans bringing up the rear. The Polish Battalion sang Polish marching songs, and the French and Italians sang in their languages. The Balkan contingent sang the "International," and the Americans sang "Solidarity."

As the train pulled out of the station, the townspeople once again threw oranges and food through the open windows. Each coach was assigned two Spanish *milicianos*, armed with sidearms, as guides. We rolled past the mountains onto a fertile coastal plain. We followed the blue Mediterranean all the way to Barcelona. In Barcelona we were paraded from the station to the "Karl Marx" barracks, directly behind the zoo. We had lunch and then headed back to the station for the journey to our next stop, Valencia. When we arrived in Valencia that evening, the station was packed with refugees — women, children and old men. The cities of Málaga and Granada had fallen to the rebels, and countless refugees were heading north.

It was during this time that Federico Garcia Lorca, the promising young poet, was captured as he tried to escape to Córdoba. He was brought back

to Granada, to the city he so loved, and summarily executed. The lines of one of his poems turned out to be sadly prophetic: "Córdoba, remote and lonely/ Jet black mare and full round moon/ With olives in my saddle bags/ Although I know the road so well/ I will never get to Córdoba." His execution was deeply felt by the Spaniards, and the whole civilized world was shocked by this wanton killing.⁴ He was not even an active supporter of the Popular Front Government. Lorca was not alone; dozens of liberal intellectuals were executed, along with countless young students.

We were marched off through the darkened streets of Valencia to the Iglesias barracks for supper. This time nobody sang. The sight of those poor refugees had cast a pall over the group. It was with heavy hearts that we left Valencia. A few miles out of Valencia, the train came to a halt. The engineer had seen something ahead and stopped the train. The guides from each coach jumped out to examine the line. The guards walked ahead of the train and discovered that the line had been blocked by trees placed across it. They were cleared, and we proceeded cautiously on our way. We approached a long viaduct crossing a deep ravine, where the train again came to a halt and the guards jumped out to examine the line. The engine and a few cars were on the viaduct. The drop into the ravine was easily 300 feet. One had an eerie feeling, thinking what could happen if the line had been sabotaged. This time the guards advanced in front of the locomotive, examining the rails and signaling the engineer to follow. The train moved at a painstaking pace, but we safely crossed the viaduct. It was like this at all the danger spots on the way to our destination.

We arrived in Albacete next morning. It had taken us all night to get there, a trip which normally should have taken just a few hours. Albacete is located in an arid central plain of Castile. There were hardly any trees to be seen on the way in. The absence of the pine forests and lush vegetation seen in the north was very noticeable, but the town itself had a few parks with stately English elms and chestnut trees. From the station we paraded through the city to get to the *Guardia Nacional* barracks, which had been taken over by the International Brigades. Albacete was the base of the Brigade; all the executive offices, supply depots, ordinance and medical staff, and military general staff were quartered there. At the barracks, we were assigned to our quarters. After breakfast we were lined up at the centre of a bullring and addressed by a Finnish captain who spoke fairly good English. He said they were short of technical, medical, and trades people, and that those with qualifications should join the designated line when he called for them. He called for doctors, medical students, mechanics, drivers,

⁴Federico Garcia Lorca's death was part of a wave of killings in the summer of 1936. He was killed in August. His brother-in-law, who was also executed, was the socialist mayor of Granada.

pilots, explosive experts, carpenters, typists, and accountants. Although there were some of us who qualified, very few volunteered. We had come to fight at the front, not to serve in the rear echelons

We stayed in Albacete for a few days and we were allowed the freedom of the city after our hours of duty. There were some shortages in the shops, but generally speaking, food, drink, and other items were available. Our favourite spot was the military café, where one could buy beer, wine, champagne, cognac, soft drinks, and food. There was a string orchestra to entertain the troops, and some billiard tables. We had to be back at barracks by lights-out at 10:30. The day after we arrived we had to check our equipment. If anyone was short of clothing or mess kits, they were supplied. We were all issued French steel helmets. Except for arms, our equipment was now complete. The commandant of the barracks was a Canadian, Captain Lamont from Montreal. The barracks was an old two-storey building, built during the Napoleonic Wars. The quarters for the ranks consisted of long rooms with two-tiered wooden bunks and clean straw mattresses. During the day we occupied ourselves with guard duty at the gate, some drill, cleaning of equipment, and all the tedious duties of barracks life.

The roof was flat with a half-a-dozen guard rooms used as jails. In one of these jails was a civilian prisoner whose identity was not known to us. A guard was posted at his door, day and night. The night it was my turn to guard his door, I was given an old single-shot carbine without any ammunition. After I had stood guard for about a half hour, the prisoner approached the door. The door had no openings to look inside. First he talked to me in Spanish. When I did not answer, he spoke in excellent French. I still did not answer him, though I could if I had wanted to because my French was fairly good at that time. Then he addressed me in English, with a clipped Oxford accent. He asked if I spoke English. I said yes, but that I was not allowed to talk to him. Then he informed me that he was the Count of Chinchon, and said that if I helped him escape he would deposit 100,000 pounds in the Bank of England in my name. I told him I was not a fool and that I had come to Spain to fight against the likes of him. I told him to shut up or I would send a bullet through the door and kill him. After that, he kept quiet and did not speak to me again. In the morning I related the incident to Captain Lamont. He laughed and that the prisoner had offered him more money.

On the second night after our arrival in Albacete we got our first taste of war. Six Italian bombers flew over the city. It was a beautiful moonlit night, and the enemy planes had the sky all to themselves. Not even a machine gun or a rifle was fired against them. They came in low and tried to hit the barracks, but the bombs fell short. They were over the city for about thirty minutes, but caused minimal damage. Most of the bombs fell in open

squares and parks. Some residences, however, were hit and after the raid we went out in the city to help the people. We cleared rubble but did not encounter any casualties. The next night they came again. We evacuated the barracks and went into the fields just outside the city until it was over. A house a few yards from the barracks was hit, and the attic and second floor had considerable damage. While clearing the attic, we discovered several boxes of hand grenades and rifles. This was one time the rebels helped us, by destroying one of their arms stashes in the town.

The next morning Comrade Lamont gave us a pep talk. The gist of it was that the boys at the front got this all the time, along with artillery, rifle and machine gun fire every day. He informed us that reinforcements would leave for the front the next day. We had our last parade to the bullring for breakfast. When we came back, a line of trucks was parked on the street in front of the barracks. Dry rations were distributed: a loaf of bread, a can of bully beef, two cans of sardines, cheese, oranges, and a pack of cigarettes. The convoy left for the front.

We did not know which front we were going to, but we assumed it would be around Madrid. Around noon we arrived at a town where I bought some sausages and wine. We were told that we were going to the famous Jarama Front, where the International Brigades, along with Spanish forces, had held the rebels at the Arganda Bridge and saved the highway link from Valencia to Madrid.

When the sun broke over the mountains, the whole landscape was displayed in copper, green, blue, and delicate shades of brown. Soon we could hear artillery fire in the distance and we knew we were close to the front. As we got closer we heard the distinct noise of rifle and machine gun fire. I had a strange feeling of excitement, mingled with fear and doom.

Chapter Three

Baptism by Fire

The convoy came to a halt at a little town immediately behind our lines at the Jarama Front. We were all tired after the long trip. We were led to a big barn where clean straw was spread on the floor. Despite the noise of firing coming from the front, I soon fell fast asleep. At noon we were served our first meal at the front. After lunch we marched up to Brigade Headquarters located just outside the town. After roll call we were put into trucks. By this time it was getting to be late afternoon. We were now in first reserve position behind the lines, just past the field kitchen, which was set up in a white hacienda on the road to Perales. This was to be our position for the night. We arranged our ground sheets and blankets under olive trees on the slope of a hill. Below us in the valley, we could see our artillery guns firing away at the enemy.

In a while a group of Divisional Staff Officers arrived to inspect us. One tall officer came to me and told me to go to the kitchen and draw some coffee for my men. I don't know why he picked on me; I suppose he thought I was in charge. In a way, I acted as if I was in charge, posting guards here and there on the hillside. I don't know why, as we were in no danger from the enemy, but this was the front, and sleeping troops had to be guarded. I told the Staff Officer that it was not necessary to have coffee, that we were all right. He gave me a funny look and barked at me, "Go get coffee for your men!" I did not argue with him, but took a detail to the kitchen and brought pails of hot coffee for the boys.

Early next morning, a Lieutenant Tanz came to us to lead us to the trenches. We stopped at the kitchen for a short breakfast, and then started up the hill to the lines. Tanz was from New York and was a lawyer by profession. He was the Battalion Supply Officer. Bullets were flying all around us, and we were walking bent over to avoid them, but Tanz was walking upright. He told us not to be afraid as these bullets were not directed at us — we were not under fire yet. We were only hearing the whiz of spent



Soldiers lining up for food during the Spanish Civil War. (NAC, C-67447).

bullets ten or twenty feet above our heads. We arrived at the foot of a steep, rocky hill. On top of that hill were the trenches, and half way up the hill Comrade Tanz stopped us and went into a little dugout. This was the Battalion Headquarters. A tall, lanky man with glasses came out with some of his staff to welcome us. He introduced himself as the Battalion Commander. His name was Merriman.⁵ From other dugouts close by stacks of Russian rifles were brought out and we were each handed a rifle and 150 rounds of ammunition. Merriman knew that most of us had never handled a rifle before, so he had some of the men come from the trenches to show us how to disassemble, clean, and reassemble it. We were shown how to load and unload the rifle, and then taken directly to the firing line, where we were trained by firing at the enemy lines directly in front of us. This was our first military training, right at the front line trenches.

We were then assigned to different platoons. I was assigned to the Flaherty Platoon, named after its leader, Jim Flaherty, a big blond Irishman from Boston. This platoon was composed of mostly Irishmen, such as Pat

⁵See, Marion Merriman, *American Commander In Spain: Robert Hale Merriman and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Reno 1986).

⁶This is likely one of three Flaherty brothers, Irishmen from Boston, who fought together at Jarama. One of these three was Edward Flaherty, who later went on a speaking tour of the US. Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, 1994), 201; and Vincent Brome, *The*

Stanley, Jack McKenna, DeBono, Sam Tomlinson, and others. These men had come to Spain with the British volunteers, but could not get along with their English comrades and were transferred to the American contingent. I was put in DeBono's section and assigned a position in the firing line, protected by sand bags save for an opening for my rifle.

There was really not much action, just the occasional burst of machine gun fire and an exchange of rifle shots. Six o'clock was chow time. I and several others from the platoon were assigned to go and draw our supper from the kitchen truck. We had white beans with a generous portion of meat floating in it, boiled potatoes and carrots, and rice pudding with raisins for dessert. This was not bad at all, ample and quite tasty.

This was February and as night approached it got very cold in the mountains. That first night I asked one of the boys where we were to sleep. He pointed back of the trenches and told me to find a flat spot and make a bed right in the open air. I spread my ground sheet and used my knapsack as a pillow. With a blanket or two and with all my clothes on, I tried to fall asleep. It soon started to snow. When I woke in the morning my body was stiff with the cold, and my feet felt frozen in my shoes. I spied a bonfire just below me, and went to it as fast as my cold legs would carry me. Just to the left of us was a Spanish Battalion, and I went over to fraternize with them. The Spaniards were wiser than we were in outdoor survival. They had tiny huts made of olive and pine branches which they called *chabolas*. These were fairly weatherproof and comfortable. I started to make one for myself back of the line and soon the rest of the boys learned the trade and the hillside was covered with *chabolas*.

In the morning, the new volunteers were asked to go to Battalion Headquarters for further training. Merriman informed us that we would be shown how to throw hand grenades. He introduced a short, dark Greek-American by the name of Tsemaikas. He was attached to the ammunition dump behind our line. He showed us a disarmed hand grenade and taught us how to pull the ring and activate the firing pin. Then it was time to practice throwing live grenades. We went off to a rocky gully, hid behind some boulders, and threw our grenades into the gully. We now knew how to handle grenades, and we were given five as part of our weapons.

We settled into the routine of daily life at the front — guard duty and rest. In case of sustained enemy firing, everyone was to go to the parapet

International Brigades: Spain, 1936-1939 (New York 1966), 113. For an account of the Irish in the International Brigades, see Michael O'Riordan, *Connolly Column: The Story of the Irishmen who Fought in the Ranks of the International Brigades in the National-Revolutionary War of the Spanish People, 1936-1939* (Dublin 1979); and R.A. Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939: Crusades in Conflict* (Manchester 1999).

in the trenches and occupy defensive positions. But apart from the occasional burst of artillery, the shells falling either short or long of our lines, nothing happened for a few days. One night, DeBono asked me to get ready to go on patrol. Flaherty was nearby, and he told DeBono to leave me be and let me get used to the front before going on patrol. When Flaherty left, I asked DeBono to take me on patrol that night. Six of us went out, armed only with knives and grenades. DeBono said to stay within four or five feet of each other so we wouldn't be separated. He took the lead, and we were not to take any action unless he ordered it. We stayed in no-man's-land for our allotted time of two hours. The closest we got to the enemy trenches was about one hundred yards. One had to be very careful and not make any noise as the enemy would also have patrols out. Wandering in no-man's-land for two hours over unfamiliar ground, in the dark, one could easily get lost and end up behind enemy lines. In approaching our lines we had to stop and shout the password, and hearing the counter password, we would jump over the parapet.

Life in the trenches was quite monotonous — the same routine day in and day out. There were days that not a single shot was fired from either side, and then some night someone would imagine seeing enemy movement in no-man's-land and machine guns and rifles would start firing fast and furious on both sides. It takes only one nervous soldier to trigger firing in the lines. This type of firing almost always took place during moonless, dark nights. This was when it was dangerous to be caught on patrol duty. You could get shot at by your own troops. When this kind of firing erupted, the patrol would lie flat on the ground and hope for the best.

After a few days, we were ordered to change our position a few hundred yards to the east, and rumor was that we were preparing for an assault. I was assigned to help move the ammunition. I discovered that the man in charge of the ammo dump was an Armenian-American from New York, by name of Bill Sahagian. I introduced myself to him as an Armenian-Canadian, and he asked me to stay with him in the ammo dump. He said it was much safer than the trenches, and he arranged my transfer. Here my job was to see that the line was supplied with sufficient ammo, and that the machine gun belts were all loaded and ready for the gunners. Once we had shifted our position east, the La Pasionaria Battalion⁷ was on our left and the English Battalion on our right. Left of La Pasionaria was the French and Italian 14th Brigade. To the right of the English was the Balkan Dimitrov Battalion.

⁷The "La Pasionaria" was named for Dolores Ibarruri, one of the heroes of the republican struggle. See, Dolores Ibarruri, *They Shall not Pass: The Autobiography of La Pasionaria* (New York 1966).

It was getting towards the end of February, and the rumor was that we were getting ready for an attack. On 26 February, we were visited by our political commissar, Mike Bremner. We seldom saw him; he spent most of his time in the comfort and safety of the cookhouse. He officially informed us that we would be attacking at dawn on 27 February. He said it would be an easy attack. The enemy would be softened by our artillery, and we would be led in the assault by our tanks, of which we had a good supply.

A steady drizzle started during the night before the planned attack, and 27 February dawned a miserable day. In the morning, a few salvos of our artillery hit the enemy lines, but there was not the heavy barrage we expected, and there were no tanks in sight. Merriman, the Battalion Commander, gave the order for the attack. Our boys eagerly jumped over the parapet towards the enemy lines, and all hell broke loose. The enemy directed a withering machine gun fire at our boys; some were killed and wounded right in front of our lines. The rest were caught in the open field between our lines and the enemy. Our machine guns were giving all the cover they could during the attack, but we were stopped dead. Many of my dear comrades were lying dead or wounded in no-man's-land. I was in our trenches, bringing boxes of bullets and hand grenades to the front. I do not know where he came from, but an English staff officer showed up at the trenches and barked at me to go over the top with the ammunition. I put one foot over the sandbags to obey his order. Bullets were flying like hail. Flaherty stopped me and told me to stay put. The boys in the field were dead or wounded, he said, and did not need any ammunition. He turned around to the English officer and asked him who the hell he thought he was to give orders to his troops. The Englishman replied that he was Captain Waters⁸ from Brigade Command. Flaherty told him to go the hell back there. Flaherty then directed the surviving men to hide behind tree trunks and rocks.

With the coming of night what was left of our boys crawled back to our lines, bringing with them all the wounded they could. We organized rescue squads to go and get the badly wounded and the dead. It was at this time that I saw Wally Dent leaving the trenches with his head bandaged up. I went to him, and he told me it was not serious, just a scalp wound. Then I saw Larry Ryan coming out with his chest all bandaged up. He was more seriously wounded than Wally, but would recover. I knew Larry well from Toronto. He was surprised to see me in the trenches. I hardly had time to say hello to him. That was the last time I saw Larry Ryan. After recovering

⁸This was actually George Wattis, a British lieutenant who was involved in the battle of 27 February, and appeared before a tribunal for allegedly ordering men to their deaths at gunpoint that morning. He was acquitted. See Carroll, *The Odyssey*, 101, 112, 114.

from his wound, he was repatriated to Canada, and he died there the next year of pneumonia. Larry and Tom Beckett were in the CCYM with me in Toronto. Tom and Larry had preceded me to Spain by about a month. Beckett was later captured and shot by the Fascists. All the night of 27 February, we were making sorties into no-man's-land to bring in the dead and wounded. A steady drizzle was falling when I crawled, drenched and tired, into the ammo dugout. I felt disgusted and sorry for our plight.

Someone had built a shelter in the back of the line and a good fire was burning there. I went there to dry my clothes. This shelter soon became a clearing house for the wounded. The stretchers and the wounded were placed next to the fire to get warmed up on their way to the first aid post, which was quite a distance from the line. It was close to the road so that ambulances could get to them. Our battalion doctor, Pike, was really busy all that day and night.⁹ Over 200 wounded went through the first aid post, and we had 125 killed. We buried all the dead right behind our lines on the Jarama Front, where they remain to this day. We erected a cairn of stones in an olive grove directly behind our lines. I wonder if it is still there.

Our Battalion Commander, Merriman, was wounded, along with his commissar. The young Greek, Mike Papas, the German, Rudy, the Irishman, DeBono, and many of my buddies lie buried there in the peaceful olive grove in the mountains. I would be there too if Flaherty hadn't stopped me from going over the top. That bastard Waters (Wattis) from Brigade was never seen again in our area. I wonder if somebody shot him.

The next morning our trenches were a desolate sight. The boys who came back alive were literally sleeping in mud and water. There was hardly anybody left to guard the line or man the parapet. The only unit left fit for defense was the machine gun company. They were still in position, directing the occasional burst at the enemy. A detail was formed to go to the kitchen for hot coffee and brandy. Lieutenant Tanz did not have enough brandy on hand, so he took me with him in the kitchen truck to the Field Army Service Depot. We got to the Field Supply Depot in about half an hour, acquired a small keg of brandy, and headed back to the front to give the boys a drink. Some didn't want it but we forced it down their throats. The brandy really revived them. Who was it that said alcohol was not a stimulant but a sedative? In this case it certainly acted like a stimulant. The bright warm sun was out that morning, in sympathy with us. Fires were lit in the rear of our lines. The boys drifted down from the trenches to dry their clothes and get warmed up. The lines were defended by skeleton crews only. Most of the boys left the lines and drifted to the kitchen and to safe areas.

⁹Stephens never gives his full name, but this was almost certainly Dr. William Pike, a volunteer with the American Medical Bureau.

Before too long our 27 February action was being openly criticized. Ed Madden, a volunteer from Chicago who was a member of the Teamsters Union, openly complained about the slaughter we had suffered. The boys were not moving up into the trenches, but were hanging around the rear. Soon, political officers arrived from Brigade Headquarters and tried to persuade the men to go back to the lines. They promised that an investigation would be conducted into the reason for the failure of the attack. They also said that a meeting would be convened very shortly to discuss the attack, and our complaints would be listened to by General Gall, the officer responsible for this sector. After venting their anger on the political commissar, the boys went back to the trenches. I will never forget the worried frown of one of the French political commissars, running from group to group with a flowing poncho over his shoulders, pleading with the men to go back to the lines. This action later was termed the mutiny of the Americans, which it was not. Even with most of the boys away from the lines, the front was well defended. Our machine gun company was still up there with their heavy Maxims in position, and there was a sparse line of infantry on guard at the parapets. No one had intentions of leaving the front; it was simply a protest meeting to air our grievances.

The Battalion Commander was nowhere to be seen. Rumor was that Merriman was left wounded in no-man's-land and had been captured by the enemy. Others said that he was wounded and evacuated to hospital. There were also dark rumors that he had been liquidated.¹⁰ At any rate, the Battalion was reorganized. Martin Hourihan, a teacher from New York, was appointed Battalion Commander, and Jim Madden was made political commissar.¹¹ Madden did not last too long as commissar. He was soon withdrawn from the lines and given a position in a rear echelon, and Oscar Hunter became the commissar.¹²

¹⁰ Merriman was reportedly killed in a retreat during the Fascist offensive at Aragon in the Spring of 1938. Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York 1977), 798.

¹¹ The new commissar's name was actually Arthur Madden. One of those present at the time, Morris Mickenburg, later remarked that many those who had served on the tribunal which acquitted Wattis soon found themselves promoted to commissar positions: "... every single one of the five members of the committee got bribed into something, and the protest evaporated." From documents relating to the trial of Wattis, quoted in Carroll, *The Odyssey*, 114.

¹² Hunter was a labour activist and organizer before going to Spain. He survived the war and gave testimony for a book on African-Americans in Spain: Danny Duncan Collum, ed., *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do* (New York 1992). Hunter's testimony is on pp. 157-62. See also, James Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid: Memoir of a Black American in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Seattle 1989).

March came in like a lamb. The weather became warmer, and the robins were singing in the trees of the olive groves. The boys regained their humor and self-confidence, and life carried on as it does in the front lines. The February incident was all but forgotten. Now it was time to bitch about food and the lack of cigarettes.

One day when I was busy in the ammo dugout, filling machine gun belts, some machine gunners were cleaning and assembling a Maxim gun right behind me. I went over to watch. The machine gun fascinated me. I went back to filling belts, but I had the urge to join the machine gun company. I put in a request to be transferred to the machine gun company, which was regarded as the elite of the Battalion. I asked Comrade Sahagian, who was in charge of the ammunition detail, and he said he would speak to Comrade Davidian, who was in charge of the machine gun company. Davidian was also an Armenian, like myself and Sahagian. In due course, I was introduced to Davidian and he told me to get my gear together. Then he took me to Number One machine gun section and I became a member of that group. Soon I was taught to take a machine gun apart, clean it, and put it together again. I was also shown how to shoot it. Our guns were old World War I relics, but they worked.



Resistance soldiers with portable cannon. (NAC, PA-194607).

A Spanish company had been assigned to our Battalion, to bring it up to strength. These boys were all volunteers from the Murcia area. They were full of life, singing, playing guitar, and dancing their local dances. Their position in the lines was immediately to the left of our machine gun emplacement. I was the only one who could speak their lingo and soon created a circle of friends. They started calling me Patricio. One particular fellow I liked very much – he always had a smile on his face. His name was Juan Abbad Garcia, and he came from the village of Ancantarilla, just outside of Murcia. He said he was a farmer there and he boasted about the big watermelons and muskmelons on his land. He said that when the war was over he would take me to his farm. He joked that he had a beautiful sister and that he would let me sleep with her. Everybody would laugh at Juan. One fellow asked if he would let me sleep with his wife. Juan said, “I have no wife, but I will let him sleep with Franco’s wife.”

One day, during my off-duty hours, I drifted around the battalion dugout just behind the lines, next to the machine gun company headquarters. The machine gun company commander, Jack Tomlinson, was standing among a group of his men, discussing something. Suddenly Tomlinson fell down, shot through the head. We carried him on a stretcher to Battalion First Aid about 200 yards from machine gun headquarters. He was pronounced dead on arrival, the bullet having pierced his brain. Poor Jack, he would never see his beloved Ireland again.

Jack had been a member of the left wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). When the war broke out in Spain, he was living in London, so he came as a volunteer with the English, then transferred with other Irish volunteers to serve in the American brigade. He distinguished himself at the Battle of Arganda Bridge, and was made commander of the machine gun company. Another top IRA man was Frank Ryan, who had played a leading role in the Irish uprisings. He was assigned a position at Brigade Headquarters, and we very seldom saw him at the front lines. Rumor was that he was the leader of a group operating behind enemy lines. Frank Ryan was eventually captured by the rebels. Because of his connections with the IRA, he was not executed. He was shifted from Spain to Berlin and placed at the disposal of the Germans. Even then the Germans had plans to use Ryan for their purposes against Britain. I don’t know what happened to him in Berlin, but he is buried there.

The death of Tomlinson created a vacancy in the command of the machine gun company. Oliver Law, a Negro comrade from Detroit, was appointed company commander.¹³ This created a vacancy in the lower

¹³Law was a six-year veteran of the US Army and served in the segregated army as a private. See John Gerassi, *The Premature Anti-Fascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39, an Oral History* (New York 1986), 4-5. He had also

ranks, so thanks to Davidian I was appointed commander of my section. This created quite a controversy in my section, as I was regarded as a newcomer. There were more presentable and forceful fellows in my group, such as Ray Steele or Syd Crotow, but in time I was accepted, and got along fine with all of them.

My section was regarded as the toughest. I had all the problem children of the company in my group. Later on, a second gun was placed at my command. I was the only section commander with two guns, and all my gunners were the roughest of the lot. Ray Steele was a tall, blond man from Kalamazoo, Michigan. We never knew what he really did for a living back home. He told many different stories — lumberjack, mechanic, construction worker, and once he even told me he was a baker. He was a likable chap, friends with everybody, a grown-up Huckleberry Finn. He would occasionally cause me minor trouble, and was sometimes late or absent for his duties.

One of the men in my unit was a quarrelsome troublemaker. He could get into a fight for no more reason than a cigarette butt. My trouble with him was over the condition of his rifle: he never kept it as clean as it should be. I really think he was scared of being at the front; he was always applying for a transfer to the rear as a truck driver, which was always denied. One night when he was on guard at one of the machine guns, he let loose a steady barrage of machine gun fire. It takes only one machine gun to start firing and the whole front comes to life with machine guns and grenades. This lasts for about fifteen minutes to half an hour, and when no attack materializes, it subsides and the front becomes quiet again. I confronted this man and asked him why he started firing his machine gun, and he said, "Well, this is war, isn't it?"

I was dumbfounded by his answer. We were never to fire the guns unless ordered, or unless we saw enemy movement in no-man's-land. I told him in no uncertain terms that if he did it again he would find himself in trouble. He started shouting at me, grabbed his rifle, cocked it, and pointed it at me. First I was taken aback and a bit frightened, but I was also very angry. I gave him a dirty look and advanced towards him. I told him to put the rifle down or I'd shove it up his ass. He pulled the trigger but the bullet went harmlessly into the air. I gave him a good kick in the groin and he doubled over from the pain. Then I turned him around and gave him a

been a politically active and controversial figure before going to Spain. He was killed at the Battle of Brunete in July 1937. Fifty years later, the mayor of Chicago proclaimed 21 November "Oliver Law Day". For more information on Law, and on African-American involvement in the Spanish civil war, see Collum, ed., *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War*. Oscar Hunter talks about Law in his contribution to that book.

hefty right hook on his chin. By this time, there was a good bunch of spectators watching us, urging me to kill him. I took the rifle away from him and he gave me a frightened, pitiful look. I guess he thought I was really going to kill him. He started crying and apologizing profusely for his actions. He said he went berserk, he was sorry, and it would never happen again. The boys in my section wanted me to put him under arrest and charge him with attempted murder, and with pointing a rifle at his comrades. I decided against this, but I was not going to give him a chance to do it again. I went to the company commissar and put the matter to him. He was furious and wanted to arrest him for trial and punishment. By now, the matter was the talk of the whole battalion. Hourihan, the Battalion Commander, wanted a full report, and I was asked to go and report verbally what had happened. He ordered me to bring the man to Battalion Headquarters under arrest. I hated doing this; he was only a youngster who had lost his nerve. I pleaded with Hourihan not to court-martial him, but to transfer him to Brigade for rear echelon duties. Hourihan would have none of this. I tried to convince Hourihan to give the boy a chance. Finally I succeeded. He was shipped to Brigade Headquarters for a new posting, and we got rid of one of the worst trouble-makers in the section. My reputation was now well-established in our unit and I had no more problems with any of them. Weeks later when I was in a nearby village, I saw that man driving a lorry. He finally got what he wanted.

The promised meeting with the Divisional Commander to explain the debacle of 27 February finally took place in mid-March. The front by this time was quiet and stabilized. Skeleton crews were left in the lines, and the majority of the troops from all the Battalions gathered at the cookhouse to hear General Gall. He was a Russian, and I was later told that his Russian name was Popar, and that he had command of an army division in Russia. He spoke only Russian, so his speech was translated for us into English and Spanish by a very competent interpreter. The gist of the speech was that the enemy had a dangerous element in our sector and that he had to be dislodged. A wall map was displayed with the positions outlined in red markers. The floor was thrown open for questions. When we asked why there were no tanks to the attack, he replied he had ordered tank support and artillery preparation. We told him there were no tanks in sight, and not much artillery. He said he did not know that and would look into it. We told him of our heavy casualties. He said he was sorry to lose so many valiant soldiers, but that war is not a lifesaving institution, and casualties were to be expected.

Even after this meeting, occasional small attacks we ordered, but we had learned our lesson. The boys knew the terrain in front of them by heart. They sallied forth from the trenches and hid behind big trees and boulders,

and then returned to their lines after dark. This way our casualties in such useless attacks were almost nil. During one such attack in April, our boys went over the top and stayed put in protective terrain. One French-Canadian, named Bilodeaux, advanced about seventy-five yards and threw himself down behind the trunk of a tree. This was in the morning. At lunchtime we heard Bilodeaux shouting to us to throw him some bread. We tried, but the bread always fell short. Suddenly a Spanish comrade jumped over the top and ran toward the man. Enemy machine guns opened up on him, but he managed to reach Bilodeaux behind the tree and shared his lunch with him. They came back to the lines later, after dark. Such were the heroics of war. During another such attack, two of our tanks were leading, but we had to pull back, as enemy defense was heavy and effective. As they retreated to our lines, one of the tanks developed motor problems, and could not make it back. Eventually it was moved to about fifty feet from my machine gun position. By this time, the enemy had brought in an anti-tank gun, which started shelling the disabled tank. The tank crew had already abandoned their tank. It was hit and started burning furiously, and the bullets and gun shells started exploding inside the tank. For a while we had a pyrotechnic show. A few days later, a tank recovery truck came and towed the tank away. Things got quiet again, and we settled back to trench life.

We had built makeshift fireplaces in some of our dugouts. We would warm our coffee and toast bread, and even fry bully-beef with onions. Life was somehow bearable. Every morning, just at breakfast time, the enemy would shell just behind the line and shower earth and dirt into our coffee. It was like clockwork; every time the food detail came in with the coffee and breakfast, the shelling would start. After a while we retaliated, and started shelling their lines at the same time, and spoiling their breakfast. At some point along our front, the enemy lines were within shouting distance of each other. One night someone from the other side shouted that they would not shell us during breakfast if we promised not to shell them. So a breakfast truce was arranged, and we had peaceful breakfasts after that.

Our machine gun commander, Oliver Law, would inspect our machine gun positions every morning. One morning he came to my gun emplacements and told me to remove one sandbag from each side of the gun. He said this would give me better vision, and a better field of crossfire with the gun to the right of me. I disagreed with him, and said this would render the opening dangerous and my gunner could be hit. But he insisted and I had the two sandbags removed. The same day one of the gunners was shot dead through the opening to the left of the gun, exactly where the sand bag had been removed. The boys were furious. Oliver Law was not well liked in the machine gun company, especially in my section. He was too authoritarian and incompetent. He had a slow way about him. One would think he

was one of those slow, lazy slaves from down South. Ray Steele and Jim Katz came to inform me that they were going to file a charge of incompetence against Law with the Battalion commissar, and request his removal. I strongly disagreed with them, and told them not to do it. Oliver Law was a strong Communist, and had powerful friends at Brigade Headquarters. I was greatly disturbed by this; I knew what the results would be. They would also be regarded as troublemakers and maybe agitators. He would be absolved, and they would become targets of petty inconveniences, and would not be recommended for advancement to higher ranks. But those two hotheads did not heed to my advice and lodged their charge. This could be very dangerous, as some agitators suspected of being Trotskyites were quietly executed at the back of the lines and no one ever knew what happened to them.

A few days later, a Board of Enquiry was set up at Battalion level to examine the charge of incompetence against Oliver Law. The Board consisted of the Battalion Commander and the commissar, the commissar of the Machine Gun Company, an officer from Brigade Headquarters, and a member of the Political Commissariat (a representative of the Communist Party). Martin Hourihan, the Battalion Commander, chaired the enquiry. He informed Law that he was charged with excessive interference in defensive operations and with causing undue casualties among the crew, because of his lack of knowledge about the machine gun emplacements. More specifically, he was cited for causing the death of Comrade Perez, who was shot dead while manning his machine gun in my section. Along with this he was charged with nepotism – promoting his close friends to safer positions at his headquarters, and appropriating excessive food rations for himself and his staff. Ray Steele was called as the first witness. He related how Law had ordered the protective sandbags removed from my gun position, which endangered the gunner. Steele said the removal of the sandbags was ordered against the better judgement of Comrade Stephens, the commander of the section. Along with this, he related how at times Law would send his runners to the kitchen at night to scrounge extra food for the staff's midnight lunch. The ordinary men, of course, did not have this advantage. As a result, resentment and discontent was rife in the company. After Steele's statements, Law was asked if he wished to question the witness. He declined. The second witness was Katz; he repeated almost everything that Ray Steele had said. Again Law did not wish to examine the witness at this time. Then it was my turn. I was asked by Hourihan to recount the incident at the of the machine gun emplacement, and the death of Perez. I asked if I could give a statement before presenting evidence. They agreed. I stated that I was not in favour of this enquiry, and that I had tried to persuade Steele and Katz not to lay charges, but they would not listen to

me. I also said that I did not attribute the death of Comrade Perez to the incompetence of Comrade Law. In war, I reminded them, some of us will get killed. I pointed out that bullet could have entered from other apertures in the position, and that the other charges were trivial, and not cause for laying a formal charge. I reiterated and verified the statements made by Katz and Steele, but repeated that I did blame Oliver Law. The comrade from Brigade Commissariat then asked me if I thought Oliver Law was a competent commander. I said yes, and pointed out that none of us were professional soldiers. How could I judge the competence of a comrade as an officer, I asked, when I myself was not a competent, experienced soldier? Comrade Law then took the floor.

"Comrades", he said, "I am a black man from Michigan. I had never been in an army or fired a gun before I came to Spain.¹⁴ I am not a military man; I am a union organizer. But when circumstances dictate, I can be a military organizer as well. I am sorry for the death of Comrade Perez, but I do not feel responsible for it. I ordered the removal of the sandbags to give the machine gun a wider and better trajectory. As to other matters, it is common practice for some of our more venturesome comrades to meander to the cookhouse at night and organize extra food for a snack. Comrades Steele and Katz are two undisciplined troublemakers. Comrade Stephens is having a hard time with them, but so far he has been able to keep them under control. I thank Comrade Stephens for his statement, and commend him for his honesty."

No more witnesses were called, and the enquiry ended. A few days later the results were announced. As always in the Army, the status quo prevailed. Comrade Law was exonerated, but Comrades Steele and Katz were reprimanded for laying mischievous charges, and cautioned against bad behaviour in the unit.

This incident was soon forgotten, and life in the trenches returned to the normal routine. With the coming of warm weather, our misery with lice increased greatly. Without exception, we were all lousy. In our spare time, we would take off our clothes and try killing the lice. Our bodies were itchy and covered with lice bites. The best remedy was rubbing our bodies with brandy. It killed the lice and soothed the bites, but in a few days they would come again. We had no facilities for hot baths or showers, and the occasional bath with a pail of cold water didn't help much. Then we got the good news that hot showers would be arranged at Morata de Tajuna. We went there in groups, and our bodies became clean and lice-free for the first time since we came to Spain.

¹⁴Law's reported statement that he had no military experience seems to contradict the fact that he had served in the US Army before going to Spain. Remember that Stephens wrote this nearly fifty years after the events took place.

With the warm weather, the front became more active. The enemy tried several times to break through our lines, but each time they were stopped cold. Most of their shells fell behind our lines, but occasionally a shell would land and explode in the trenches or on the parapets. To the left of us, on a hill overlooking the valley of the Jarama River, there stood a beautiful villa, now half in ruins from enemy fire. This was where our tank corps was stationed. From this vantage point our tanks were being used as mobile guns, and were shelling the hell out of the enemy lines. We could observe from our trenches bits of equipment being blown up out of their trenches.

Life carried on as normal as it could be under war conditions. Once an outbreak of dysentery went through our Brigade, and more than half the men were away from the lines. The light cases were being treated at our cookhouse, where Dr. Pike was doing the best he could. The more serious cases were sent to hospitals in the rear. It was strange that the native Spaniards were not affected at all. One day I asked the commander of the Spanish contingent why the Spanish comrades were not affected by this outbreak. He took me to his dugout and showed me the strings of garlic hanging on the walls. He said they ate some every day and never got sick. Soon our entire battalion was eating raw garlic. To Dr. Pike's amazement, the outbreak of dysentery was brought under control with the use of this native remedy. Every since then, I have used garlic generously in my cooking.

It was decided by higher command that we would be given leave passes to go to Madrid in small groups. This news was received with great joy. Each day a group would leave for a five-day stay in Madrid. Finally, my turn came around. We went to Madrid in a truck and arrived there before noon. Our group was to stay at the Florida Hotel, where a group kitchen was arranged for the American boys. We got all cleaned and shaved and went for lunch at the Florida. We sat at tables with white tablecloths and were served by beautiful Spanish girls. A few tables away from us sat Ernest Hemingway, and Herbert Mathews of the *New York Times*.¹⁵ After lunch, they came over and shook hands and invited us for a drink at their suite in this hotel. Not all of the boys took advantage of this invitation, but I and some others went to their suite for the drinks. Drinks were not the main attraction; we never lacked a hefty ration of good Spanish cognac and anise, but I certainly wanted to meet Hemingway. There were several other newspaper reporters in the room: Mathews from the *New York Times*, Delmar of the *London Express*, and Louis Fischer of the *North American News Alliance*. Whisky and gin were in ample evidence. I don't know where they managed to get all

¹⁵The Florida was one of Hemingway's haunts, and there is an account of this particular encounter in Carroll, *The Odyssey*, which describes Hemingway having been there with "some Lincoln soldiers on leave", 152.

this, but these reporters never lacked the comforts of life. The discussion soon took the form of a press conference. Each of them started asking us about life at the front. They wanted to know if we had experienced hand-to-hand combat with the enemy, how the food was at the front, whether we regretted volunteering, and so on. None of these men really impressed me, not even Hemingway. They were cold and impersonal, and seemed to not care much what happened in Spain, or for that matter in the world. I asked Hemingway how our war compared with his experience in Italy during the war. His replied that he couldn't really answer that because he really hadn't been away from Madrid long enough to formulate an opinion. He said, however, that from what he had seen in Madrid and his short visits with Spanish units at the front, the Spanish war seemed to be a more cruel war.

We took our leave from the reporters, and went for a sightseeing walk around Madrid. It was exhilarating to walk upright and not be dodging bullets cracking overhead. The sight of the beautiful women on the streets aroused other interests. We dropped in at the Aquarium Bar for some refreshment. It was nice to go to a well-appointed bar, sit down, and relax. There were no girls to be had at this bar, so we left for a walk to another place. There I met Harry Sparks, a communist friend of mine from Toronto who was serving as a driver in a motorized unit. I asked him where we could get some girls, and he invited us to go along with them, as they were on their way to a whorehouse. We followed them to a side street and up a flight of stairs to the reception room of a brothel. Several scantily dressed girls were lounging in armchairs and sofas, displaying their individual charms. We each picked a girl, paid our ten peseta fee and went to bed with them. Our lust satisfied, we left the brothel and took to the street for more sightseeing.

Some of our friends were staying at the Hotel Alfonso, a really ornate place built in the nineteenth century. The staircase and its bannisters were of solid Carrera marble, and the lobby was covered with Moroccan rugs. The walls were covered with frescos of Greek and Roman mythology. We discovered that this was one of the hotels that served decent meals, as it was the only one catering to high army officers. We stayed for supper with our friends in the elegant dining room. The food was served on beautiful china, and the waiters all wore formal dress. This struck us as an idiosyncratic, but the manager said he wanted to keep the place up its old standards. While there we saw General Miaja, the defender of Madrid, come in to have his supper with his entire entourage. Even in these times of distress, the old goat liked the atmosphere here, and liked to be seen and admired by friend and foe alike. Such is life. Later that night we took in a movie, and as we were coming out of the theatre, the enemy started shelling Madrid again.

Their artillery fire came from the Carabanchel Front, just outside Madrid. People started running for cover, but the shells were not close to us. Besides, we were used to artillery fire at the front, so we were not scared. That night, I had the delight of sleeping in a bed with clean sheets and woolen blankets. Life could be beautiful. Madrid awakened in me the desire to be a civilian again, but the reality of war was all around me. There were emaciated women and children, and numerous wounded soldiers walking the streets.

We had five glorious days in Madrid, but then we had to leave again for the front. On the return trip, we stopped at the village of Perales, half way between Madrid and Morata. We stopped at a quaint little inn where they were still serving wine and sandwiches. We were soon mobbed by village urchins asking for cigarettes and chocolate. We gave them what we had. I noticed one shy little fellow lurking in the corner. I went and gave him some chocolate, and noticed that he had only one leg. The poor kid had lost the other one during an artillery shelling.

Soon after our return from Madrid, there was a rumor that the enemy was preparing for an offensive in our sector. We were placed on alert and our night patrols increased. At dawn on 24 May, the enemy started shelling our lines. The smoke of exploding shells filled no-man's-land, so that we could not see what was happening. Our artillery returned the fire, and the acrid smell of cordite and smoke was burning our eyes. Our machine guns opened with a furious crossfire, and our infantry had fixed their bayonets and were ready to jump out at them if they ever came close to our lines. Our machine guns exacted a heavy toll and as the smoke cleared we could see the remnants of the enemy forces retreating to their trenches. That night, we allowed the enemy to pick up its dead and wounded without opening fire on them. This was a reciprocal courtesy to them for their action on 27 February. Our casualties were very slight. We had only a few wounded, but one comrade from Milwaukee, but the name of Abramoultz, had been killed. It was during this attack that our machine gun commissar, Davidian, was wounded by shrapnel. Battalion Commander Hourihan was also wounded; he had been nicked by shrapnel in, of all places, his genitals. Oliver Law was now named Battalion Commander and Jardon became temporary commander of the machine gun company. The battalion commissar, Oscar Hunter, took ill and was replaced by the famous Steve Nelson, who distinguished himself during the Brunete and Belchite actions.¹⁶

The front soon stabilized, and we fell back into our daily routines. We had been in action at the Jarama Front for over three months and rumor had it that we were soon due for relief. One night after supper we were told to pack our things. We were going to some town behind the lines. When

¹⁶Nelson also served as political commissar of the Lincoln Battalion, and later wrote a personal narrative of his time in Spain: *The Volunteers* (New York 1953).

darkness fell, our relief came to take charge of the lines. As each company moved out, a new company took over their sector. The change was effected very speedily and efficiently. It was the 14th French Brigade that relieved us. We boarded lorries and were going to Alcalá de Henares, the birthplace of Cervantes. We arrived there in the early hours of the morning and our column of lorries pulled up in front of the San Pablo Cathedral. This was to be our quarters during our stay in Alcalá de Henares. Apparently, it had served as a storeroom before our arrival. All the pews had been removed, allowing us space for bedding and equipment. The rectory next to the church was set up as a kitchen.

After breakfast, we had the run of the city. It was one of those quaint, provincial towns, right on the banks of the Henares River. Alcalá de Henares was also the site of an air force base and an airport. The main square was crowded by the people of the town who had come down to see *Los Americanos*. All the coffee houses were wide open. Groups of soldiers were marching from one tavern to the other, flirting with the girls and in some cases pinching their behinds. I was strolling past the Don Quixote Tavern, when I heard guitar music coming from inside. I went in and, sure enough, it was the boys from La Pasionaria Battalion, whooping it up. Juan Abbad and his chums were dancing a fandango. "Ola, Patricio!" they called to me. Juan Abbad came over to me with a bottle of Jumilla wine. Before long I was feeling the effects of the wine and started singing and dancing with the Spanish boys from the regiment. In walked the traditional troubador, led by his son. Most of these troubadors were sight-impaired. His guitar-playing was masterful, and his voice was the plaintive language of suffering Spain. A gypsy from the regiment asked him to play a flemenco, and then he put his head back and sang with the true feeling of a boy from the mountains of Granada. From flamenco, the music turned to the dances of the south. Almost all the Spaniards were in a circle dancing to this lilting music. When it was time for the troubador to make his rounds of the other taverns, his son passed the hat around. It was soon full of pesetas.

We did not bother going to the church for our noontime meal. We purchased fresh bread, sausages, and cheese and made our lunch right in the tavern. After lunch we went to different taverns, enjoying our freedom. Girls were to be had, so I soon drifted in that direction. Abbad and the others went with me to a tavern. We sat at a table and ordered some muscatel. We were munching bread and cheese when three young girls came and sat at the table next to ours. We invited them over to our table to share our wine and food, and they invited us back to their house. How could we not accept? We went around the corner to their house with them, and had a glorious time. When we were leaving, we asked how much we owed

them. They laughed and said we owed them nothing: "We are anarchists. It is the love we give to our *milicianos*."

I was feeling quite drowsy from the wine, so I left and went back to the church for a snooze. I was lying on my bunk after supper when one of the Spanish comrades came in and told me that the boys were desecrating the crypt behind the altar. I went up and saw that they had removed the large stone slab covering the graves of various church dignitaries, looking for valuables buried with them. I tried to stop them, but they paid no attention to my orders or pleas. I went to report the incident to the Battalion Commander. I was given a detail of armed men and asked to stop it, and to keep it quiet. When I got back to the church, the miscreants were still at it in the crypt. I ordered them to stop. One man had the miter of a dead bishop on his head. We made them put everything back in its place and cover the graves, and I posted a guard so that it would not be repeated.

Next morning, it was decided we would have a military parade. The whole brigade would take part in it. We had no band to lead us but a drum corps was produced from somewhere and we marched behind it. Our route took us through the main street to the Air Force Headquarters and through the airport. The entrance to the airport was heavily guarded. The sergeant in charge of the guards tried to prevent us from entering the base, but General Claus, who was leading our parade, paid no attention and led us through the area. As we were marching through the airport, Claus's head was turning from side to side and his eyes scanned the whole base, taking in every detail. Claus was a German, and later was executed after being tried as a spy.

Our stay did not last long. The day after the parade we were told to get ready to go back to the front. Our intelligence was reporting ominous movements by the enemy. Returning to the front was like a homecoming – the same cookhouse, the same front line trenches, exactly the same position in the lines which we had vacated only three days before. I reclaimed my dugout and the same group of my men occupied it once more. We decided to make some alterations to the dugout. We enlarged it a bit and put in a fireplace by building a firebox on the floor and sticking an old stovepipe through the roof. On damp, cold days, our fire was stoked and we had the comforts of the bourgeoisie.

The occupants of my dugout included a black comrade named Doug Roach, a short, powerfully built man. We nicknamed him the "Jolly Giant." I don't think I ever saw Doug without a smile on his face. He had recently been assigned to my group and one of his talents was being a good "organizer" for extra food and treats from the cookhouse. We were never short of delicious Polish ham. He would steal a five-pound can from somewhere, and every second morning Doug would prepare ham and eggs

for breakfast. For the life of me I never knew where he got the eggs, and cared less, as we enjoyed breakfast prepared right in our own dugout away from prying eyes.

Another newcomer to my group was a tall, lanky Jewish lad from New York City by the name of Micky Mickenberg.¹⁷ Micky was the political philosopher of the group. He was not afraid to criticize Uncle Joe (Stalin) openly, and would often make sarcastic remarks about the Party hierarchy. I knew that his remarks would be reported to the appropriate people, and I warned him several times to be more careful in his comments. One day, I was summoned to company commissar's quarters, where I was asked about Micky. I assured the commissar that he was only making jokes and was not undermining the morale of my men. I was asked to tell Micky to watch his words and not be so sarcastic about "Uncle Joe." I had a long talk with Micky, but he did not pay the slightest attention to my warnings, and carried on with his so-called fun.

The threat of enemy action did not materialize. Our leave had been cut short by a false report. At this time, it was decided by the political department to send some of the Lincoln boys home for propaganda purposes. One of those chosen was Doug Roach. He was happy as hell that he was going back home, and we gave him a send-off party in our dugout. We opened one of the cans of Polish ham that he had stolen and toasted to his health with bottles of wine.

The morning Doug was to leave, he came and asked me to take a walk with him outside the dugout; he had something to tell me. He informed me that he was a member of Security Services and had been sent into my group to spy on me and Mickenberg. He asked me to be very careful of what I said and if possible to get Micky out of my unit. He was suspected of being a Trotskyite, and my friendship with him was suspect. He advised me to warn Micky and not to associate with him too closely. I thanked Doug for his warnings, but told him I had no fears; I had come to Spain to fight the Fascists, not the Communist Party. But I took his warning under advisement and became less friendly with Micky.

The days dragged on at the front: the same daily routine; the constant suffering from lice and inclement weather; the occasional enemy shelling; and nothing more. The weather was now getting much warmer, and we would occasionally be relieved in small groups to go to a cool stream some miles behind our lines for a refreshing swim. We were getting into June, and we still had not been relieved for rest and recreation. The boys were getting restless from confinement to the trenches. Tempers were getting short, and there was more drinking and more arguments. I suggested to

¹⁷It is possible that Stephens is using a nickname, but Mickenberg's first name is usually given as Morris.

Jardon that we form a baseball team, and compete with teams from other companies to break the monotony. We put in a requisition for the necessary equipment, but baseballs and bats were not available so we never got to play. One time, Ernest Hemingway arrived at our front and requested that we put on a mock attack behind the lines for his benefit. He was making a movie short of the Lincoln Battalion for consumption back home. He had obtained the necessary permission from Staff Headquarters, so we pulled two companies from the lines and put on a simulated attack with real sound effects. Some of the boys pretended they were wounded or killed. This was shown back home in the States as an actual attack by the Americans at the Jarama Front. Hemingway always traveled with a gorgeous blonde woman at this time, and the boys were openly making remarks to her, wishing they could have her for a short time.¹⁸

We had constant visitors to the front. The staff of the Russian Army; Harry Pollitt, head of the Communist Party of Britain; the American author, Josephine Herbst; and others.¹⁹ The most venerable visitor to my mind was Dr. Norman Bethune. He spent the whole day with us at the front, eating and drinking with us, and regaling us with stories of his experience with Spanish units at the Estremadura Front. His Mobile Blood Donors' Clinic saved many lives in Spain, and would do the same in China, where he gave his life in the service of the army of Mao Tse Tung.

Finally we were given the news that we would be withdrawn from the lines for rest and recreation. Little did we know that this was in preparation for a coming offensive to take place soon. In mid-June, we vacated our positions and were on our way to the village of Alvarez.

¹⁸During this time, Hemingway was living and traveling with journalist Martha Gellhorn, who became his third wife.

¹⁹Herbst wrote a memoir of her time in Spain: *The Starched Blue Sky of Spain, and Other Memories* (New York 1991).



Dr. Norman Bethune, assisted by Henning Sorenson, performing a transfusion during the Spanish Civil War. (Photo by Geza Karpathi, NAC, C-67451).

Chapter Four

Love and Loss

My group was in a lorry with some infantry men from the First Company. I noticed someone I knew, an Armenian-American from Worcester, Massachusetts. This man was one of the worst bitches in the Battalion. He used to tell me that we would all be slaughtered in this goddamned place and that he had been a fool to come. I was always trying to cheer him up and bolster his morale whenever we got together. I told him that as soon as we got to Alvarez, I would buy a lamb and prepare a nice meal for some of our boys.

Our convoy skirted the northern suburbs of Madrid on the way to our destination. Alvarez was about fifty miles northeast of Madrid. It was a pleasant little village, built on the slope of a steep hill. The convoy stopped at the bottom of the hill, and we had to climb the steps from the road to the village square. In the village square was a central fountain and pool, where the women were doing their washing. Dominating the square and the whole village was an imposing stone church of early Romanesque architecture. This phenomenon — a very large church in a small village — we would see again and again in all parts of Spain. The church was not used as a place of worship. The two parish priests had escaped to unknown parts, leaving their flock to the mercy of the local syndicate, dominated by the CNTU. The church was requisitioned as our quarters for the duration of our stay. A kitchen was set up in one corner of the church, and another corner was used as our ammunition depot. The centre was used as sleeping quarters, and straw mattresses were provided for the troops. Behind the church was the cemetery, and again we had a problem with Spanish members of our Battalion desecrating the graves. I don't know what prompted them to such vandalism. I soon put a stop to it and posted guards against such incidents. The local municipal office, which was also the mayor's residence, was occupied by our Battalion staff. The machine gun company was allotted quarters at one of the imposing houses at the west corner of the village

square. The population of the village came to the square to welcome us and get a good look at the "*Norte Americanos*" who had come to their aid. After a few days of rest, we began to take part in the life of the village. Some of the boys who had farming backgrounds went to the fields with the peasants to help them with their chores. The clean air and the scent of sweet clover was all around us. I think in my old age I would not mind retiring there.

A few hundred yards away from the square, we discovered a pleasant inn. There was an open air dining room in the back of the inn, and a pleasant garden with a delightful smell of lilacs and other flowers. Ray Steele and I made this place our hangout. Every morning we came in for our breakfast. One morning, while having breakfast, I noticed a little girl spying on us from the corner of the kitchen. I beckoned to her to come over, but her shyness overtook her and she disappeared into the kitchen. But now and then I could see her peeking at us. Again I signaled for her to come over, took a Hershey bar from my pocket, and asked her to come and get it. She went hiding in the kitchen again. She soon grew bolder, however, and came close to me. I gave her the chocolate bar and she ran back to the kitchen to show her mother what I had given her. Her mother brought the child back to our table to thank me. The little girl's name was Conchita, and I would bring Conchita a chocolate bar every time I went in for breakfast. Conchita was four years old. Her father owned the tavern, but right now he was in the army at the Madrid Front, serving in the famous El Campesino Brigade. I also kept my promise to my Armenian friend. I acquired a lamb and with some help from the locals, we put on a feast.

There was another village, called Almoguerra, about three or four miles from Alvarez, on the banks of the Tagus River. The people were just as friendly as those in Alvarez. We met a young Spanish soldier who was home on leave for a few days from the Guadalajara Front. He asked us to his house for a drink. We accepted his invitation, and went to meet his family and have a drink with them. We arrived at a fairly big, well-kept house. He took us in and introduced to his father, his mother, his sister, and his cousin. His father was a local bourgeois who owned an olive processing plant, but was an ardent supporter of the Republic. After a pleasant afternoon, we tried to take our leave, but the old man insisted that we stay for supper. I thanked him for his hospitality, but told him we had made other plans for the evening. He said we should come the next night, and we accepted his invitation and took our leave. The two girls were very pretty. The one whose brother brought us to his house was named Purita, and her cousin was named Rosita. Purita was shy, but Rosita was much more outgoing. Occasionally I caught her stealing appraising looks at Ray Steele. On our way back to Alvarez, we discussed the two girls. Ray was impressed by the attentions of Rosita.

The next afternoon, Ray and I took off to Almodguerra to pay our respects to our new-found friends. We went to their house and were greeted with apparent delight. The father was not at home; he had gone to his mill to attend to business. The son, Valentine, had gone with his father. The girls were alone in the house with their mother. We were conducted to the garden where we sat at a table under a beautiful English elm tree. The mother brought us a bottle of wine and some roasted almonds. Then she left us with the girls, saying she had to go to the kitchen to get supper ready for us. Rosita filled our glasses with this excellent wine. I could not see any label on the bottle, so I asked Purita what kind of wine it was. She replied that it was made by her father. The girls were very curious about America. They thought of America as the land portrayed by Hollywood — a glamorous land of wealth where everybody owned cars and houses and money could be picked off the trees. They did not know of the devastation and misery caused by the Great Depression. Of course, we never portrayed the ugly part of American life, but raved about its abundance and its beautiful farms and cities. They had heard of gangster wars in Chicago, and had some romantic notions about Al Capone. Purita asked me what my occupation was in America and I had a hard time explaining to her that I was not American but Canadian. She had never heard of Canada and considered me an American. I left it at that. I did not exaggerate the things I did in Toronto, and told them I had been a salesman, houseman, gardener, waiter, store clerk, and handyman.

It was a beautiful sunny day and Rosita suggested that we go to the Tagus River for a swim, to which we heartily agreed. The girls went inside to get their bathing suits and towels, and we went to the river bank. The girls went back behind some bushes to change. Now what were we to do? Ray and I had no bathing suits. So we decided that we would strip to our underwear and pretend they were shorts. The girls came out in their bathing suits, looking like two beautiful mermaids. Rosita, with her shapely, strong limbs looked stunning. Purita looked like a nymph, slight and graceful. Ray and I went behind the bushes to get undressed and came out in our underwear. The girls started to laugh; I guess we looked funny in army shorts. We went into the water for a refreshing swim, but the damn underwear tended to come down, and clung to our bodies as if we had nothing on. Rosita, the devil, hung around close to Ray, splashing him with water. They got close and locked in a loving embrace, but my Purita was shy. She just swam and enjoyed the refreshing water. A couple of times I tried to get close to her, but she said no. After we had gotten out, dried off, and dressed, we sat on a patch of green grass under a tree and necked with the girls. Whenever we got serious, we were politely but firmly pushed back, and told we had to be satisfied with just hugging. It was beautiful, innocent love.

When we got back to the house, the men had not yet returned from the mill. Before long, however, they arrived and greeted us like two old friends. We went to the garden for a drink before supper. We drank anise from shot glasses. After several drinks, Purita came to inform us that supper was ready. Senora Gallardo had prepared an excellent traditional Spanish meal, and after supper we had coffee and brandy in the garden. Senor Gallardo said he was sad his son Juan, the only son in the family, was leaving early in the morning to join his regiment at the front. Then we began to discuss our political beliefs. He was not a socialist and did not belong to any syndicates. He was an ardent Republican and had no use for the church in its present form, but he was also an ardent believer. He said the church hierarchy was very corrupt, as was the uneducated lower priesthood, who were sucking the lifeblood of the poor peasants. He commended the highly dedicated members of the clergy who were with the people and the Republic, and the priests who were serving with the troops, but by and large, he had no use for the established church. The anarchists and socialists he put into the same category — misguided idealists who did not understand Spain. He believed in the justice of the Republic, and hated the landed aristocracy and ruthless bankers, who had prevented Spain from becoming an advanced democracy. He said he did not generally believe in the expropriation and confiscation of property, but he did not approve of the church holding vast tracts of the best cultivatable land. This land, he said, should be confiscated and redistributed to the people who cultivated it. He said the same thing about the feudal holdings of the landed aristocracy. We sat and talked for a long time, and then reluctantly took our leave.

The walk back to Alvarez was pleasant, with a full harvest moon illuminating the pastoral scene. The smell of cut hay permeated the night air. In the distance we could still hear the faint drumming of a guitar, and flamenco singing coming from the roadside café just outside of Almoguerra. We arrived at Alvarez just before midnight. Life went on in this leisurely way for two weeks in Alvarez. Ray and I made our way to Almoguerra every other day, and enjoyed our swims in the river with Rosita and Purita. The days that we were not in Almoguerra, the girls came over to Alvarez to spend the evening with us. Life was beautiful. Why must there be a war to spoil all this?

All good things must end, and all too soon we were told to prepare to leave Alvarez. The Republic was ready for its first major offensive and the International Brigade was to spearhead the attack. The night before our departure we went to Almoguerra to say farewell to our Spanish sweethearts. Rosita started to cry, and told Ray that she loved him. Purita cried also, and showered me with tender kisses. She told me to be careful and to hurry back to her.

Early next morning, our convoy pulled out of Alvarez and headed for the Madrid Front. We were to take part in the Brunete offensive. Although dawn was just breaking when we pulled out of Alvarez, the population was on the road to bid us goodbye. My little Conchita had come down with her mother and was waving goodbye to me. The old women were dabbing their eyes with handkerchiefs and saying, "God be with you, sons. Take care and don't get killed."



Canadians in the Abraham Lincoln and Washington Battalions, Spain, June 1937. [The man standing in the second row, in the long-sleeved white shirt, may be Pat Stephens.] (NAC, C-74967).

Our convoy took a circuitous road towards the northwest corner of Madrid. On our way we passed a group of women doing their laundry in a stream by the roadside. Again the handkerchiefs were evident. Drying their silent tears, they were mourning the ones that they knew would not come back. In early afternoon, our convoy drove past Carabanchel. We could now hear artillery fire in the distance. This was as far as the convoy could travel safely; from here on we had to walk. We marched through a beautiful resort town dotted with handsome, rich villas. It was apparent that this was the town where the rich spent their summers, away from the heat of Madrid. A few miles out of the town, we camped for a late lunch. Our kitchen had caught up with us, and we had our first hot meal of the day. After a rest, we started on our way. We reached our staging area for the night, a place called Val de Morillo. We spread our blankets under the trees and had a late

supper. Then we were paraded to an open area, where our former Battalion Commander, Martin Hourihan, addressed us. He had recovered and was now attached to brigade staff. He said he was sorry he would not be leading us in the attack and wished us good luck. Before dawn the next morning, we started toward the front. We were now getting close to our objective, Villanueva de la Cañada.

Just as the sun was trying to come out from behind the mountain tops, our artillery started its shelling. A squadron of air fighters swooped low, strafing the enemy lines. We were in a fig orchard. Our commander, Oliver Law, was hesitant in our advance. We were not in contact with the enemy and he did not know which way to advance. A Brigade Officer ran to him and told him to hurry and join the battle. He pointed the direction of our advance and told him to go just over the ridge. So we started running up the ridge, from where we could see Villanueva de la Cañada. The enemy troops were in full view now, retreating to the town. We opened up on them and advanced towards them, but were soon under fire ourselves. Their machine guns, which were mounted on the high church tower, were raking us with bullets. I ordered my two machine guns to the top of a little rise to cover the church tower. One of my gunners went down, badly wounded. The rest hesitated. I ran forward and grabbed the gun, pushed it into position, and opened up on the tower. The other gun followed me and we poured a steady stream of bullets on the town, not giving them a chance to fire on us. Then their artillery started shelling our position. I heard the whistle and swish of a shell landing not more than ten feet from me. Thank God the thing was a dud and never exploded. By late dusk we still had not captured the town. Our artillery obliterated the church tower so there was no danger from that quarter any more. We rushed the town and captured it. There was very little resistance. The main enemy force had retreated, and we took care of their rear guard. To our right, the Lister Brigade²⁰ had captured the town of Brunete, and the civilians were being evacuated to the rear in military lorries. The women were shouting at us to spare their houses.

Our next objective was Boadillo del Monte, to the east of Brunete and past the Guadarrama River. It was dark when we came to the river, so we camped in the woods for the night. In our advance during the heat of the day, we had thrown away our blankets and ground sheets, but it gets cold at night in the mountains, and we were shivering. Some of us went back to Villanueva de la Cañada to look for blankets in the abandoned houses. We found quite a few, and took them back and distributed them to those that had none.

²⁰Stephens may be referring here to the Lister Division, which belonged to a mixed corps known as the 5th Army Corps, and took part in the Brunete offensive.

Dawn was breaking in the mountains when we were ready to move again. Our kitchen had finally found our location, and a hot breakfast was most welcome. We forded the river in water up to our chests, and headed straight for the enemy lines at Boadillo del Monte. We had not had contact with the enemy since we left Villanueva de la Cañada. We reached the top of the ridge overlooking Boadillo de Monte and dug in. The enemy was by now entrenched in the hills and was opposing our advance. A couple of days later, the Moors were pressing hard on our left flank, but we stopped them dead. We were constantly losing contact with our left, which was occupied by Spanish battalions, so it was always necessary to take combat patrols out at night to protect our left flank. The fighting was becoming more intense. The town of Villanueva del Pardillo was in danger of being recaptured by the Moors, so our battalion was shifted to the left to stay in reserve and ward off any danger to the town. The Moorish attacks were resisted and our Spanish comrades counter-attacked to drive the enemy to the opposite side of the hills, where they dug in to form their defensive position. This whole panorama was visible to us from our position on the crest, and we were glad that our help was not needed to drive the enemy back. During the shelling, some of the partridges in the woods were stunned by the exploding shells and fell literally in our laps. We had a good meal of partridge that day, broiled on improvised barbecues in the woods.

When the danger to Villanueva del Pardillo had been dealt with, we were moved back to our positions in front of Boadillo del Monte. We camped in a wooded hill and prepared for a rest. I spread my blanket under the shade of a tree and fell asleep. I don't know how long I slept, but I was rudely awakened by one of my boys and told to run back as we were under attack. Bullets were whizzing around and digging into the ground all around me. I grabbed my rifle and ran back to a position protected from enemy fire. I had left my pack and blankets under the tree, and I was damned if I was going to let the enemy get them. When the firing was not too intense, I crawled back to the tree and retrieved them. On the way back, I saw the body of one of our boys who had been killed there in the woods. It was John Findlay, from the hills of Kentucky. He was a tall blond student, now lying dead in the strange woods of Spain. His body had been stripped bare to his waist. John always carried a few hundred American dollars in his money belt, and he let the boys know that if anything happened to him this money was to be sent to his poor mother. I saw no money belt; it had been removed. When I got back to my machine gun position, I told our political commissar, Steve Nelson, about John Findlay. He said he knew he had been killed and that his money belt had been returned for despatch to his mother.

Oliver Law, the Battalion Commander, along with several others, had been killed in that ambush in the woods. Steve Nelson had taken command

of the battalion until someone was appointed from Brigade. That evening, I was summoned to Battalion Headquarters and Nelson asked me to take two machine guns to the crest of a hill to our left, as it was left undefended by our troops. We stayed there all night but nothing happened. At daylight we went back to Battalion Headquarters. We spread out under the shade of the olive trees, and slept until one o'clock, when we were woken up by the noise of the chow truck. The food truck was always a welcome sight. We had suffered casualties, so there was surplus food and cigarettes.

I strolled over to first aid to have a little cut cleaned and bandaged, and also to say hello to my dear friend, Dr. Pike, who was working hard tending to our wounded under the shade of a fig tree. Laid on a stretcher was our Cuban comrade, Sanchez. He was wounded in the head and was unconscious. Dr. Pike told me it was a hopeless case; he would die in an hour or so. It was no use moving him to hospital. He would never see his beloved Havana again. Sanchez was soon dead, so we dug a grave in the mountains of Boadilla del Monte and buried him there. No one prayed, or uttered a religious incantation over his body. Dr. Pike was a very sensitive, emotional man. I could see the tears running down his cheeks, but no one else cried.

My machine gun group was now held in reserve just behind the Battalion Headquarters. I took it upon myself to survey our right flank. I took three boys with me and we must have covered a quarter of a mile without encountering any troops from either side. Our right flank was wide open. Just below the hill was Boadilla del Monte. It looked like a ghost town. We could see no sign of life or movement. The boys wanted to go down the hill into the town, but I decided against it for fear of an ambush. We went back the way we came to Battalion Headquarters. I told Steve Nelson about our right flank, and he was surprised that there was no one on our right. He ordered me to take my two machine guns to the hill overlooking the town, and cover that area. We stayed in that position all night but nothing happened. If the enemy had known about this gap, they could have marched all the way to the Guadarrama River without us knowing about it.

In the morning a runner from Steve Nelson ordered us to go back to Battalion Headquarters. When we got back there we saw that the whole battalion was ready to move out. Nelson had received orders from Brigade to retreat to the right bank of the Guadarrama River. I was ordered to dig in and protect our rear in case of enemy action, so under the ledge we dug a fox hole and mounted one machine gun to cover the road. It was at this time that I received two new replacements. One was Milton Wolff²¹ from the Bronx, the other was a Canadian from Toronto by name of Jack Hoshooly. They were both under fire for the first time. Both of them were

²¹For Wolff's own account of his time in Spain, see Milton Wolff, *Another Hill: An Autobiographical Novel* (Chicago 1994).

tall, lanky boys, and there was hardly any room in the dugout. I gave them the shovel and asked them to make room for themselves. At noon, I sent Hoshooly and Wolff to the river to bring our chow. They also brought the mail. I had a letter from my cousin Ruth in Boston, in which she informed me that my cousin Grant's four-year-old daughter, Mary, had died during a simple appendix operation. I really felt very sad for this sweet little girl, the apple of Grant's eye. Milton had a letter from his girl in New York, and he started reading it out loud to us. It was quite romantic, and one of the old-timers started to tease him. He took out his wallet and showed us her picture. She was really beautiful.

I could hear the rumble of motors in the distance. It was not the sound of airplane motors, so it had to be lorries or tanks. I inserted a belt of anti-tank bullets into the machine gun and waited to see what was coming down from the back of the hill. Soon two tanks appeared on the road at the crest of the hill. I trained my binoculars on them and I could see that they were our tanks, retreating to the river. The first tank stopped a few yards away from our position, and the second tank stopped behind. Then the turret top of the second tank opened, and a member of that crew drew his pistol and started firing at the first tank. The first tank took off and sped away towards the river, and the second tank followed it, the officer still firing his pistol. They soon disappeared from view and we never found out what really happened. My guess is that the first tank commander chickened out and retreated without orders.

The enemy had retaken Brunete, and we could hear the artillery duel in our vicinity. Our entire front had been ordered to retreat beyond Villanueva de la Cañada. The Lincoln Brigade was given the task of defending the retreat. We re-crossed the Guadarrama River, but this time the river was bone dry. In a grove on the west bank of the river, our troops had abandoned motor vehicles intact. There was a water tank, so we drained the tank and filled our canteens. It was terribly hot and water was getting scarce. Then we opened fire and put every vehicle out of action, so that the enemy could not use them. The last of our troops crossed the river bed and the full retreat began. Our machine gun commissar, Denis Jordan, saw that one of our machine gun group was retreating without its gun. It was commanded by a Finn from Minnesota named Sunstrum. Jordan asked him where his machine gun was and he seemed aware for the first time that the machine gun was left behind. He and his group went back to the hill to retrieve it. We could not wait for them; we were in danger of being encircled. I asked Jordan if I could stay behind with my group to give support for Sunstrum and his men. Jordan said I could, but warned me to be careful. He said if Sunstrum and his men were not back soon I was to retreat and rejoin the battalion. I did not have to wait long. The men came back with

the gun and we hurried back through the woods to rejoin the battalion. Jordan was worried, and had sent two patrols looking for us. One of the patrols was led by Mo Teitelbaum from Chicago. While looking for us, he had met an enemy patrol. An exchange of fire had taken place and Teitelbaum was wounded in the stomach. They had no time to give him first aid, so one of his boys was carrying him on his back when we met them. I lowered Mo onto the grass, cut open his shirt and examined his wound. The blood had caked around his wound and coagulated, so the bleeding had stopped. I bandaged his wound from a first aid pack and he was put on a stretcher and taken to Dr. Pike. He was later sent to a Madrid hospital in an ambulance.

The heat was unbearable. Our water supply was exhausted and we were parched. I would have given a million dollars for a glass of water. Our kitchen truck had lost contact with us, so we had no supper that night. We were camped in a grove, waiting for orders. We had established telephone contact with the Brigade Command. We were to stay where we were, safe from enemy attack. I went down a gully to look for a spring or pool of water. I heard drops of water falling into a little recess and I saw a pool of dirty water. I cleared the scum from the top with my hand and fell to the ground to take a long drink, bugs and all. After I had quenched my thirst I filled my canteen and went to inform my group quietly where there was water to be found. I led the boys to the cesspool and they all had a drink. In a few minutes, the pool was as dry as a bone. It would take hours for the trickle of water to fill it up again.

We were ordered to move to the farmhouse where the Brigade was situated. General Nathan, an English officer, was Acting Chief of Staff of the Brigade. He was a typical British officer. He was the only one on staff who employed an orderly at meal times. His orderly would open up a folding table, spread a cloth and serve his meal on a china plate. He came to tell us that the offensive was over and the lines were now stable. We would soon be relieved, and get a well-earned rest.

It occurred to me that I had not seen Ray Steele during the whole retreat. Then I saw Lenny Lamb wearing Ray's Sam Browne belt. I asked him why he was wearing it. He said Ray had been killed by a sniper's bullet as we retreated across the Guadarrama. I was shocked to hear it. I asked where his body was, and was told that it was left where he had fallen; they had no time to bury him. I was furious. How could they leave Ray's body to the enemy? I was beyond myself. I tried to organize a volunteer patrol to go and retrieve his body. I was so grief-stricken I was crying like a little boy. Steve Nelson came over and put his arm around me and tried to console me. He told me to pull myself together, and assured me that Ray and our other comrades belong to history, and we would see that their memory stays

alive. By now I realized the futility of retrieving his body. The enemy was on our heels and we could never reach it.

The next morning we started to retrace our steps back to Villanueva de la Cañada, and from there back to Val de Morillo, our starting point. As we were passing the El Escorial on the left side of the road, we could hear the whirr of enemy planes. Sure enough, a squadron of Junker bombers was heading straight for the road. They had a perfect target, and we would be caught without protection. They dropped their first load on an orchard behind us. In this raid the only casualty was General Nathan. He refused to throw himself on the ground, but stood up staunchly shaking his fist at them. We were next in line. I found a hollow section of ground on the shoulder of the road and a few of us squeezed into it. Here only a direct hit could get us. Then a miracle happened. Our anti-aircraft batteries, manned by Czech volunteers, got the planes in range and shot down two of them. The rest turned tail and flew back to their lines. It was a glorious sight see the shattered sections of the bombers floating down overhead. We could see tiny pieces drifting down like flakes of snow. Safe from further bombings, we continued our march back to Val de Morillo.

We were to stay there in reserve a few days to make sure the enemy did not pull a counter-offensive to drive us back to Madrid. We received a supply of brand new machine guns from Russia, along with some light automatic weapons. It's too bad we didn't get them before the start of our offensive; we sure could have made use of them. Rumors were flying around that we would be sent back to Villanueva de la Cañada, as the enemy was becoming active there. Concentrations of rebel forces were reported just outside of Brunete. Our Spanish units were getting restless. They did not wish to go to the front lines again for awhile. That evening, just at dusk, Steve Nelson sent for me. He informed me that trouble was brewing among the Spaniards. He wanted to avoid a mutiny, but he didn't want to use American boys to do so. He asked me to assemble a group of loyal Spaniards and organize them quietly as a combat force to oppose a possible mutiny.

I knew what I had to do. I went to see my friend, Juan Abbad, who by now was commanding a platoon in Number Two Company. I informed him of the situation, and asked him to get his platoon ready for action. He was aware of agitation among the Spaniards, and the desire by some to march straight back to Madrid and refuse to take part in any further action. He said the agitators were sent in from Madrid by Fascist agents to make trouble. One of Juan's sergeants came to report a man back on the hill, exhorting the men to desert. I asked Juan to get a group from his platoon and form them into three details, and we would go and see what was happening. We sauntered around back of the hill, without making any attempt at action. We wanted to get close to this man and arrest him. Under

the shade of a giant oak up on the hill, this agitator was exhorting our poor demoralized troops to desert and return to their families. He told them we were losing the war anyway, and may as well avoid getting killed for nothing. The he loaded his gun and started firing it into the air. I told Abbad to take a squad and approach the man from behind, and I would lead the rest of the men from the front. I gave Juan some time to get behind the agitator before I made my move. We started climbing the hill, but he smelled a rat and started running down the hill away from us. Juan was behind him and making straight for him. When the man realized he was surrounded he stopped, pulled a pistol from his belt, and pointed it at me. But he never got a chance to pull the trigger before Juan put a bullet through his head. The man fell to the ground and was dead in a few seconds. The men who had been listening to the agitator left the hill and went back to linger around their campsites. I told Juan to search the man for documents and papers, which he did, and these were turned over to Battalion Intelligence for scrutiny.

We stayed in this reserve position for a couple of days more. The front was now stabilized, and all sectors in our part of the front were quiet. It was time for us to go back and rest. We retraced our steps through Torredelado and behind the Madrid Front at Carabanchel. Lorries were lined up waiting for us, and we got in and started on our way back to Alvarez. It was dark when we arrived at Alvarez. We were assigned the same quarters as before. After supper, a few friends and I strolled to our favourite inn. Our Spanish comrades had taken over a part of the garden and were singing and dancing to the tune of a guitar. They were really having a good time, especially after their ordeal during the Brunete offensive. My little Conchita ran to me but I had no chocolates to give her that night. I promised her some for the next day. We drank wine until midnight, and got rid of some of our tension.

I was trying to settle in to a daily routine without the company of Ray Steele, but I really missed him. I didn't think his friendship had meant so much to me until after death. Just before lunch on the day after we arrived, I left the inn and was walking towards my quarters near the village square when I saw Rosita and Purita standing at the fountain. Rosita saw me first, and rushed over and put her arms around me. This public show of affection wasn't the right thing to do according to Spanish custom, but they were glad to see me and showed it the best way they could. Rosita was looking around, and she asked where Ray was. I uttered one word only: "Dead." They both started crying, "What anguish, what barbarity, the poor one dead? It doesn't seem possible." Purita came close and hugged me tightly. I guess she was glad I wasn't killed too. I took the girls to the inn for a drink, but they were in no mood to drink. After a drink of wine they wanted to go back to Almaguerra. I walked with them to their house and their mother met us at

the door with a great big smile. Rosita gave her the bad news about Ray, and the smile turned to tears. I stayed for lunch, but then I had to go back to Alvarez, as there was a meeting arranged between Steve Nelson and the Old Guard for that afternoon. The Old Guard were what was left of the original volunteers at the Jarama Front. I promised the girls I would visit them the next day, and left.

I arrived at Headquarters in time for the meeting. Steve Nelson told us that the political commissariat had decided that all the volunteers who had a long front line service were to be given the chance to serve in some safe rear echelon unit. It was up to us to decide. Those who wanted to remain in combat positions could do so, those who wanted to go to rear echelon duty would be sent to Albacete for reassignment. Steve addressed me and said that in view of my excellent action during the offensive, he had decided to appoint me Machine Gun Company Commander if I chose to stay with the battalion. He said those who were going to Albacete for reassignment were to be ready by the next morning to board the lorry. He asked me to think about my choice and let him know in an hour, so he could make up the list. I went to the inn to have a drink and mull over the proposition. The lure of being Company Commander was strong; on the other hand, the law of averages did not guarantee longevity at the front. After due consideration, the urge for self-preservation prevailed, and I asked to be sent back to Albacete for reassignment.

That night, after supper, I started walking to Almoguerra. There was hardly any traffic on the road, so getting a lift there was improbable. As I started on my way, I could hear the sound of a motorcycle coming around the bend. I hailed the driver and he stopped. I asked him for a lift. He could not understand English, and asked me in French where I wanted to go. I told him in French to the next village. I jumped in the back seat and away we went. I got talking to the driver over the din of his motorcycle and found out that he was from Marseille, France. I told him we had stayed in Marseille for a few weeks on the way to Canada. I told him I had relatives in Marseille, living in Rue Dominicain. He said he knew the place well, that there were a lot of Armenians living on that street. It was known as "Little Armenia." When I told him I was Armenian, he pulled his bike to the side of the road and stopped. He jumped off his bike and gave me his hand. He was Armenian too, serving with the French 14th Brigade. He was on his way to Guadalajara to join his brigade. We stopped at the café at the approach to Almoguerra and had a drink to celebrate our meeting. I hope he survived the war and returned to his people well and safe.

I got to Purita's house just as they were finishing supper. I told Purita of my transfer to Albacete. She said in a way she was glad, because this way I would stay alive. I asked her father for his permission to take the girls to

the bar for a drink of wine. He said by all means, so we went to the café and had a bottle of wine. Purita sat close to me, holding my hand, and as the wine flowed I became bolder and put my arm around her waist and held it there. She clung close to me. I am sure I could have had her if I had wanted to, but I knew I would have taken advantage of her, so with great difficulty I resisted the temptation. I walked the girls home and kissed them goodbye. I promised to write when I knew where I was to be posted. Purita looked at me with her beautiful brown eyes full of tears, and said she knew that this was the last time she would see me. She asked me to take care of myself and write often.

It was a beautiful moonlit night and the song of the bullfrogs kept me company as I walked back to Alvarez. Next morning after breakfast, twenty-one of us piled into a truck and were on our way to Albacete. After a short drive, we arrived at Morata de Tajuna, our old base just behind the Jarama Front. The guns were roaring still, and one could hear the spatter of machine gun fire. We drove through without stopping. The driver was in a hurry to get to Albacete. A section of the road was under artillery fire. It was not heavy, but it only takes one shell to end it all. We got through safely and arrived in Albacete in time to line up in the parade to the old bullring for supper. I remembered when we were here the first time in the same parade with my comrades from New York. There were very few of them left; most were wounded or killed at the Jarama Front on 27 February.

After supper we were allowed the freedom of the city. I made my way to the old Circle Mercantile, the military club. The club was still the same, but the atmosphere and customers had changed. When we first came here in early February, the place was full of American and French volunteers; now it was the Spaniards who dominated the place, especially the white-uniformed pilots of the Spanish Air Force. Why not? After all, this was really their war and they were entitled to dominate it.

Next morning, we were sent to the commissariat for an interview. Who should I meet, sitting at the desk behind the typewriter, but Johnny Mura, who sailed with me from New York on the SS *Paris*. Johnny was of Rumanian descent and a decent chap. He was majoring in Political Economy at the University of Illinois when the war broke out and he volunteered. Johnny was glad to see me. He said I was the first one from the original group that he had seen. He had heard so many bad reports about the February attack he thought we had all been killed. I told him it wasn't that bad, that quite a few were killed but most of them were wounded and were back in the lines again. I had to fill out a questionnaire about my line of work or profession, so that a suitable spot could be found for me. Johnny informed us that before reassignment, we were to be sent to a rest camp for a while. We would

be leaving next morning for Benisa on the east coast, just south of Valencia, for a week's leave before returning to our new units.

Benisa was a delightful little resort town on the Mediterranean, between Valencia and Alicante. We were quartered in an old convent which had been requisitioned by the military; they could get anything without questioning. The place was about a quarter of a mile from the centre of town. It had a fine orchard and vineyard. We were not subjected to any military routine or discipline and we came and went as we pleased. We slept in as late as we liked. The food was good. The place was just the right combination of things to give tired combat troops a real rest. It was here that I met one of my acquaintances from Toronto, Alf Bell. He was the driver of the recreation lorry. Every morning at 10:30 a truck left for a beach called Ifach. This place was situated half way between Benisa and Alicante. One drove to it by a narrow road like a causeway for half a mile. On both sides of this causeway were huge piles of salt reclaimed from the sea. At the end of the road was a beautiful beach — clean, pure, white sand visible for about a mile. At the northeast corner of this peninsula was an old Moorish fort, now in ruins. At the centre was a fine vineyard with red and white grapes hanging on the vines. These were cut and washed and placed on a long table with other fresh fruit for our enjoyment. There was a sort of roadhouse and restaurant built at the edge of the orchard facing the blue Mediterranean. The water was so clear that the fish swimming on the bottom were clearly visible. Lunch was always freshly caught fish, fried crisp and delicious, and served with local vegetables and salad. Dinner was washed down with a generous supply of Alicante wine. Sometimes some of us would go with the fishing boats to catch our daily requirements. I made a point of not missing my trip to Ifach every day that we were at this rest camp. I had a really wonderful rest. A week is not a long time, and I really regretted leaving this peaceful place, away from the war and its filth and turmoil.

Chapter Five

The Intendencia

Back in Albacete, I reported to Johnny Mura, who told me to pack and be ready to leave in one hour for my new assignment. I was going to Murcia, a pleasant inland town between Alicante and Cartagena. This was where the base military hospitals were situated. I was assigned to the supply depot as a bookkeeper. It was noted on my documents that I had taken a course in Accountancy, which qualified me for the position. Micky Mickenberg was to go with me, as well as Yale Stuart, who served with me at the Jarama Front. They were to be stockroom helpers at the supply depot. We arrived in Murcia in the late afternoon. The supply depot was a converted old warehouse. We were welcomed by the commander of the supply depot, Lt. Sam Peck, whom I knew from the days of Jarama. He knew Yale Stuart and Micky quite well from New York. He took us to the back of the depot where there was a special dining room set up for the staff. He introduced us to Carmen, our jovial, buxom cook, who gave us coffee and food. Then we were introduced to Luigi Mazuchelli, who was in charge of the stockroom. Micky and Yale were to help him, so they stayed with him. He took me to his office, and introduced me to his Spanish assistant. He said his books and accounts were in a hell of a mess, and it was my job to set up a new system with accurate records.

There were no thorough accounts of anything. No one knew what cash was spent for supplies and services, and what was in inventory. Once a month, Sam Peck would go to Major Damont, a French officer assigned to the financial office in Murcia, and draw his cash requirements to buy supplies for the four hospitals situated in Murcia. Our main supplies were drawn from the local Spanish *Intendencia Militar*. Such items as coffee, sugar, tea, rice, canned goods, much of our fresh meat, and dry supplies came from there. All fresh and perishable foods were purchased by our own buyers, who would scour the countryside and farms for vegetables, fruit,

and poultry. For fish he had to send buyers as far as Cartagena and the surrounding villages.

We were assigned quarters in a dormitory along with other international staff attached to the hospitals. My quarters contained eight beds, and I lived with Micky, Yale, and an Irishman by name of Vincent O'Donnell, who was later transferred to the supply depot. Apart from our own dining room, we had also a common mess for all the military staff assigned to hospital duties. I had an eight-to-five job, and was free to do what I wished after that. There were some good bars in Murcia, and I went to them quite regularly. There were also a few movie houses and clubs. We often went to a place called Bar Americano. The bartender knew how to make a good Tom Collins, and I would have one every evening before supper. Life was pleasant in Murcia, but money was not too plentiful. Thank God I had not drawn much pay while at the front, so I had a big back pay to draw on.

The Murcia base was under the command of Major Minkoff, a Bulgarian doctor who was sent to Spain while serving in the medical corps of the Russian Army in the Moscow area. He was a tall, handsome man, who looked more like a poet than a doctor. One day he dropped in at the supply depot for an inspection. He shook hands with me and said he understood I was an Armenian. He said he had many good Armenian friends while studying medicine, and that if I ever had any problems I was free to go to his office and he would do what he could for me.

Sam Peck would occasionally go for a few days at a time on a buying trip, leaving me in charge of the Intendencia. One day while Sam was supposedly away, I was summoned to Dr. Minkoff's office. I was met by his assistant, Captain Angeloff, who was also a Bulgarian. He said Comrade Minkoff would like to have a talk with me, and he took me to the office. Comrade Minkoff offered me his hand and asked me to sit down. He asked Angeloff to send two cups of coffee. He said he had just dismissed Sam Peck as Chief of the Intendencia and was appointing me in his place. In fact, he said, he had Sam Peck under arrest and suspected him of black market operations. He said they had searched Sam and found nearly a thousand dollars in American currency. He asked me if this was normal, as Sam claimed he had brought it with him from the States when he came to Spain. He asked me what I thought of Sam and if I had noticed any shady deals. I said that it was possible he brought the money with him, and that I had not noticed any irregularities in the cash account. About Sam I knew very little. Major Minkoff took me to a back room at his headquarters. He had the guard open the room, and took me in with him to see Peck. Minkoff said he was appointing me to take command of the supply depot, and any useful information that Peck possessed should be imparted to me. Sam started protesting and asking to see the local American political commissar. Mink-

off said that would not be necessary, as he was sending him to Albacete for a closer investigation, and he could see the base commissar when he got there. We went back to his office and he handed me Peck's Sam Browne belt and his pistol, and appointed me Lieutenant in charge of the Intendencia. He also recommended some other changes. He would appoint an old Bulgarian comrade named Vasilief to act as treasurer and cashier, and to be my assistant. He was also sending me another young Bulgarian lieutenant to be chief buyer and to take control the other buyers. But he wanted to make it clear that I was in full charge and all the rest worked under me. I would be held personally responsible for the efficient operation of the Intendencia.

The next day, Angeloff brought Vasilief and Lieutenant Jordanoff to be my Bulgarian helpers. I now occupied the big, six-drawer desk that had belonged to Sam Peck. Vasilief was in his late fifties, and right away he made a good impression on me. He was friendly and warm. Jordanoff was a gruff young Bulgarian who had just been discharged from hospital after being wounded. He was a front line soldier and had served on the Jarama Front during the defense of the Arganda Bridge. He and I got along very well. Jordanoff liked his liquor and women, and he often led me astray in these fields. It was through him that I met a dark gypsy girl by the name of Juanita. She was really a beauty, with large, beautiful black eyes and an olive complexion. Juanita remained my lover during the time that I was stationed in Murcia. She had a flat over the bar she worked at, and this became my second quarters while I was in Murcia. Often Jordanoff, Yale Stuart and others would be invited there for an after hours party. My social life was certainly improving. Juanita would invite girls she knew to keep company with the others.

The Intendencia kept me very busy. It was becoming harder to get adequate supplies from the local large Spanish Army Supply Depot. I always had to go there personally two or three times a week to try and get better supplies. It was also getting harder to get fresh vegetables and fruit from local farmers. They were reluctant to sell us produce for cash. They wanted staples like rice, sugar, coffee, soap, and cigarettes as barter. I did my best and supplied our hospitals with fresh produce and meat. The bulk of our fresh meat came from the local Army Supply Depot, but at times they too would be critically short, so I had to find other sources. There was a monastery with a farm attached, just west of Murcia on the road to Albacete. This place was not being used as religious premises any more and had been left vacant. I asked comrade Minkoff to arrange with the local authorities to have this place allocated to us so that I could turn it into a farm and keep animals there in reserve to slaughter at times of need. He thought this was a wonderful idea. The land and its buildings were turned over to me to use

as a farm. I asked Comrade Minkoff to requisition six persons to staff the farm. Soon I had a complete menagerie. I managed to purchase or barter some cows, horses, pigs, hens, sheep, and goats. The quality and quantity of the food at the hospitals improved greatly. I was even able to set up the canteens with fresh sandwiches so the wounded would have a better choice of buying more varied foods. We had a Polish butcher who really knew how to make salami and corned beef. These two items were strictly for the canteens. The proceeds from these canteens went to the orphanage at the Campo de Ninos Lukacj, named after a Hungarian volunteer who gave his life at the Madrid Front.

Comrade Vasilief and I would drive to Albacete once a month to draw funds for our needs and for the local payroll. The money was allocated to us according to the number of effectives stationed in the Murcia base area. The head of the Financial Department was George Franek, a young Bulgarian whose father was the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party and a prominent member of the Communist International. Vasilief knew Franek's father quite well, so we had no cuts made in our monetary requirements, as was the case before Vasilieff became treasurer. As a matter of fact, we always had surplus funds to augment our supplies. Franek always opened a bottle of vodka for Vasilieff and me, and we were always half drunk when we left his office with all that cash. Franek always made a point of sending bottles of vodka for Minkoff, whom he knew quite well.

Life was really pleasant in Murcia, away from the dangers of the front. One night, I was leaving the office late after going over some records and preparing the next day's shopping list. As I was locking the door I noticed Comrade Minkoff and his staff coming down the street, followed by a mob shouting, "Victory!" They told me we had taken Teruel and the enemy was on the run. Of course, I was elated! This was an important victory for us. Teruel was a fair-sized city in Aragon and its capture was important because it had been in rebel hands from the beginning of the war, and this was the first major victory for the Republican Army. Almost the entire population of Murcia was on the street. People ignored the curfew laws; the bars stayed open all night. Unfortunately, we did not have the reserves or supplies to follow up the victory. The enemy regrouped, counter-attacked, and recaptured Teruel some weeks later.

Troops were badly needed at the front. An order was issued to expedite the discharge of wounded comrades from convalescing centres. It was also ordered that all auxiliary troops serving at the base be put through a medical board, and those who were fit be sent to Albacete to be assigned to front line regiments. I lost six men out of a twelve-man personnel assigned to the Intendencia. I also had to appear before a board myself. The board was presided over by a Belgian doctor named Blanque, and included

Minkoff and two other doctors from the hospital. Dr. Blanque found me fit for front line service, but Dr. Minkoff intervened. He took off my glasses and examined them, and remarked that they were very strong. He noted that I would be almost blind without them. Besides, he said, my work at the base was very important and he needed me here. He asked Dr. Blanque to change his decision. Of course, no one would disagree with Minkoff; he had a lot of clout. So I remained in Murcia.

The enemy, after retaking Teruel, was pressing our forces on the Aragon Front. The number of wounded was increasing. Our four hospitals were full and getting fresh meat was becoming difficult even with our farm animals. We had to supplement our supplies by buying and slaughtering horses. It was now more than ever necessary for me to go with the buyers on their trips, taking supplies of sugar and other staples to barter for fresh meat. The worst problem was our coffee supply. We were down to our last five bags. The local supply depot claimed their supply of coffee was exhausted, and cut our rations to less than half our requirements. I put the matter to Dr. Minkoff, stating that at this rate, we would not be able to supply the hospital with coffee in about ten days. I told him that I was using my reserves, and they would soon be exhausted. I suggested he use his political clout with Franek and his Russian friends to arrange for me to go to Barcelona with a truck and draw some coffee directly from incoming ships bringing coffee from Brazil. He said this would be hard, but he would try. After a few days, I was asked to go to see Franek in Albacete. He was a hard man to see. His mission building had very tight security at the door. I explained my mission to the officer in charge of the guard detail. He phoned Franek's office and I was cleared. I was ushered into Franek's inner office. He recognized me from my past dealings with him and extended his hand in a warm, friendly welcome. Before I had a chance for any conversation, the ever-present bottle of vodka was produced. After a very healthy drink, he told me that Minkoff had phoned him yesterday about the coffee situation and he would see to it that my wounded charges would not be left without their coffee for breakfast in the mornings. He handed me a letter addressed to the Central Supply Commission in Barcelona. He said he had already talked to Comrade Gundulach, the man in charge of all supplies, and he had promised to see what he could do about it. He asked me to stay for lunch. I thanked him for his prompt action, but declined his invitation as I wanted to get back to Murcia to arrange for my trip to Barcelona.

It was late afternoon when I got back to Murcia. I was tired and hungry. I reported directly to Minkoff and asked him to arrange my travel documents to go to Barcelona. I wanted to leave the same night, but he asked me to rest and leave in the morning. I went to Alfonso's restaurant with Juanita and had a nice seafood supper. I always marvel at how a good meal

and a good bottle of wine can change one's mood for the better. I retired to Juanita's quarters for a good night of love and rest.

The next day, I went to my office quite early. Mazzuchelli was there, preparing for his deliveries of rations to the hospitals. Our cook, Carmen, brought me a cup of coffee. A few minutes later, I went to our private dining room for breakfast. Our breakfast was the same almost every morning: fried eggs and bacon, toast with honey, and coffee. There was always a bowl of fresh fruit at the centre of the table. We ate good; after all, we were in charge of the supplies.

After breakfast I went to oversee the buyers and sign their vouchers for cash to effect their daily purchases. I told one of my American truck drivers, Jacobs, to service a big truck for a trip to Barcelona, and to get ready to leave as soon as possible. I put on a clean uniform, strapped on my Sam Browne belt and my nine-millimetre Browning automatic, and was ready to leave. Just as I was leaving my desk, one of my Spanish buyers came in with Jordanoff. He was highly excited, telling me that when he went to purchase fresh vegetables from a farm where he had contracted for the entire crop, the farmer told him he was forbidden by the government to sell his vegetables to the International Brigades. He had produced a written order signed by the marketing board. So I took Juan Aroca, my buyer, with me and went to see the commissioner. I wanted some background information on this man before I went to see him. Juan told me he was a middle-roader whom had been an assistant to the governor before the war, and that as far as he knew he was a conscientious man but a real bureaucrat. His father had been jailed once under the monarchy for having Republican sympathies, but the son was neutral or left-of-centre, and not too friendly toward foreigners.

Juan and I arrived at the government building and were entering his office just as he was coming out. Juan stopped him and introduced me to him. He was a mild, pleasant looking man. I told him of my mission and asked him why he had forbidden the local farmers to sell fresh produce to the hospitals. He said his intentions were misunderstood; he had a hard job to feed the local population and every time he had requested produce from the farms, the farmers told him their entire crop was going to the hospitals. But he knew damn well these same farmers were selling their surplus produce through their back doors at black market prices. He said he realized that the wounded came first and would permit the local farmers to supply their needs. He suggested that my buyers register all crop contracts with his department for verification and said he would issue orders not to interfere with such valid contracts. I certainly understood the man's viewpoint and thanked him for his cooperation. I gave him a carton of Camels and left.

With that problem solved, I was ready for Barcelona. Jacob and I, plus a Spanish relief driver, started on our way that afternoon. We drove through miles of date-lined roads on our way to Alicante. Just before we arrived, the date grove stopped as if by providential order, and the vineyards started. It was getting late when we arrived at Alicante. My driver said he knew of a good inn on the road to Valencia, and I agreed to stop there for the night. We arrived at this ancient inn just as the sun was setting. The building was situated at the edge of an orchard and looked friendly and inviting. We parked our truck at the rear and went in. A beautiful log fire was roaring in a fireplace at the end of the entrance hall. We were given a big room with three beds. After getting cleaned up, we went downstairs for supper. The landlord had arranged a table near the fireplace. He said supper would be ready in a few minutes. In the meantime, he had various *hors d'oeuvres* set up with fresh bread. We drank three bottles of wine before the meal arrived. We had a great meal, with coffee and pastries to top it off. Then we went and got a good night's sleep.

Early next morning, we started again on our way to Barcelona. We stopped for lunch at a town on the Costa Brava, and I asked a passerby where was the best place to eat. He said the "Villa Largo Caballero." It turned out to be one of the best villas in the area. It was owned by a nobleman, but it was now requisitioned as a convalescent place for wounded troops. The villa was built right in the sea, about one hundred feet from the shore. Piles had been driven in the ocean floor, and the villa built on these, so the entire structure was surrounded by water. The interior was still the same as when the nobleman occupied it. There was ornate period furniture all around the place. We had a delightful lunch and started on our way again.

We arrived in Barcelona in late afternoon. I booked two rooms at the Hotel Continental, which was situated right on the Ramblas de Flores. The Ramblas of Barcelona is the main promenade. It starts at the port and goes west as far as the Plaza de Catalunda, at the top of which is located the Hotel Colon, which at this time was out of service. It was here that, at the start of the civil war, rebel officers at the Barcelona garrison fortified themselves for their last stand. The building was pockmarked with bullet holes, and artillery shells had knocked off part of the front facade.

The Spaniards are great people for going for walks. Multitudes walked up and down the Ramblas continuously. There were open air bars, and on both sides of the street, sidewalk cafes as far as the eye could see. The Ramblas are also famous for streetwalkers. Every few paces a hooker would approach eligible people and try to sell sex, without hindrance of any kind from the police. Sex was wide open in Barcelona. We went for a sightseeing tour of the Ramblas before supper. At this time, the British battle cruiser

Hood was docked at Barcelona and we met quite a few of the sailors on our walk. It is tragic that this mighty ship was sunk by the German battleship *Bismark* in the North Atlantic. I still remember the youthful lively faces we met in Barcelona, many of whom gave their lives during the sea battle. We went to a French restaurant which was situated at the top of the Ramblas, opposite the Hotel Colon, and had a wonderful meal. On our way back, my driver, Jacobs, decided to pick up one of the damsels on the boulevard and take her to the hotel. I was tired from all the walking and drinking, and went to the hotel for a good night's sleep.



Pat Stephens (second from right), with comrades in Barcelona, 1938. (Courtesy of Phyllis Stephens).

After breakfast the next morning, I had to go to the designated address on Viu Duruti. This was a very solid stone neo-classical structure. Sentries were posted at the entrance and I had to show credentials to be allowed in. I showed them my letter to Gundulach and was directed to an office on the second floor. There were two secretaries, one male and one female. I gave the pretty young lady my letter, and she bid me sit down and even offered me a cigarette. After a short wait, she came out and ushered me to an inner office. Behind a big oak desk sat the important man. He greeted me cordially, and said it was unusual for him to get requests of this nature. As Quarter Master General, he was only concerned with the distribution of commodities to the various central Intendencias. However, he could not ignore a request from Franek, so he made a phone call and found out where coffee could be obtained. He gave me a requisition for two thousand pounds, and asked me to go straight to the docks where a boat was unloading a shipment of coffee. He told me to go to the Port Officer, and he would direct me to where I could pick up my load. I thanked Comrade Gundulach and left for the port. In parting, Gundulach shook hands with me and asked me to give his regards to Comrade Franek the next time I saw him. This man Gundulach was a striking-looking man, with piercing blue eyes. Years later, when East Germany was made a People's Republic, its leader was Walter Ulbricht and his picture in newspapers and magazines reminded me of the Gundulach I met in Spain. I could have sworn that Gundulach and Ulbricht were the same man.

We drove to the docks at the port estuary, where I presented my request to the Port Officer. He said he knew all about it as Gundulach had phoned him personally to see that there were no bureaucratic delays. He sent one

of his assistants with us to the proper warehouse, and we loaded the coffee on our truck and started back to Murcia. It was late at night when we arrived there and the Intendencia was closed. I opened the gates, drove the truck in, and left it there to be unloaded in the morning. Our supply of coffee for the wounded was now assured. My mission successfully completed, I went with Jacobs to Alfonso's for a drink and a bite to eat.

The situation at the front was not favourable for our side. The rebels had recaptured Teruel and were making a major effort through Aragon to reach the Mediterranean and cut off Catalonia from the rest of Spain.²² If this happened, we would be isolated south of the Ebro River, and cut off from our forces who were defending the front north of the river. In spite of this, life in Murcia was being carried on in the normal, leisurely way of Spain. People were still observing their fiestas and enjoying their music and women. One night, I was invited to a tea with some Quakers who had come from England to help the civilians in Spain. I took Vincent O'Donnell with me as a bodyguard and companion. We arrived at the Quaker quarter around nine. They were situated in a private house which served them as offices and living quarters. We were introduced to four charming young English ladies, who tried to make us feel at ease. We were also introduced to a middle-aged German gentleman who spoke very good English. Tea was served as only the English know how. The girls had made cakes and fancy cookies, which were very good. I had known of these Quakers in Murcia, but had no social contact with them. I wondered why they had invited me for tea. During the tea, our conversation naturally turned to the events at the front. The German gentleman's name was Hans Mueller. He was very cautious in his remarks, and played a low key role in our conversation. The leader of this English group in Murcia was Miss Homestead. Eventually, she asked me to hire the German as a buyer for our Intendencia. So this was the reason for this tea. I told her to ask Herr Mueller to come and see me in the morning and we would discuss the matter further. Miss Homestead asked me if I wished to hear the BBC News from London. I had not heard a foreign broadcast all the time I had been in Spain, so I said yes. The news on the radio was not pleasant: Hitler was pressing for concessions in Czechoslovakia; the Japanese were advancing in China; and the republican forces in Spain were being hard pressed by the rebels. It was reported that within a fortnight the rebels would reach the Mediterranean coast and cut Spain in half. I was asked if this was probable. My answer was evasive: I said it was possible but not probable. Shortly after the news ended, Vincent and I took our leave. On our walk back to our quarters, Vincent asked me if I thought it possible that the rebels would divide us in half. I thought they might, but told him not to worry. We had been in tight corners before, I

²²Teruel was recaptured in February 1938.

assured him, but had managed to keep the enemy at bay. The next day, Mueller came to see me at the Intendencia. After checking his credentials, I hired him and he proved to be a competent buyer.

By this time reinforcements were needed at the front lines. I lost four men from the Intendencia, one being Vincent O'Donnell. I was sorry to see him go; he was the most honest and reliable man I ever had. Vincent was left wounded behind the enemy lines during one of our frequent retreats. He was captured by the rebels, cared for, and repatriated to England with some other wounded English volunteers. I received a note from him much later when I was back in Canada. He was working as a waiter in a resort hotels. Eventually I lost contact with him. I hope he survived World War II.

Spring was very pleasant in Murcia. The surrounding farms and orchards were all in bloom. I was getting kind of restless, cooped up in my office at the Intendencia. I decided to take a trip with Juan Aroca on one of his fish-buying expeditions to the coast. I arranged to leave with him early one morning for Aquilas, a small fishing village near Cartagena. Buying fish or other essentials was quite a skill. Spanish farmers and fishermen were well-versed in the arts of the market place. Fishermen would not sell us fish unless we bartered with such items as sugar, cigarettes, coffee, soap, and chocolates. These were hard to come by on the coast, so we loaded them into the truck before we left. Early next morning we set out for Aquilas. We wanted to arrive at the wharf before noon, so we could meet the fishing boats as they came in.

There was a ritual to buying fish. First, Aroca had to contact the Chief of the Fishers' Syndicate, have a few drinks with him, and offer him personal gifts of sugar, coffee, cigarettes, and bars of soap for his wife. Juan introduced me to him at a café, where we had a few glasses of vermouth. We were invited to his house for coffee, this being the only locale where the gifts could be given. Then he would ride with us to the wharf to start bargaining with the Fishers's Cooperative. Juan knew how to handle them, and with some help from the Syndicate Chief, the necessary exchanges of goods and money were made. Our truck was loaded with fresh fish and we started back to Murcia.

I felt relaxed after my trip to Aquila. The change of scenery and the sight of the blue Mediterranean had its good effect on me. That night I didn't feel like going to the communal dining room, so I asked Carmen, our Intendencia cook, to get me something for supper. Around six o'clock I went to eat. Carmen had prepared a rabbit dish with garbanzos and vegetables baked in the oven. Carmen sat with me and had some too. She seemed to be worried about something. During our meal, she asked me about the war, and then she came to the core of her worry. She said she had heard the enemy was advancing towards the sea, trying to cut the country

in two. She wanted to know if it was true. I replied that it was not true, that our forces were holding the line. I told her not to worry. I reminded her of what happened in Madrid, when Franco promised to parade the morning after the attack at the Grand Via; two years later, he was still outside Madrid. I think she was reassured.

After supper, I decided to go to bed early instead of to Juanita's. I don't know how long I had slept when someone was trying to wake me up. It was Angeloff, Dr. Minkoff's adjutant. He told me that Minkoff wanted to see me at once. I looked at my watch - it was one o'clock in the morning. Angeloff told me to get dressed and be at Headquarters as soon as possible. He said he had to go tell the others, and left. When I arrived at headquarters, the place was buzzing with action. Staff cars and motorcycles were arriving and leaving. I arrived at Minkoff's office and was ushered in immediately. There were a few important comrades from Albacete, among them Franek. Coffee and sandwiches were being served. Dr. Minkoff said he had called this extraordinary meeting on the order of Franek, who had come personally from Albacete to see that his orders were received. He said he would wait for the rest of the comrades before imparting the purpose of the meeting. One by one the people summoned started to arrive. Present were Dr. Blanque, the Chief of Medical Services; the Cuban comrade, Soler, the Chief of Security; Ruth Wilson, Chief of Nurses; Major Marcus, our Spanish liaison with the local Spanish authorities; Lieutenant Himmel as Chief of Medical Supplies; and myself as Chief of Supplies. Comrade Minkoff called the meeting to order and introduced Comrade Franek. He informed us that Franco had unleashed a major offensive on the Aragon Front and was making a drive to the sea, with the object of cutting our forces in two. Considering the strength of his drive, it was thought prudent to evacuate the International Brigade hospitals to Barcelona, where they would be safer. He said Comrade Minkoff would now outline our duties in this evacuation. Comrade Minkoff stated that the evacuation was to be swift and that the movement would take place the following night by rail. He instructed Dr. Blanque to do what was medically necessary for the journey. Himmel was told to prepare enough medical supplies for three days. He told Soler that all hospital patients and personnel were to be confined beginning at two o'clock that afternoon. He asked me to distribute enough rations to the hospitals to last until supper that night. He reminded us that this meeting was secret and the proceedings were not to be publicized. The evacuation would begin as soon as darkness fell. There would only be freight cars for the movement. The train would be ready to move at midnight, in two sections, one leaving ten minutes to twelve, the other at twelve. The patients were to be notified at supper time, and preparations were to start at once. Comrade Minkoff dismissed the meeting and we were ready for our mission.

Minkoff asked me to stay behind for a few minutes after everyone had left. He opened a bottle of cognac and poured a drink to soothe our nerves. He told me to prepare enough dry rations to last two days, and said that a car had been allotted from each train for this purpose. He said that the international personnel would be leaving with us, but the Spanish would be left behind. The meeting ended at four and I was at the Intendencia by seven.

Mazzuchelli and Franke were in the warehouse getting things ready for delivery to the various hospitals. I asked them to come to the dining room because I wanted to talk to them before the rest of the staff came in. We went in and Franke poured some of the freshly-made coffee. I told them about the enemy's actions, and about the evacuation plan. I ordered them to keep it top secret. I could see that they were visibly upset. I told them not to worry, that we would fight the bastards in Catalonia. I told Mazzuchelli to get dry rations ready for the journey. I would order extra bread to be baked for distribution before departure. I had a lot of details to work out in a short time. After giving instructions to Mazzuchelli, I went to my office to wait for the rest of the staff. Vasilieff and Jardanoff soon arrived. They told me Minkoff had informed them of our plan. Vasilieff asked what he should do with the records and the money. I told him to put all the money on hand in a box to take with us. All financial records would go with us. Other, unimportant documents, were to be burned. When the buyers came in to draw funds for their buying trips, I got them together and informed them there would be no buying trips today, as our funds from Albacete were not available until tomorrow. I told them to take the day off and go home. Mueller and Alfonso left the Intendencia, but Juan Aroca hung around. He sensed that things were not normal. He said he would go to Alfonso's and have breakfast and he would see me later in the day.

I went to Minkoff's headquarters for final instructions and information. The place was a hive of activity. Angeloff said he was glad I had come as he had been about to send for me. In Minkoff's office were Dr. Blanque and Soler. Minkoff gave us our route. The train would proceed through Alicante to Valencia, where we would be shunted to a side track and given a chance to feed the troops and rest a while. The major in charge of movements in Valencia, Cassals, would be at the station to assist us and give us further information. I asked permission to leave as I had a lot to do, and went to the Intendencia to oversee the operations. Everything was proceeding smoothly. I told Mazzuchelli we would take all the coffee and sugar on hand to Barcelona with us, and asked him to get the advance truck to leave at six o'clock sharp. Jacobs would drive the truck. I wanted two cooks from the Casa Roja Hospital to go with the truck, and to take pots to make coffee when they got to Valencia, so that it would be ready when the train arrived.

I asked Jacobs to come to my office and told him our plans, swearing him to secrecy. When he arrived at the station in Valencia, he was to contact Major Cassals, and he would be shown where to set up the kitchen. He would be given a requisition by the major to draw fresh bread for the troops. This had to be done before the arrival of the train.

I went to our private dining room for lunch. Juan Aroca was there, and he came and sat down with me. He told me that he had been to the main Spanish Intendencia of Murcia and had seen the major in charge, who had informed him of our evacuation and had offered him a job as a buyer for him. The major had the decency to tell Juan the information was confidential and was not to be repeated. I told Juan I had no such knowledge and if and when I did I certainly would tell him. But he knew I was going, and he grew quite emotional about it, and about the war and the International Brigades. When he was leaving, he got up, put his arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks. He left with tears running down his face.

I went to the hospitals for final inspection. I informed the sergeant-cook of our evacuation and told him not to spare anything and make the final meal a truly memorable one. The Casa Roja Hospital was the last place of inspection. After giving last instructions I was ready to leave. The guards at the door would not let me go. I told them who I was, but to no avail. They told me that everyone was confined to barracks. I told the guards to go and get the Guard Commander, which they did. Comrade Soler came out to the door and ordered the guards to let me out. When I got to the Intendencia I got a phone call from Minkoff. He wanted me to go to the station with him to see how things were progressing there. It was around four when we arrived there. Our two trains were being coupled and shunted to a line. I don't think I have ever seen such a long train. It was nothing but box cars as far as the eye could see. Everything was proceeding well there.

On our way back, I asked Minkoff what I should do with the farm. He said I was to turn it over to the "Sacorro Rojo" ("Red Aid", or Red Cross, in Spain). When we got to Minkoff's office, their representatives were waiting for us. Minkoff asked me to take his staff car and drive these men to the farm. At the farm I introduced them to the sergeant in charge and told him to give the keys to the men when he was ready to leave for the train with his staff. He had already been alerted to the move.

I had to start moving the rations to the trains at six, so I had the driver drop me off at my office. Jacobs had his truck ready and loaded with the two cooks from Casa Roja. They started on their way to Valencia. Mazzuchelli and Franke had everything under control. It was time to make our move to the station and distribute the rations for the trip. Just as I was ready to start, I walked the Spanish major in charge of the local Intendencia, along with Juan Aroca. He informed me that he had hired Aroca as a buyer.

The major was a pleasant, friendly man. He said he was sorry to see us leave. I opened a bottle of cognac and we all drank to the health of the Republic. I told the major I had instructions to hand the keys of the Intendencia to him when I was ready, so I thought I might as well give him the keys while he was here. I suggested that he leave the keys with Aroca, so he could lock up after we had gone. So Juan stayed with me until the end.

I sent Franke with the first truck to the station to supervise things there. I had arranged to leave the necessary rations in every freight car. The rest were loaded on the supply car. The fresh bread hadn't arrived from the bakery yet, so we left that for the last load. It was getting time to move the wounded to the trains. I went to report to Minkoff that everything was ready. He phoned the hospitals and ordered them to start the move. There were two passenger coaches, one in each train, for the very serious cases. Minkoff and all his staff were at the station supervising and seeing that the wounded were comfortable. The fresh warm bread arrived from the bakery and I had it moved to the train to be distributed. Now I was ready to close the Intendencia. I shook hands with my friend Juan Aroca. We embraced and he kissed me on both cheeks, and there were tears in our eyes. I took one last look at my Intendencia, where I had spent so many fruitful, happy days.

In all the activity, I had not been able to see my Juanita. At the station I asked Minkoff for leave to go and say farewell to her. Minkoff put his staff car at my disposal and I drove to Juanita's flat, hoping she would be there. I ran up the stairs and knocked on the door. She opened the door with a happy smile on her face, and asked where I was going all dressed up and wearing my belt and pistol. I put my arms around Juanita and kissed her. Her dark, beautiful eyes were not smiling now. She sensed something was wrong. I broke the news to her as gently as I could. She started to cry, asking why I hadn't told her much earlier. She said if I could wait half an hour she would pack her things in a suitcase and leave with me for Barcelona. I told her it would not be practical for her to go to Barcelona. It was a strange city and she would have no friends. Besides, I would not be staying in Barcelona but rejoining my regiment at the front. She asked me again to take her with me, even for a few more days, but I could not. I told her that some day, if I survived, I might come to her again. She came to the station with me. Minkoff pulled me to one side and asked me if I wanted to take her with me. I said no. Minkoff and I made a last inspection of every car. The first section started at ten minutes to midnight. It would soon be time for us to move. I stood on the station platform, holding Juanita's hand. There was no conversation, just the warmth of our bodies. It was time to leave; the train was starting. I said my last farewell to Juanita and ran to my car. Juanita never left the spot where she was standing, gazing in my direction. She was crying. I waved a last goodbye to the girl I loved. There were no bands or

crowds of people to see us off, only the darkness and silence of the night. My thoughts went back to Figueras, where the multitudes had welcomed us to Spain.

Chapter Six

The Security Service

There is something about a train — the huffing and puffing of the engine, the clanking of the wheels, and the scenery unfolding and passing by. It was getting chilly outside; the nights in Spain, even in summertime, are cool. I closed the wagon door; most of the boys were asleep, but Mazzuchelli and Franke were still awake. They were drinking a bottle of cognac. They poured me a hefty drink and I tried to drown my sorrows in alcohol. Soon I fell asleep. When I woke up, it was light outside. Rays of the sun were coming through the cracks of the freight train doors. I opened them up and the train was moving through an orange grove. The oranges were ripe and yellow on the branches. Then the train eased to a stop. I guess the conductor thought it a good idea to let the boys out to pick some oranges. All those who could walk were out in the orchard picking fruit and carrying it to the cars for those who couldn't get out. We picked enough oranges to last us for the entire journey.

Soon we were pulling into Valencia, and into the same station where a little more than a year ago we had seen the refugees from Málaga crowded into freight cars. Now it was our turn. The train moved onto a siding and stopped at a freight shed. The advance crew was there and coffee was ready for everyone. Cans of bully beef were opened and everyone had breakfast. I ordered cigarettes and chocolate bars to be distributed to everyone. The train was to remain in the station for the next hour and those that could got out to stretch their legs. I went to see Jacobs who was with his truck alongside the sheds. He informed me that the first section was stopped just ahead about one hundred feet on a different siding. I went with him in his truck to the bakery to see what was causing the delay in the bread delivery. When we got there, the bread was just coming out of the ovens. The man in charge came to greet me, and offered me a loaf of warm, fresh bread. I shared it with Jacobs, and we ate with great relish. We had the truck loaded and returned to the station to distribute bread to the wounded men. We

did not forget the crew of the train. They also had their coffee and breakfast. I went to report to Minkoff that breakfast had been served and bread distributed, and we were ready to move on. I found Minkoff not well. He was having heart problems and there was a nurse looking after him. I had not known that he had a heart condition. His nurse was a pretty little thing. She was Bulgarian like Minkoff. I later discovered that they were lovers. Her name was Anika.

It was now time for us to resume our journey. There would be no more stops until we crossed the Ebro at Tortosa. Our next scheduled stop would be at Tarragona, and then Barcelona. As we were approaching Castelló de las Plana, we heard the sounds of war in the distance. The enemy was making its final push to reach the sea, which it did the day after we crossed the Ebro. The bridge at Tartosa would be blown after we crossed over, and after the troops fighting at the front had crossed to safety. When our train pulled into Tarragona, the local chapter of the Socorro Rojo was at the station to welcome us. The young women were running from car to car with pitchers of coffee and wine. It was a touching sight to see the caring and love in the eyes of these women towards the wounded men. After a short rest, we were ready to go again.

It was mid-afternoon when we arrived in Barcelona. Ambulances were lined up at the station. The wounded and others were moved to designated hospitals. Minkoff was well again and moving about, supervising everything. Being a doctor and a medical administrator, he would be given a responsible post with the hospital. He came to me and gave me instructions about what to do with the remaining rations. The money in my charge would be kept with Vasilieff as before, but the rest of the supplies would be taken in the truck, and my staff and I would report to the Allocation Office. I had a short conference with Vasilieff and Jordanoff. I told Vasilieff not to turn any funds over to the Socorro Rojo, but to hang on to the money, as Minkoff, his staff and I might need it for expenses. I still had a few cartons of cigarettes. I distributed these to my men, and gave some to Angeloff for Minkoff's staff. We unloaded the remainder of our supplies. There were nearly fifteen bags of coffee and this was gratefully received as they had been without coffee for a while. After unloading, Jacobs was assigned to one of the local transport units. Mazuchelli and Franke, along with the rest of my staff, remained there. We were asked to seek accommodations at the Continental Hotel, take a few days off, and enjoy ourselves as best we could. We were asked if we had any funds to take care of our expenses and I said yes. The French comrade in charge told me he would contact us later to give us our assignments but right now we had a one-week leave. Vasilieff, Jordanoff, and I headed for the hotel. When we got there we met Minkoff,

Anika, and Angeloff. They were also staying at the hotel. Vasilieff, Jordanoff, and I were given two connecting rooms on the same floor as Minkoff.

When it was time for supper, our whole gang went into the dining room and had the waiter put two tables together so that we could sit as a group. Champagne was still available in some of the hotels in Barcelona; we ordered two bottles and toasted the success of our evacuation. We had an excellent dinner and then retired to Minkoff's room. When we got there, Anika ordered Minkoff to lie down and rest. Vasilieff, Jordanoff and I went out together for a stroll on the Ramblas. It was the same scene as last time — people strolling about and sitting in the sidewalk cafes. If there was no war, this would be a pleasant pastime. We eventually ended up at the Maison d'Ore and had some pastries and coffee before returning to the hotel. We had a good time that week. We had no responsibilities to worry about, and Vasilieff had an ample supply of funds, so we did not lack currency. We ate well and drank the best. Now and then we would pay Minkoff a visit in his room. He was more or less confined to his quarters in the care of his beloved Anika. I bought myself a beautiful pair of civilian shoes. No clumsy army boots while I was in Barcelona.

My leave of one week ended all too soon. Monday I received a message to report for duty at 1:00 in the afternoon. I had an early lunch by myself and then went to say goodbye to Minkoff. He was feeling better and was up and around. I told Minkoff I was off to another assignment, and that I would likely be posted to my regiment at the front. Minkoff told me he could arrange for me to stay on his staff in Barcelona. I knew Minkoff had enough clout to do this, but I really wanted to go back to the front. Minkoff asked Angeloff for a bottle of cognac. We drank a farewell toast and I left.

When I got back to my room, Vasilieff and Jordanoff were there. I told them I had to leave in a few minutes. Jordanoff already had a glass of cognac in his hand. He poured me and Vasilieff each a shot and we drank to our friendship. Vasilieff came and put his arms around me, kissed me on both cheeks and said goodbye. Jordanoff did the same. Vasilieff took a big wad of 100 *peseta* notes and gave it to me. I told him I had enough money for my needs and besides, I had little use for money at the front. They wished me well and I left.

It was just a few minutes before one when I got there. I reported to the clerk and he ushered me in to Major Genoux, the Frenchman in charge. He asked me if I had any preference for assignment and I said I wanted to go back to my regiment. He informed me that a truck would be leaving in about half an hour for Badalona, and from there I would be sent to the front. Badalona was an industrial suburb just north of Barcelona. There was a holding unit there for the Lincoln Battalion. In the truck with me were some other American comrades going back to the front. I did not know any

of them; they were later volunteers. We got to Badalona around three in the afternoon. The holding unit was a small building right on the waterfront overlooking the huge blue expanse of the Mediterranean. There were a few fishing boats tied to the wharf in front of us. Someone thought it would be very easy, if one wished, to take one of the boats and sail it north to the French coast. Apparently, some had tried but were caught and executed. Also, some had succeeded, and had asked for asylum in France. I asked the American lieutenant in charge, and he said that we would leave early in the morning to join the Brigade.

There were about ten of us returning to the front. Most were like me, reassigned to their regiment from rear job positions. The rest were comrades released from local hospitals. That night after supper we went out to a nearby café and enjoyed our last free evening. There was still champagne to be had, so we ordered a couple of bottles. It was not bad at all. It could have been a little colder, but then what should one expect in time of war and scarcity? Most of the boys had very little money with them. I told them not to worry, as I had enough for all of us. I could see the Spaniards next to our table eating french fries and fish, and I ordered fish and chips for us all. We went back to the holding unit full of champagne and fish and chips.

After breakfast the next morning I went to sit and gaze at the sea. I could see ships sailing by in the distance, followed by a line of warships. They were part of the British fleet sailing north and south, patrolling the sea near the coast of Spain. These ships were part of the “non-intervention” patrols, ensuring that no supplies of arms were sent to the legitimate government of Spain. What a farce. The Germans and Italians were openly helping the rebels with men and arms. Italian and German ships were unloading tanks and artillery at Almería and Cádiz, and the British patrols were sailing by, not noticing them. But in the eyes of Baldwin and Chamberlain, prime ministers of Britain, Franco was a “Christian gentleman” defending his faith.

Later that morning we left for the front, which was located all along the east bank of the Ebro River. In ancient times, this river was the demarcation line between the Romans and Carthaginians. This is the river that Hannibal crossed to attack the Romans, driving them all the way to Italy. There were fourteen of us going to the front to rejoin the Lincoln Battalion. We headed south to Reus and then west through Falset and on to the Ebro. There was hardly any traffic on the highway and we made good time. In a few hours we arrived at the village of Marsa, the closest place civilians were allowed near the front. A few miles outside this village was the Lincoln Brigade Headquarters.

The Lincoln Brigade was now commanded by a Spanish major from Bilbao, by the name of Villador.²³ While in Barcelona I had removed my rank insignia from my tunic and hat. I did not wish to cause any problems for the Battalion Commander. Besides, my rank of lieutenant was not confirmed or marked in my official military record. This was due to my neglect in not having Minkoff enter it in my military book. This point was not important for me; I just wished to rejoin my regiment as I left it, a plain corporal. After documentation, we were told to report to the Battalion Commander for assignment. Just as we were leaving, I heard someone call my name. It was Gerry Smith, who had come to Spain with me on the *SS Paris*. We caught up on what we had been doing since then. Gerry had become a captain by now and was Chief of Operations for the 15th Brigade. He asked me if I wished to stay at Brigade; he said he could find me a place somewhere as a Supply Officer. I declined the offer and left with the battalion for the front.

We were to serve in a position a couple of miles behind the front, at the Ebro River. We found the battalion in a ravine. Everything was quiet; not even a rifle shot could be heard. The place was well camouflaged along the banks of a fast running stream. We asked directions from the sentries and went to Battalion Headquarters. It was located in a little stone hut at the bottom of a terraced hill. I went in to present my documents, and there was Milton Wolff from my machine gun group at Brunete. He hugged me and said he was glad to see me again. Milton was now Battalion Commander, with the rank of captain. He introduced Jim Watt, the battalion commissar, then he started reminiscing about the good old days at Brunete and Alvarez.²⁴ He told Jim Watt about how I had taught him all about a machine gun and how to stay alive at the front. Jim Watt remarked that they could use me in the machine gun company. Milton looked at my sleeves and hat and asked what had happened to my bars. I replied that I had wanted to rejoin the Battalion as I had left it, as a corporal. He said we would have to see about that.

²³The Lincoln was of course a battalion within the 15th Brigade. So, while Villador commanded the Brigade, Milton Wolff was the commander of the Lincoln Battalion. Stephens is referring here to José Villador, who replaced Vladimir Copic as Brigade Commander. Villador was just thirty-one at this time, but he had experience beyond his years. He had been one of the leaders of the famous Asturian Revolt of 1934, and had been imprisoned and sentenced to death by the right-wing Lerroux-Robles government. He was released when the People's Front won the elections of 1936.

²⁴The commissar of the Mackenzie-Papineau at this time was Frank Rogers, a Finnish-American who had served with the Lincoln. Howard, *The Mackenzie-Papineau*, 209.

Milton had changed quite a bit. He was more mature and forceful, no longer the lanky student from the Bronx. He was now a tough-looking soldier and officer. I unloaded my pack at a corner of the hut, which would be my quarters for the time being. The army discipline had been tightened since my days at the front. Officers had to be saluted and some officers had been allotted batmen to serve them. Milton and Jim each had one. These batmen carried their bedrolls and made up their beds for them at night, brought them their coffee and breakfast in the morning, and kept the area around the command post clean.

At supper time, the two batmen went and drew supper for Milton and Jim. Milton asked his batman where my dinner was and the batman pointed to the truck where the men were lined up. Milton gave him a dirty look, and told him to go and get my supper. I told Milton I wanted to go myself, so that I could meet some of my pals who were still in the battalion. As I was walking to the chow line, who should I meet but Juan Abbad! I was glad to see Abbad again. He had hardly changed, except that he had the rank of lieutenant and was in charge of Company One. He took me by the arm and led me to his hut. He called his batman and told him to go and get dinner for me. Another Spaniard came in, a sergeant in charge of one of the platoons in Abbad's company. It was Pablo Gómez from Murcia; I knew him from the Jarama Front. He thought I had been killed, so he was really happy to see me alive. Pablo went to his hut and came back with a bottle of Anise. After supper I bade them goodbye and went around the bivouac to see who else I might meet. Most of the boys were new volunteers, but here and there were old timers like Jack Hoshooly from Toronto, Dave Rappaport from Milwaukee, good old Mickenberg from New York, Sullivan, Fisher, and others. We even had a new doctor, whose name I do not recollect. He was Polish, with very little knowledge of English. We also had a new party organizer by the name of Joe Brand.

While the battalion was in reserve, it was kept active with training and manoeuvres, and the occasional forced march. One day, I met Johnny Mura while at Brigade Headquarters on some assignment. Johnny had come with me from New York, but had been assigned a clerical job at base Headquarters in Albacete. While he was there, he kept complaining about his assignment, and said he wanted to be at the front. Now, he had finally managed to be sent to the front, and he was very pleased and anxious to see action. I took Johnny to the Battalion with me, where he was posted to one of the companies as a rifleman. Johnny was a brilliant student at Northwestern University, studying political economy, when the bug of Communism got to him. He became very active in the student movement and joined the YCL. Like all zealots, he volunteered for service in Spain. Johnny's father came from Rumania and married an American. His

mother's parents were well-to-do, so Johnny had many advantages. Poor Johnny, he would later regret his eagerness to come to the front.

One day I was ordered to Brigade Headquarters. Gerry Smith wanted to see me. He informed me it had been decided to set up a new security service at Battalion level. We would be getting reinforcements, the majority of whom would be Spanish and Catalan conscripts, and we had to be vigilant because some Fascist spies and agitators may have infiltrated the group. He thought I would be a good choice to head the new security post and organize a network. My knowledge of Spanish and French would be a definite asset in this assignment. I accepted Gerry's offer. He then took me into one of the offices in the Information Section and introduced me to a Spanish comrade by the name of Valentin González, who was Head of Security and Intelligence for the Brigade. Smith left Valentin and me to discuss our problem. Valentin wanted to converse with me in English instead of Spanish, so that he could polish his knowledge of that language, but when he got stuck for the proper word or phraseology, he would revert to a rapid Spanish. González was one of the few Spaniards who had blue eyes and fair hair, no doubt inherited from German or Saxon ancestors. He began to outline my duties as Security Officer of the Lincoln Battalion. I would henceforth be under the order and command of SIM (*Servicio de Investigación Militar*). This was the secret service of the defense forces of the Republic.²⁵ I was to set up agents in every company and they in turn would appoint someone in each platoon to act as informants. I would be assigned officially to Battalion Headquarters but would not be subject to Battalion command. My assignment was for SIM and under their direction. I was to submit a daily report on routine matters: the morale of the troops; the troops' confidence in their officers and any complaints about them; complaints about the food; rumors and who started them; the condition and maintenance of arms; suspicious characters to be scrutinized and watched, and any information about their connections and their backgrounds; military effectiveness of the battalion; and the efficiency, conduct, and competence of the officers. These points would be transmitted to me by my company agents, and I would prepare a daily report based on the information, and add my own summary and commentary. These would be taken

²⁵It is sometimes called the *Servicio de Información Militar*. The SIM was set up in the autumn of 1937, in part to deal with enemy spying and infiltration, as Stephens describes it here. It is also believed, however, to have played a role in Party discipline and internal spying. See, for example, Brome, *The International Brigades*, 226-27; R. Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (Kentucky 1982), 172-75; Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London 1996), 188; and Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (North Carolina 1992), 600-606.

personally to Brigade. Henceforth I knew where I stood and what my job was to be. Comrade González told me that the battalion command would be informed of my position and act accordingly. In a few days I would get a permanent safe conduct pass issued by the Divisional Headquarters, signed by the divisional commander, and countersigned by the SIM. This pass would give me authority to travel in all parts of Republican Spain without hindrance, and requested all civilian authorities to render all necessary help in carrying out my duties. I thanked him for his confidence in me, shook hands and left.

Now, it was up to me to find the necessary personnel to act as my subagents in the battalion. I was not in a hurry to find these men. I had to select suitable people, and had to be sure of their reliability and their sense of careful and objective observation, and I had to be sure they were not subject to over-zealous deductions. I went to see Pablo Gómez, whom I knew well, and put the proposition to him. He was glad to act as one of my agents. The Spanish company now had a reliable man. Next, I approached Mike Meyer from New York. He would be the agent in Company Two. Then I chose Tony Brown, a runner in Company Three. My network was organized. I did not ever have cause to regret the choice of these men. I gave them instructions and a free hand to pick out their own contacts at the platoon level, as they knew their men better than I did. Their names would be given to me, so I could make use of them in an emergency.

Our daily life was becoming very monotonous; if not for the manoeuvres and marches, we would have been bored death. Lately I had noticed a couple of women, leading a burro, mingling with the boys. No civilians were allowed in this sector. Their ostensible reason for being there was to peddle fresh fruit. This prompted me to keep a surveillance on these women. I told Pablo to watch them carefully, and to track their movements to see where they came from. After selling their products, they went back to Marsa for the night. Now, there was nothing unnatural about pedaling fruit, but they were not supposed to be in advance positions. I told Pablo to note who was patronizing these pedlars most often and to keep track of them. After a couple of days he reported that two Catalan conscripts were always hanging around them, and he observed one of the boys passing an envelope to them. I took no action, as I wanted to observe them some more and see who they contacted while in Marsa. This whole thing could be an innocent commercial venture, or it could be of a more serious nature. Pablo came to me in the afternoon to inform me that more envelopes were passed to these women. I decided to act. I let them finish their task and when they were past the Battalion territorial limits on their way back to Marsa, I had them picked up. I instructed the arresting patrol to take them to Brigade, where I would be waiting. In the meantime, I briefed González on their activities.

When the women were brought in, I took them to González's office and Valentin started to question them. The girls were originally from Tortosa, but had been staying in Marsa for the last few weeks. They said they had an aunt in Marsa whose husband had a farm and orchard, and they had come to Marsa to help them in their farming operations, as their sons were in the army. They said they did not know that civilians were forbidden to come into front line positions. This sounded plausible, but there was more to it. I asked them if they received any communications in writing from the soldiers, and they said no. Yet I knew that envelopes were passed to them by some of the troops. In all of this questioning, we were very friendly and gentle with them. I told them that I knew they had received envelopes, and requested that they surrender them to us, or we would have them searched. By this time they were getting scared. They realized we knew more than they thought. These two poor girls were sisters who, maybe innocently, were doing something they did not regard as bad or dangerous. They started to cry, and volunteered to give us the envelopes. They contained letters addressed to the parents of the boys who gave them to the girls. The girls were to mail them through the civilian post as military posts were examined and censored. We read the letters and found nothing in them that could be of a detrimental nature. The only information contained in the letters was the location of the battalion and accounts of the men's daily life. But it was information useful to the enemy. Now we had to make an agonizing decision: to send these two unfortunate sisters to the rear as spies, or to release them. Well we knew what would happen to them if we sent them to the authorities. On the other hand, if we released them, we would be shirking our duties. Valentin asked my opinion. I was in favour of releasing them with a stern warning. Valentin agreed, so we let them go free. They thanked us profusely, and promised never to set foot in our sector again. The elder of the two kissed my hand in gratitude. I heaved a sigh of relief after they had gone, and so did Valentin I think. I certainly did not want to have them on my conscience.

I kept close watch over the boys who had given these letters to the sisters. Letters which they sent or received through army channels received more than just cursory censorship. A few weeks after the incident with the two sisters, Valentin came to see me. He produced a letter written by one of those suspects. The letter carried four small denomination stamps instead of one full value stamp. The postal clerk got suspicious and steamed the stamps off. Underneath, he found minute letters, a detailed map of our location, the names of Battalion and Company Officers, and a report that we were planning an attack across the river. This was definitely evidence of espionage and had to be treated as such. I sent for Pablo and instructed him quietly to detain this suspect and bring him to us. I told him what was

involved and instructed him to use some of his subagents for the arrest, and to put the suspect under heavy guard. Soon the suspect, a conscript from Barcelona, was brought to us with his hands tied behind his back. He was pale and scared. Valentin gave him a cigarette and tried to put him at ease. I lit it for him. He started to smoke, but the fear never left his eyes. He knew he was caught and he also knew what to expect. This was one time I regretted having accepted this assignment. We confronted him with the letter. He did not deny or conceal his motives in the affair. He informed us that his father was an officer in the Civil Guard and was killed during the uprisings in Catalonia in the early stages of the rebellion. He said he was a soldier of Christ and was acting for God and country. Valentin and I agreed that he should be sent to Division for court martial. This was my first confrontation with an admitted spy and I hoped it would be my last. Valentin went back with his prisoner under guard to Brigade. I never found out what became of the prisoner. I went to my hut and poured myself a good shot of cognac to steady my nerves. A few days later Valentin gave me my safe conduct pass and I was duly installed as security officer.

Life carried on in its dreary, monotonous way behind the lines. At night, patrols would be sent to Mora la Nueva to guard against enemy infiltration on the left bank of the Ebro. Our front line on the bank of the river was too thinly spread to be effective against infiltration. The town was absolutely deserted; the inhabitants had been forced to vacate their homes and relocate in towns some distance from the river. The houses were left with all their furnishings intact. The only thing the inhabitants removed were things they could carry personally, in suitcases or boxes. The house that our detail occupied was a big one. When they were not on guard duty our boys slept on comfortable beds with mattresses. In the basement of this house were crocks of pickles and black olives, which we ate with great delight. This guard duty in the town was rotated among the companies, so that each company furnished a patrol once a week. I went in with the patrols when I wished, which was quite often. It gave me relief from the daily routine. It was at this time that we had an addition to our personnel. An emaciated looking young man entered the Battalion Headquarters and was introduced as James Lardner. Jim Lardner was the brother of Ring Lardner, Jr., and the son of Ring Lardner, the famous American humourist. He was also a reporter for the Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune*. He had given up his job as a reporter and volunteered to enlist in the International Brigade. He had been refused on several occasions but he persisted and through his connections with Hemingway and Vincent Sheehan, he was introduced to Kozlowsky, a *Pravda* reporter who knew Stalin personally and reported to him by phone every week. He had a lot of clout and through him, Jim Lardner

was accepted as a volunteer and sent to our battalion. Jimmy was assigned to Number Three Company and became a good friend of mine.

At this time the enemy was pressing our lines on the northern Lérida Front and it was decided to send the 35th division to this sector as reinforcement. So one night our brigade boarded trucks and were dispatched to Mellarusa on the Lérida-Barcelona Road. We arrived there at night and camped near a farm. There was plenty of clean straw in the barn so we made comfortable beds on the floor. A battle was raging in the distance to the north of us. We could hear the artillery and small arms fire and could see the flash of hand grenades. We stayed there for a couple of days without seeing any action. It was here that we were visited by the foreign press corps: Louis Fischer of the *Nation*; Herbert L. Mathews of the *New York Times*; Robert Payne of the *London Chronicle*; Vincent Sheehan of the *Herald Tribune*; Delmer Sefton of the *London Daily Express*; and a couple of Spaniards who were not introduced to us. When they came to our barn we were on our knees shooting dice for cigarettes. They all sought after Jimmy Lardner, as he was one of them not so long ago. They hugged him and gave him packages of Camels and Luckies. He shared them with us after they were gone. After a couple of days the front stabilized we went back to our positions behind the Ebro near Marsa.

Our training became more intense and specialized. We were practicing how to cross a river in assault boats, and how to disembark for the attack. It was becoming obvious that we were going to cross the Ebro and attack. These manouevres were practiced every day for three weeks. It was July and getting close to the start of our offensive. One morning Pablo came to my hut and informed me that there were two women loitering near our position. I instructed him to take a couple of his men and escort them to me at the big walnut tree a little way past our position, on the road to Marsa. I waited at the tree and soon Pablo appeared with two women, a middle-aged one and a teenager. They seemed nervous and scared. I spoke to the older lady gently to put her at her ease. I informed them that they were in a battle zone and were not permitted there. The lady said she did not know that, and that she had not noticed the road signs pointing this out. I wanted to know what they were doing here and they said they were on their way to buy olive oil on a farm just outside of Marsa. This didn't make much sense to me and I told them so. I did not wish to take the responsibility of dealing with them, so I asked Pablo to conduct them to Brigade Headquarters, and I would meet them there. I went back to our position and then headed for Brigade Headquarters. When I got there, Pablo and the two women were inside the building. Breakfast was being served. I took two cups of coffee, and some bread with butter and jam, and offered them to the women. The mother thanked me and started to eat. The daughter seemed afraid. I put

her at ease with a few friendly words and told her to drink her coffee and not to worry. I went to see Valentin and explained to him what was up. He said to bring the women to his office. He started to question them intensely and more sternly than I had been doing. The women started repeating the same answers as they gave me, about the olive oil. Valentin got angry and told them not to take him for a stupid man. He wanted to know the exact reason for their presence in the battle zone, and said if they persisted with their olive oil story, he would send them to the *Brigades Sociales* in Barcelona, which was the civilian arm of SIM, in charge of anti-government activity and counter-intelligence in the civilian population. This threat seemed to upset the women and the mother started to cry. Soon the daughter began weeping also. The daughter was carrying a cloth bundle and I asked what was in it, but she would not tell me. I forced the bundle out of her hand. She tried to hold on to it, which made me more suspicious, so I yanked it out of her hand. The mother went to Valentin and whispered something in his ear. Valentin took me to one side and informed me that the bundle contained feminine sanitary pads. This satisfied me and I gave the parcel back to her without examining it. But we were still not satisfied with their answers about the olive oil. One does not come to the front looking for olive oil, but that was their story and they stuck with it. Once again, Valentin told them he did not believe them, and said that unless they told the truth, he had no choice but to send them to Barcelona under guard. The mother finally broke down crying, and told us that she knew her son was here in the Lincoln Brigade, and she had heard rumors of an intended offensive and had come to see her son, maybe for the last time. Now this sounded more plausible than the olive oil story. We understood her reason and sympathized with her. Valentin got the son's name, and sent for him to be brought to Brigade Headquarters. He was just a kid, a student, who had been conscripted into the army. Valentin brought him to his mother and sister. He was shocked but happy to see them. Valentin and I left them alone in the office for a while to have a visit and then sent the boy back to his unit. The women were still crying when he left them. After he was gone they dried their tears and thanked us for our kindness. Valentin asked what we should do with them, and I suggested we let them go with the promise that they would go to Marsa and take the train or a bus to Barcelona and home. Valentin agreed and so the women were released with a lecture. As I was leaving the mother rushed over and kissed my hand in gratitude. She couldn't thank me enough. I really felt good that it ended this way. It was late afternoon when I got back to our position. I went to Pablo's hut and told him the outcome of the incident. He also was glad of the way things had turned out. Pablo opened a bottle and we had a good shot of anise.

One day the Battalion Commander called me in and said he wanted to discuss a case with me. He started relating a problem of theft and pilfering among the troops. He said Joe Gordon had come to him a few minutes ago and complained that two cartons of Old Gold cigarettes were stolen from his pack. He was very upset, not so much about the cigarettes but about the fact that comrades were stealing from comrades. I told him that this sort of problem did not fall in my line of operations. He agreed with me but said it was creating a morale problem in the battalion. I said morale problems came under the jurisdiction of the political commissar and he should be instructed to deal with. He agreed but asked me to look into it and stop it as a personal favour to him. So I agreed to work on it, although this was strictly police work. I called in Pablo and the rest of my company level agents and told them what was involved. I instructed them to work through their platoon agents and be on the lookout for persons smoking Old Gold cigarettes in their circles. Of course if someone was smoking Old Gold cigarettes it did not mean that he had stolen them, because Old Golds, Luckies, Camels, and Chesterfields were all given out as cigarette rations. A few days later Pablo informed me that a Spanish comrade in his platoon was passing out Old Golds and seemed to have a big supply. I asked Pablo to bring the man to me. That same afternoon Pablo brought in one of the old volunteers from La Pasionaria Battalion. I knew him from the Jarama days. I also did not think this worthy comrade would stoop to pilfering his comrade's pack. I explained what was involved and asked him where he got the Old Golds he was smoking and passing around. He told me he had gone to the first aid post the other day, complaining about a headache. While there, one of the stretcher bearers had given him a couple of packs of Old Golds. I thanked him and dismissed him. Taking Pablo with me, I paid a visit to the first aid post and found the man who had given the cigarettes to my friend. I asked the man for a smoke and he offered me a Camel from a crumpled package in his pocket. I told him I didn't like Camels, but preferred Old Golds. He went to his pack and brought out a whole carton of Old Golds. He tore open the carton and gave me a whole pack. I told him who I was and asked him to empty his back pack. The thing was full of all brands of cigarettes. I wanted to know where he had obtained all these cigarettes and he told me he had bought them from "the boys." I asked him what boys and he said he couldn't remember. I told him if he could not identify the boys from whom he brought all those cigarettes, I would put him under arrest for theft and send him to Brigade for punishment. He looked scared and finally confessed to his misdeeds. I confiscated all the cigarettes in his possession and warned him that if he ever did it again, I would have him shot. I gave Joe Gordon a carton of Old Golds and distributed the rest to the company commissars for the use of the troops. I

told Joe Gordon not to broadcast this incident, but to keep it quiet and his cigarettes would not be stolen again. But one can't keep a thing like that secret. Soon everyone was joking about it and calling me the "cigarette detective."

The time was approaching for our planned crossing of the Ebro. Early one morning, we boarded lorries and headed north to the spot where we were to cross the river and assault the enemy. The road leading to the river was packed with troops and supply trucks, and with occasional batteries of field artillery. For the first time I noticed cavalry units going to the front. I did not see a single armoured vehicle during our journey. We stopped close to the river, jumped down from the lorries, and headed for a deep ravine within walking distance of the river front. Our kitchen soon caught up with us, and we were served a hot meal that night. Next morning we were to cross the river in flat boats and attack the enemy at the edge of the river. The assault was to begin at dawn.

Chapter Seven

The Unromantic End

The next morning we marched a few hundred yards and arrived at the river's edge, where the boats were waiting. As we were embarking, our artillery commenced firing at the enemy facing us on the opposite bank of the river. While we were crossing, enemy aircraft arrived on the scene. Our anti-aircraft batteries drove them off and no bombs were dropped. I think the aircraft were reconnaissance planes, trying to assess the situation. One of the planes flew quite low over our boats. We opened fire with our Bren guns from the boats and hit it in several places. It veered off toward the land and crashed on the bank of the river where we had started our crossing. As we approached the enemy side of the river, they started lobbing artillery shells at us. The shelling was light and we sustained no damage. We encountered no enemy resistance at the river's edge, as they had retreated from the bank. We reassembled, reformed our fighting lines, and made for the village of Fatarella, the first objective in our plan of attack. We reached Fatarella without encountering the enemy.

The village seemed deserted; there was no movement anywhere. We occupied a hill overlooking the village, and sent a combat patrol to enter the village. In a field to the right of us there were four peasants with hoes, tilling the land. I thought it strange that the peasants worked on during an attack, and sent the two battalion runners to bring them to Headquarters. They looked like healthy young lads, not like overworked peasants. I asked them for their identification, but they told me they had left it at home in the village. I decided to isolate them and question them separately. I took one of them a little distance away from the rest and asked him for his name, his place of birth, and his parents' names. He told me he was born in Fatarella. I asked him the name of the village mayor. He told me it was Vicente Padilla. I asked him for the name of the village priest, and he gave me a name. When giving me these names, I noticed that he had to stop and think for a while before answering. By his general behaviour I knew he was

lying. Then I sent for another of the so-called peasants and put the questions to him. He also claimed he was born in Fatarella, but gave me different names for the mayor and the priest. Now I was sure they were lying, so I confronted all four of them and told them I did not believe their story. I advised them to come out with the truth. One of them broke down and told me that they belonged to the Tercio (Foreign Legion) and had been left behind during the retreat to Corbera. I obtained the information helpful to us, about their regiment, their officers, and their strength. I gave them some food and cigarettes and sent them back to the river under escort.

I left Headquarters and joined one of the companies advancing to the village. In the distance was a solitary field gun, lobbing occasional shells near our positions. The boys had discovered an Italian supply depot at the edge of the village, and were raiding it for food. I entered the place and soon started helping myself to some cheese and some large Spanish onions. There were rolls and rolls of cheese. I took out my big dagger and started cutting chunks of cheese and stashing them in my haversack. I had enough cheese and onions to last me for days. I went back to Battalion Headquarters and shared it with the rest of the staff. I can still remember the delicious flavour of the well-aged Parmesan cheese. I sent the two orderlies to the supply depot to bring more cheese and onions. I had missed the fresh bread in one corner, but they found it, so along with our cheese and onions, we had chunks of Italian bread and slabs of sweet butter.

The order came to advance toward Corbera. We started off in that direction and reached Vente Composinas in the early afternoon. We stopped at a vineyard for lunch. By this time enemy aviation was becoming more active and they were bombing our rear positions, especially the river front. They were still not bombing our advancing column as they were not sure of their target and were afraid they might bomb their own troops. We arrived at Corbera before dusk and made camp for the night. The troops had been on the go since early morning and were dead tired. We posted guards and prepared for a night's sleep. I prepared a place in the protection of a huge walnut tree. I heard shots being fired, and shouting. Some enemy troops had been trapped and were trying to break through our line to rejoin their own troops. There could not have been very many of them. Our sentries opened up on them but they got away in the confusion. I made for Dr. Simon's first aid post to see if anybody was hurt.²⁶ We sustained one casualty; a sentry had a bullet wound in his shoulder. We doubled our sentries and spread them on both sides of the road to prevent a second such attempt, but nothing further happened.

²⁶This was Dr. John Simon, who later led the Committee to Defend Lincoln Volunteers against charges brought against them by the US Government.

Corbera was captured by the Canadians on the first day of our attack. Now our objective was Gandesa, a fair-sized town on the road to Caspe. Early next morning we started our advance towards Gandesa. We still had not engaged any significant enemy troops or defense. On our way to Gandesa we had to take a little village which lay astride the highway. This was the village of Villalba de los Arcos. As they advanced on the village, our scouts were fired upon. A machine gun mounted at the church steeple now had us in range. We deployed for battle and suffered some casualties. The enemy had managed to organize a line of defense in front of Gandesa. It would be heavy fighting from now on. We tried to outflank the village, to no avail. They were well entrenched and had ample automatic weapons to hold us at bay. It was no use trying to capture this village. Our casualties were mounting, and one could not advance against withering machine gun fire. We did not have any field guns or mountain artillery to silence those machine guns, and we certainly could not risk a frontal attack against this awful firepower. We had established Battalion Headquarters under a cluster of trees just a little west of the village. I was going from company to company trying to assess our prospects. The enemy held the hills in front of us, leading to Gandesa, and were giving us stiff resistance. We were definitely stopped and could advance no further without artillery support. The best we could do was dig in and defend our positions against enemy counter-attack.

I went to Headquarters to see what was happening. Casualties were trickling in. When I got to Doc Simon's first aid post, I could hear screaming and cursing. As they were bringing in the wounded, I saw Bill Bellows walking with blood oozing from his leg. He smiled and said he was glad he wasn't hit any worse. He would be good for at least a month in hospital and he was glad of it. The screaming and cursing came from inside the little dugout where the doctor was working on a wounded soldier. I looked in and recognized Johnny Mura, the one who was so anxious to get to the front lines. Johnny recognized me, grabbed my hand and squeezed it. He started crying and saying this whole thing was inhuman; he had no defense against those machine guns. I guess this was one aspect of war about which his university had not taught him. Fortunately, Johnny was not wounded too seriously. He had taken a bullet in his abdomen and would be hospitalized for a couple of months.

I went back to Headquarters and queried Milton about the situation. He was not too optimistic. He informed me that the advance had come to a halt all along the whole sector. The field phone rang. It was Brigade Headquarters ordering an attack against enemy positions in front, to try to cut the road between Villalba de los Arcos and Gandesa. Milton complained that it would be suicide without artillery, but to no avail. He was ordered to move

his troops towards Gandesa at all cost. I followed to the front lines, where he gave the order to attack. No one moved, so he led the attack. I followed him, and the boys followed their commander, but it was no use. We all had to drop and seek protection from the murderous fire. This stupid attack cost us several killed and wounded, but it could have been worse. Wolff and I went back to Battalion Headquarters. The telephone rang from Brigade Headquarters and Johnny Gates, the brigade commissar, wanted to know how the attack was going. Wolff informed Johnny of the situation and some unpleasant words were passed. When Milton hung up, he turned to me and said, "There goes my major's stripe." I was kind of surprised to hear that major's stripes were that important to him.

That night we were ordered to move a mile or so east and try to move towards Gandesa from this new position. We took our position on the crest of a hill overlooking the cemetery northeast of the town. Towards dawn we moved to a ravine below the hills. The ravine was already occupied by elements of the Lister Division. The enemy had not spotted us as yet. We had no telephone communication with Brigade Headquarters. I went back to our signals dugout to order them to lay a telephone line to the ravine. Sullivan said he already had, so I told him to go inspect the line because the telephone was dead. The telephone rang and it was Gates; he wanted to talk to Wolff. I took the phone from Sully and told Gates our line to Headquarters was broken. He then asked me to take a message to Wolff: the Lincolns should advance to take the cemetery. They should move now because the Lister Division was making a frontal attack from Sierra Pandolls. I hung up and ran to the ravine to relay the message. On the way down I saw the body of an officer sprawled on the crest of the hill. He had fallen face down in the grass. I turned him over and recognized Comrade Freiburg, who was attached to Operations in the Brigade. He was shot through the head. I knew he was dead, poor man. I had seen him just a few minutes ago going past our signals position. I started to run down the hill to our position in the ravine. By this time the enemy had taken notice of our presence there and started lobbing shells on our position. Before I got to Battalion Headquarters the shelling escalated, and intense artillery fire was being directed into the ravine. I paid no attention to the shelling and ran through it to give my message to Wolff. Wolff said they were crazy, there was no way the Lincolns could advance against the cemetery in this withering fire. Just then a shell exploded very close to me. It was so loud I was stunned for a moment; I thought my time had come. A Spanish comrade ran towards me covered with blood, threw his arms around my neck and cried for me to help him. He slid down my chest to the ground. I called for stretcher bearers, who came and took him away. I ran to Wolff at Battalion Headquarters. I must have been a frightening sight, covered with the

Spaniard's blood. He thought I was wounded and began to panic a little. I explained and he hugged me with relief.

Our casualties were not too heavy at the ravine, but the Lister boys suffered heavy losses before they were pulled out. By some miracle our kitchen had caught up with us. That night we had a hot supper. There was plenty to eat, as our casualties were not with us to eat their share. After supper we were ordered to move to the Pandolls. That night we slept at the foothills of the Sierra Pandolls. At dawn we started climbing to the top of the hill. Our position was to be the highest point of the sierra, a 3000-foot high precipice of sheer granite. We went to huge cave which was to serve as our Brigade Headquarters. It was ideal protection against air and artillery attack. After a short rest, we again started to climb the sierra, sometimes going on all fours like goats so as not to fall. We finally made it to the crest. We could not dig in as there was no earth to dig, so we gathered stones and small chunks of granite to create a defensive position. Telephone connection was made with Brigade, and now we were ready for action. Three thousand feet below, at the curve of the road, we could see our tanks in action. They were hidden behind formations of rocks, and now and then would venture into the open and shell the enemy positions. But as soon as enemy artillery opened up on them, they ran back to the protection of the rocks behind the curve of the road. We did not have a protected spot for our Battalion Headquarters so Wolff ordered a couple of runners to find a suitable spot. They found a place about 500 yards behind the summit, so we went and established our Headquarters there. The cave was not big enough for all the staff but it had a protective overhang in case of aerial bombing or shelling. I created a little foxhole for myself by piling rocks around under the overhang. The ground was not even, so that when I lay down to sleep or rest my legs were inclined towards the road. In order not to slide down, I placed some big rocks below my feet so I was held in a safe position. The only flat spot was an area inside the cave, but that was only big enough for the long legs of Wolff and his small political commissar. I was just outside the cave under the overhang. The telephone rang; it was Brigade wanting to know how we were faring. An order came to send a company to try and capture the enemy positions directly in front of us. Milton ordered the First Company, commanded by Juan Abbad, to move in the darkness and try to capture the enemy outpost directly in front of our positions. When it was dark enough, the whole company moved out silently, like ghosts, towards the enemy line. In a few minutes they all disappeared behind boulders and there rang out the occasional rifle fire but no more. Juan Abbad's company just vanished into thin air; we never saw them again. My guess is that they were ambushed, or captured by an organized gang among the new conscripts. I stayed at the lines all night,

hoping at least one of them would turn up to tell me what happened, but no one came back.

I stayed with Mike Pappas' machine gun company that night. They had the only part of the summit that was flat and even, and they could mount their machine guns in a defensible position. We had not had a hot meal for a couple of days and our water was running low. The only supply of water was a well near the road, three thousand feet below. We could not draw water from this well during the day. The enemy could see us from their positions and would shell the hell out of anybody trying to get to it. At night we would assign volunteer groups to take all the water bottles they could carry, fill them and climb up to the top again. The next day the Moors attacked our positions between the machine gun company and the Canadian battalion. There was a short break between the Canadians and our lines and the Moors penetrated this space and were trying to push forward, but the machine guns of the Canadians and our group made short shrift of them. They ran back, leaving their dead behind them.

It was very cold at night in these mountains. That night I found a Foreign Legion officer's great coat and put it on to keep warm. In the morning I went back to Battalion Headquarters wearing this coat. I noticed that they had a prisoner guarded by the two batmen who were sitting in front of the cave. When the man saw me with a Legion coat, he looked very puzzled. I suppose he thought I was from their ranks. This prisoner was dressed in peasant garb and our men had caught him near Battalion Headquarters. Wolff turned him over to me and asked me to ascertain what he was doing in our lines. I questioned the man about his presence in our positions and he was quite frank in admitting that he was a member of the enemy battalion. He had hid himself behind the lines, and was trying to reach his own lines when he was caught. I asked him what formation he belonged to. He said he was a member of the Spanish Foreign Legion. I gave him a cigarette and assured him that he had nothing to fear and that he would be sent back to Division Headquarters under guard, to be kept as a prisoner of war. I told the two batmen to take him to Brigade Headquarters and to turn him over.

During one of the heavy enemy artillery bombardments, we could not keep in touch with our forward companies by telephone. The artillery had broken some of the lines, so Wolff asked me to go to the forward positions and see what was happening. The forward position, at the summit of the mountain, was only a few hundred yards from the Battalion Command Post, but the whole goddamned mountain was nothing but sheer rock. I reached the forward positions and found our companies still holding their lines, but they had suffered heavy casualties. In the Third Company, one of the Spanish comrades, whom we called "Radio" (because he had been working

as a repair man in a radio shop), was one of those killed in this action. He had been carrying a brand new Star automatic pistol, which he had obtained from the enemy forces he had captured during the crossing of the Ebro. He had said that if he was killed or wounded, we should give the pistol to the Battalion Commander, Milton Wolff. So I approached his body, undid his belt, and took the pistol off to give to Milt. The pistol was damaged by the shrapnel that had peppered Radio to death. There were notches embedded in the mechanism of the pistol but it was just as beautiful and as new looking as when he first had it. I stuck the pistol in my belt, intending to take it back to Wolff. After assessing the casualty situation, I walked to the left flank where our machine gun company was located. Just as I was approaching the parapet I saw a stretcher bearer carrying a wounded man to the rear. I ascertained the condition of the machine gun company and ran back towards the stretcher bearers. I caught up with them and I saw Joe Bianca, the man with the fierce black mustache, struggling and flailing his arms and legs so that the stretcher bearers had a hard time carrying him. A little way back I told the men to put him down so I could see if I could do something for him. He had caught a blast of shrapnel right in his chest and I could see that there was no hope for Joe. In a few minutes Joe stopped struggling. He took one last strong breath, and died. Joe was one of the most heroic and beloved members of the machine gun company. I knew him in the days of the Jarama, when he was nothing but a plain machine gunner, and now he was a lieutenant, second in command of the machine gun company. Joe's eyes were open. I pulled his lids down and looked around for some soft ground where we could bury him. There was no damned soft earth on top of this mountain, so I took his ID and all the documents he was carrying, and the stretcher bearers and I started covering him up with smaller bits of rock until his body was completely covered under rocks. Poor Joe. There was no sounding the last post and no firing of an Honour Guard over his grave. So we left Joe on the heights of the Pandolls Mountains, far away from his New York. I told the stretcher bearers to go back to the machine gun company, and made my way back to Battalion Headquarters.

On the way down I met Mike Pappas and asked him what the hell he was doing back here, away from his machine gun company. He said he had gone down to report to Battalion Headquarters, which to me sounded like a cop-out. It was quite apparent that he had deserted his command and was hiding behind the lines during the artillery bombardment. I turned Joe's documents over to the political commissar, Jim Watts, and I handed Radio's pistol to Milton. I said, "Compliments of Radio to you, from hell. Radio is dead at the top of the mountain." He took the pistol, examined it, and said,

“Well, I’m sorry to hear that. He was a good man. I’ll get this pistol repaired and in working condition when we get back.”

At Brigade Headquarters I met one of the commanders of the Spanish battalion. He was quite an elderly man and he had a hell of a time climbing the steep mountain. His companions were making a joke out of it, saying, “Go, old man. We will soon be there.” We were pulled out of the line and directed to a nice orchard back of the mountains to rest for a couple of days. Not far from where we were, the boys had located a beautiful vineyard and we all took advantage of it to fill our bellies with grapes. For the first time in three days, our kitchen truck brought us hot food and coffee, which we really enjoyed. There was a little stream behind the orchard so we all took off our clothes and had a refreshing morning bath. It was beautiful to be able to walk with your head held high, knowing that no bullets would whiz past your head in this location. When night fell, we could see the flashes of exploding hand grenades back over the Pandolls, at the positions we had vacated the night before. Whoever was defending the position, we were glad that it wasn’t us.

The next day, Divisional Command decided to send us to the heights of Sierra Caballs, to assist the Polish Battalion and the Brigade they were serving in, around the town of Corbera.²⁷ After walking for a whole night, we arrived at the Caballs. This was not as high a chain as the Pandolls, and was covered with olive trees and pines, so we had some shade and soft ground to dig in. Nothing much happened here, just the occasional shelling. Our post was just a few feet back, at the base of the rise. We were gathered in a bunch looking at some maps and having a little conference with the bullets were whizzing overhead, but we knew that we were safe because they were going way over our heads. Suddenly, Jack Friesman fell to the ground. We bent over to look at him and the blood was gushing out of his ear. A stray bullet had caught him. He was dead instantly. At this point the enemy was rushing our lines and we had to retreat to the next ridge to establish new defense lines. We did not even have time to bury Jack. We left him where he fell. Someone pointed out that we had left him with his documents and his watch. But I said we were not going to risk someone’s life trying to get them. We ran to the next ridge and dug in. The enemy did not follow up with an attack so we were safe for a while.

The next day enemy planes started bombing the valley in front of us. I hope they hit some of their own men, because we were not there any more. Two enemy fighters escorting the bombers apparently had detected our

²⁷There were two battalions that were usually referred to as Polish: the 3rd (Dabrowsky) Battalion of the 11th Brigade, and the 4th (Miciewicz, Palafox) Battalion of the 13h Brigade. (The Dabrowsky was formed in October 1936, and later moved to the 13th Brigade).

position and started going up and down, strafing the side of the hill where we were dug in. Actually we were not afraid of strafing because they were never accurate and very seldom caused any damage. One of our anti-aircraft guns brought down one of the planes and the pilot jumped out with his parachute and landed in our lines. We could see where he had landed and ran towards him. When I got to him the Spaniards were pummeling him and beating him up with their rifle butts, so I stopped them and took the pilot under escort to our battalion post. The pilot was a Spaniard, and he was scared stiff, asking for mercy. I asked Wolff what we should do with him, and he said he wasn't sure. He said that if we gave him to the Spaniards they would kill him, and he might have valuable information. We decided to send him back to Brigade under escort. At this time, Lieutenant Palacio came up with a group of his men. Wolff asked him to take the man to Brigade Headquarters, and to make sure that he got there alive. There was a lull in the fighting, and we were relieved and withdrawn a few kilometres behind the line to rest for a couple of days. Actually, we were in a reserve line: in case of necessity, we would be pressed again into action. Again, the same process started — digging a little shelter for our bodies and a little cover over our heads in case it rained.

The morning after we arrived in this position, I had a visit from Valentin. He had an assignment for me in Barcelona. He said he had arranged with the Battalion Commander to let me off for a few days. I was not supplied with transportation, just told to get to Barcelona the fastest way I could. So I hitched a ride back to the river, and crossed the bridge into a small town on the other side. By this time it was noon so I went to the edge of the road where there was a little shack, opened up a can of sardines and had my lunch. I noticed some peach trees just opposite the place where I was sitting. The fruit was all covered with dust from the road used by military vehicles. I picked up about a dozen of those big peaches and cleaned them in the river. They were delicious. I headed down the road on my way to the next town, Falset, which would have railway connections to Barcelona. It is strange that on this stretch of military highway there would be so little military traffic. I was almost half way to Falset before I hitched a ride on a military vehicle. I got to the railway station and I was told I had a two-hour wait for the next train. Fortunately, I found a little tavern near the station and had a bottle of beautiful local wine. Then I went and bought a ticket to Barcelona. It was surprising that during all these travels from the front lines to Falset I was never stopped and asked to show my documents. I realized how easy it would be for a deserter to make his way to Barcelona.

My mission in Barcelona was to go to a detention centre just outside the suburb of Mataro, and present myself to Major Alonso. I was to give him a letter of introduction explaining why I was there. Major Alonso took me to

his office, poured me a nice drink, and tried to explain to me what I was commissioned to do. I already knew from Valentin that I would be put into a concentration camp to try to ascertain the character of the inmates, their reliability and their loyalty to the Republic. This concentration camp was full of deserters, political unreliaables, and light criminals who had been conscripted for military service. I was supposed to mingle with them and try to be like one of them. Major Alonso asked me to deposit my pistol with him, and said he would give it back when I was ready to leave. I was assigned to a dormitory and escorted there by guards. I tried to be like one of them but they were too damn smart, they could "smell" me. Several times when I went near a group, they would change the topic of conversation. There was nothing to indicate from their behaviour whether they were for or against the Republic, so I really did not glean much from this endeavour.

In a couple of days I was back where I came from, at the front. On my return, I reported to Valentin and confessed that I was unable to get any information because they seemed to sense I was a spy. I went back to my dugout, and I was hardly asleep when I heard an explosion of artillery not very far from me. I stuck my head out, and I could see that a battery of artillery had moved to within a few yards of my dugout and were banging away at the enemy, but I was too damn tired to worry about it and soon fell asleep. It's strange how one can get used to all these noises and explosions at the front, and still fall asleep. At about two o'clock that night, we were told to pack and get ready to move immediately, and in a few minutes the whole group was on its way to the front. We had to hurry because the front line near Corbera had collapsed and we had to defend the Polish Brigade. We arrived at our position just as the sun was breaking through. We stopped in a little ravine to rest for a couple of hours. I threw my pack under a big walnut tree and got ready to go to sleep. But everybody else was digging like hell to make themselves little foxholes in case of air attacks. One of the boys shouted at me to do the same, so I picked up a shovel and started making myself a foxhole. I was still digging when I heard a squadron of enemy bombers coming directly towards our ravine. I could hear the swish of the bombs falling. I threw myself in my foxhole. They had us well pinned down, and they dropped bombs all around, but my foxhole saved me from the falling shrapnel. I went towards the tree where I had left my pack. It was completely riddled with shrapnel. Had I stayed there and not heeded the boys I would not be here to write these lines.

We suffered quite heavy casualties from the bombing. I saw Lieutenant Lamb²⁸ running towards us with blood coming from his neck, but he said it was just a shrapnel cut. He told Milton to advance the battalion to the ridge at the right of the road and to relieve the Polish Battalion, which had

²⁸Leonard Lamb.

been very badly mauled. They had lost quite a few men, and many had been taken prisoner. The ones that had got away had run to the ridge and had witnessed the execution of their comrades who had been taken prisoner. We moved towards the hill as fast as we could. The enemy started shelling the road and our positions to the right and left of it. In spite of shelling and the artillery barrage, we went in to reinforce the Polish Battalion. Thank God, we suffered no casualties, and were able to relieve the Poles. They took their wounded with them, but they had no time to bury the dead, so there were quite a few bodies lying in the trenches. We had eight heavy machine guns, which we put in position to defend this ridge. I remembered taking these same positions from the enemy on our way to take Corbera. We found a nice dugout at the base of the hill, where we established the command base. Sullivan and his helper started to lay telephone lines to the different companies right away. When the telephones were functioning, we could speak to the company commanders to ascertain what was happening. We did not have to wait long to find out. In a few minutes the enemy artillery started shelling our position mercilessly. The shells were falling so fast, one was afraid to stick one's head out to see what was happening. It was like a hailstorm. The Battalion Commander asked Sullivan to connect him with the First Company, but he couldn't get through. Second and Third Companies were the same. The lines were dead; artillery shells had severed them. As usual, Milton told me to go up and see what was happening. I jumped out of the dugout and was on my way to the top of the ridge, but behind the ridge I could see our boys running back like hell. I jumped back into the dugout, grabbed the military maps and the telephone and told Milt that we were now the front line. By this time the shelling had subsided and the staff of Battalion Command caught up with our retreating troops. We went a few hundred yards back to the next ridge to form a new defensive position. We did not have to dig any trenches because there were already trenches there. We simply turned and faced the enemy, waiting for the next assault. But, thank God, the enemy did not follow through; for some reason they stopped after taking the ridge. Maybe they were reforming for the next attack. Milton told me to come with him to inspect the line. We started going towards our right flank, stopping and talking to our boys and getting the reports from the Company Commanders. We had suffered quite a few fatalities. The dead were left behind but all the wounded were brought back to this new line of defense, from where they would be evacuated to first aid posts and hospitals. As we reached our extreme right flank the ground became more level, and Milton asked who was on our right flank. I said I had no idea, and that I would go a few hundred feet to our right to see if I could make contact with that flank. But we had no right flank. It was wide open and the enemy could have walked through without having to fire a

single shot. So Milton ordered two machine guns set up facing the open space to our right. When we went back to our post I was asked to go back to Brigade Headquarters and personally report what was happening and the precarious position we were in. I didn't even know where Brigade Headquarters was, and neither did Milton. I started running back to our rear and the first troops that I contacted I tried to get information about the position of our Headquarters. Nobody knew where it was. Further back, I met a battery of our artillery which had taken up position behind the lines. I asked them if they knew where our Headquarters was and they directed me to the dugout where the Brigade Command was situated. The first man I met at Brigade Headquarters was Johnny Gates. I told him what was happening and informed him that our right flank was wide open. Johnny translated this to our Brigade Commander in Spanish and he immediately ordered the Third Spanish Battalion, presently in reserve, to take up position to the right of us, thus securing our right flank.

By this time it was getting dark, and I was kind of scared to return back to our position. I was disoriented and was not sure where I would find our battalion. I started hesitantly towards the front, thinking about walking into an ambush or an enemy patrol all by myself. Then I heard English being spoken to the right of me and I walked towards the voices. I discovered that it was our kitchen. So I told the cook what had happened, and what I was doing there. He gave me a hefty shot of brandy, followed by a mug of strong coffee, which really picked me up. Unfortunately, I don't remember the cook's name, but he told me he was taking coffee to the battalion, and I could go with him. He said it would be a couple of hours, and I should lie down and take a little rest. When the kitchen detail was ready to leave, I went with them back to our position. When Milton saw me he demanded to know where I had been all this time. I told him it had taken me hours to find Brigade, and more hours to find my way back. I told him that the Third Battalion was being sent to reinforce our right flank. He looked at me and laughed, saying that he thought I had chickened out.

By this time, the telephone lines were hooked up to Brigade Headquarters and we were able to communicate with them. The phone rang from Brigade and it was Johnny Gates, wanting to speak to the Battalion Commander. He told Milton to get ready to be relieved early in the morning, and that we had fought our last battle on Spanish soil. We were being pulled from the fighting lines and repatriated back to America. This was good news, and yet also very sad. Before dawn, while it was still dark, we pulled out from the fighting lines and the Spanish Lister Brigade took our positions. We carried our rifles and machine guns back with us as we did not know when we might have to use them again. We walked back a couple of miles behind the lines where there was a convoy of lorries waiting to pick

us up. We jumped into the trucks, and were driven back over the river, where by now there was a solid bridge built to allow vehicular traffic. Strange to say, we were driven to the exact position where we were camped before, just outside the village of Marsa. We waited there for a couple of days, in case there was a breakthrough at the front. Then we moved into the village itself, where we found quarters in an unused monastery.

One night, while I was Officer of the Guard, a comrade ran towards the guard post calling, "Come on, come on, he's drowning!" I told him to calm down and tell me what was happening. He said he and another comrade had broken into the local winery and the other chap had fallen into a pool of wine. So I took a couple of boys with me and went to the winery. There he was, floundering in a pool of wine, drinking to his heart's content. We pulled him out and told nobody what had happened, so the contamination of the wine would not be discovered. That was one of the funny episodes of our campaign.

During the enemy shelling at the position in front of Corbera, a small sliver had lodged in my right third finger. I had pulled out the sliver and dabbed a little bit of iodine on it, but the damn thing had festered. My right hand started to swell up to my elbow, so I thought I'd better go see Doc Simon. He looked at my arm and told me it was blood poisoning, and I would have to be evacuated to a hospital. He gave me the necessary documents and sent me to the railway station to report to the War Officer. He looked at me and my red face, and said he had something to stop the pain. He gave me one of the biggest tablets I've ever seen. It was bigger than a nickel. I took the tablet and swallowed it with some wine and in no time a warm euphoria took hold of me. I could feel no pain any more. I guess it was either codeine or morphine, but whatever it was it sure stopped the pain.

Soon the hospital train arrived and we piled in. When we got to the station at Reus, we could see that the town had just been bombed. We could see the ruins, and some buildings were on fire, but the hospital had not been hit. We were taken there by ambulance. The doctor who looked at my arm did not do a damn thing about it. He just said he was sending me to Base International Hospital in Figueras. The next morning I was put on an evacuation train and taken there. There I met quite a few of my comrades from the front, who had been hospitalized. Tony Rappaport showed me his abdomen, where he had taken an almost direct hit. He recovered and went back to his home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Spanish doctor who looked at my arm said it was badly infected. During the night, I was wakened by the nurses every hour to put hot compresses on my hand. I was so sleepy, I couldn't care less what happened. Then I heard a beautiful, low voice singing in my ears. It was the young Spanish nurse who had put a compress

on my hand. She kissed me gently on the forehead and said good night. The doctor had hoped that the compresses would break the wound open, but the next morning the swelling had gone past my elbow. He said he was sending me to the American Hospital at Moya. So early in the morning, a few of us were put in a truck and driven to Moya. When we arrived at Moya, we were immediately taken to surgery. A doctor looked at a man with a badly wounded calf and started to swear, saying, "Those damn Spanish doctors are trying to kill you." They put him on an operating table and told him they had no anaesthetic to give him. Four orderlies held him fast to the table. The surgeon sprayed the edges of the wound with silver nitrate, took a pair of surgical scissors, and started removing the dead tissue. By this time the pain was so great the poor fellow had fainted. Thank God for that. They bandaged his wound and brought him to one of the wards. Now it was my turn. They lacerated the finger and inserted a tube to drain the infection. He bandaged it and again swore at the Spanish doctors for not having done this days ago.

I stayed in this hospital for two weeks. Every morning, at ten sharp, I could see the nurse and the doctor coming towards my bed. I dreaded the moment when they would pull the rubber drain out, wash the wound and insert a new drain to take the place of the one removed. It was one of the most excruciating pains I have ever suffered. Finally the wound healed up, the swelling went down, and I was ready to be evacuated back to my unit. From Moya we were shipped to Las Planas, just outside Barcelona. We were in a high rise, a former apartment building, which was now being used as a clearing house for members of the International Brigade. By this time, the enemy had re-crossed the Ebro River and were pressing on to Barcelona.

One day, I decided to go down the hill to the subway station, and go see for the last time what was happening in Barcelona. Surprisingly, the subways were still running on schedule. I got off at the Plaza de Catalonia, and found the whole city was like a morgue. There was hardly anybody to be seen on the street. Finally, further down on the Ramblas, I found an open café where they were able to offer me *café au lait*. While I was drinking my coffee, a young woman walked in, came to my table, and told me she was hungry and needed something to eat. Every morning we were issued a loaf of bread as our day's ration, and I still had mine with me. I gave her the loaf of bread, and her eyes lit up. She said she could give me money for it, but nobody was taking money in Barcelona anyway. She offered to repay me back in her room if I wished. I politely declined.

I took the subway train back to Las Planas, which was the last station on the subway line. The coffee counter was still open. The women still had a couple of sandwiches to sell, so I bought one and went up the hill. When I

got there, there was a truck waiting for the Americans. There were about a half a dozen of us. We were driven about forty miles outside of Barcelona to the American Hospital at Vick, where we would wait to be evacuated to a safer place at the base of the Pyrenees Mountains. As we were leaving Barcelona the noises of battle were quite audible in the distance. After arriving at Vick we were given a nice meal but one could see the nervous state the place was in. I guess we were the last Americans to leave Barcelona before it fell. In a couple of days we were driven to the local train station and taken to the town of Ripoll. There the Canadians were separated from the Americans, and were sent to the assembly area for the Canadian Battalion. I seldom saw my American friends again. I would occasionally meet some of them and as we were talking they would often remark that they never knew I was Canadian. Milton would say he thought I was from somewhere in Michigan.



Members of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion returning to Canada after fighting in the Spanish Civil War (L-R: Walter Hellund, Alex Forbes). Halifax, Nova Scotia or Toronto, Ontario, February 1939. (NAC, C-67449).



Canadians arriving home after having fought in the Spanish Civil War. Edward Cecil-Smith addressing the crowd at Union Station, Toronto, February 1939. (NAC, C-67441).

We waited in Ripoll for a few days for the League of Nations representative to arrive to validate and list the different nationalities to be repatriated. The officer who was questioning the Canadians was an old Navy captain, as stiff as the pictures portray them. I remember one of our lieutenants approaching him to be registered. This old captain looked at him and said, "Don't you ever salute a superior officer?" The lieutenant said, "You're no commanding officer of mine, so why should I salute you? You don't even belong to our army." The old captain backed down, registered his name, and called for the next in line, which was me. I gave him my name and address. Then he asked me for my place of birth. When I told him I had been born in Armenia, he wanted to know if I was a British subject. I told him I was. He asked for proof of it. At this point, a Mr. Kelly, an elderly gentleman who was sent from the Canadian Embassy in France to examine members of the Canadian Unit, and whom I suspected of being a member of the RCMP, told the captain he would take over. He asked if I had my passport, and I told him I had turned it over to the International Brigade Headquarters in Albacete. I told him I had a Naturalization Certificate, which I produced from my wallet. He scrutinized it very carefully and asked me a few questions about Toronto. He warned me not to give any false information, as he knew Toronto quite well; he had been stationed in the RCMP Barracks in Toronto for a long time. After he was

convinced that I was the man who owned the citizenship papers, he said he would give me authorization papers to travel to Canada. After all the preliminary registrations and enquiries were concluded, we went for supper at the local barracks.

When it was time to leave Ripoll, we boarded the train for the Spanish frontier. All the other International Brigade volunteers were allowed to change a nominal amount of Spanish currency into any foreign denomination they desired. But we, in the Canadian contingent, were prevented from doing so because the Communist Party commissar in our contingent had decided that all the Spanish currency was to be donated to the local Socorro Rojo. Some of the other boys and I were very opposed to this, because Spain did not lack pesetas for the use of the Socorro Rojo. We crossed the tunnel under the Pyrenees and arrived at the Port Boux station on the French side. There were all kinds of goodies to be had in the station — food, wine, cigarettes — but we didn't have a goddamned franc to buy a cup of coffee. We were herded into railway carriages and the doors of the train were locked, so that we could not get out. Fortunately, there were French Sisters of Mercy on the train, with sandwiches and hot coffee. We traveled in locked cars to the Port of Dieppe, and there we were met at the station by a contingent of the French Guard Mobile, to make sure that none of us escaped into France itself. We descended from the train by ladder (because the tide was so low), into the holds and cabins of the ferries crossing between Dieppe and Newhaven. We had to wait a few hours until the tide came in, and then we started for England. In a few hours, we docked at Newhaven, and were on English soil again. We read the giant headlines on the local newspapers, "Barcelona Fallen to Franco." That was the sad end of my romantic attempt to make the world safe for democracy.

Afterword

One historian has estimated that approximately half of the Canadian volunteers did not return home at the end of the Spanish Civil War.¹ They were killed, missing in action, captured, or simply stayed in Europe at the end of the war. Many were unaccounted for.² While the Canadian government's attitude toward the volunteers had softened somewhat over the course of the war, primarily under pressure from public opinion, many returning volunteers received something less than a hero's welcome from the state.³ With respect to volunteers stranded in Spain, for example, the government decided that while "inquiries" would be made, no great effort — or money — should be spent in attempting to locate and repatriate them, especially those over 21 years of age.⁴ Adopting a position "essentially the same as that of the US," the Canadian government promised to examine the claims of returning volunteers, but refused to commit "any financial or other responsibility for the large sums of money involved."⁵ The RCMP claimed that many of the volunteers should simply be refused re-entry, on the grounds that they had violated the Foreign Enlistment Act, and had been "engaged contrary to the policy of the government."⁶ Many had to rely on their own devices, on organizations such as the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, and on the Spanish government to get back to Canada. For some, the repatriation process took months.⁷

¹Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers*, xxxvi.

²The Mackenzie-Papineau National Committee, for example, estimated that of the 1,239 volunteers for whom they had records, 646 returned to Canada, 171 were killed, and 214 were unaccounted for. National Archives of Canada (NAC) MG 30E 173 Volume 1, File #18.

³The best account of how both the government's position and public opinion changed over the course of the war is in Lobigs, "Canadian Responses."

⁴NAC MG 30E 173, Volume 1, File #5.

⁵NAC MG 30E 173, Volume 1, File #5, October 19, 1938.

⁶NAC MG 30E 173, Volume 1, File #5, October 19, 1938.

⁷For an account of the repatriation process and the issues involved, see Howard, *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, 224-35; and Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers*, 187-99. American volunteers received similar treatment. See, for example, Carroll, *The Odyssey*, 209-23; and Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 159-234.

One of the events Pat Stephens does not include in his account of the end of the war and the repatriation process is a series of interviews and assessments conducted by the War Commissariat of the International Brigades, and by the Leading Party Committee of the 15th International Brigade in Barcelona. These interviews were designed to test volunteers' political allegiance, and to determine their suitability for possible future Party activities. During his War Commissariat interview, Stephens gave a summary of his service in Spain and the various posts in which he had served. He was also asked a series of questions designed to test his loyalty to the Party, and to get his assessment of the Spanish cause. To most of these he gave safe and standard answers. His only critical comment in this regard was that the brigades were somewhat lacking in discipline. He said he thought he would return to Canada and that if unable to do so he could live in Mexico City. He was not asked to explain this choice. The Party Committee's assessment of Stephens was conducted 1 January 1939. The transcript of the interview describes Stephens as an "efficient, loyal, dependable" soldier, and as "an element to be helped from the political standpoint." It was also suggested that he would make a good propagandist.⁸

Despite the Party's favourable assessment, and his obvious political commitment up to that point in his life, the note of disillusionment which enters at the end of Stephens' memoir seems to have stayed with him. He shunned political activity after the Spanish war, and did not like to talk of politics.⁹ He served in World War II, but then returned to Toronto and a relatively quiet life as a salesman. He married in 1949 and he and his wife, Phyllis, had two children, Patricia and Douglas Patrick, Jr. Pat Stephens died in Toronto on 16 December 1987.

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⁸NAC Reel K265.

⁹Personal correspondence Phyllis Stephens.



Memoir of the Spanish Civil War is one man's bittersweet account of fighting with the International Brigades against the forces of General Francisco Franco in Spain from 1936 to 1939. Douglas Patrick (Pat) Stephens was born in Armenia in 1910 and emigrated with his family to Canada in 1926. Like countless others, his dream of finding a new and more prosperous life was severely shaken by the onset of the Great Depression, and he turned to the Communist Party of Canada in an attempt to combat the political and economic deterioration which had gripped much of the world. Franco's attempt to overthrow by military force the republican government of Spain seemed to Pat Stephens the ideal opportunity to put his political convictions into action. Through his connections in the Communist Party, he became one of some 1,400 Canadians, and 40,000 International Volunteers in all, who went to Spain. Many of the volunteers, including the Canadians, went to Spain against the laws and the wishes of their governments. Many of them never came back. Stephens' memoir, dictated to his wife Phyllis Stephens shortly before his death in 1987, puts a very human face on this strange and complex war. It is a portrait of political and moral conviction tinged by creeping disillusionment. It is also a compelling depiction of the strength, frailty, doubt, and courage which can result from the sometimes incongruous intersection of the personal and the political. *Memoir of the Spanish Civil War* is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the conflict which immediately preceded World War II, and of Canada's role in that conflict.