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THE STORY OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BATTALION



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**WRITTEN
IN THE
TRENCHES
OF SPAIN**

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN BATTALION**



“ That government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Gettysburg Address
November 19, 1863

Library
University of Texas
Austin

CHAPTER ONE

HELLO FOLKS! I am writing to you from the front line trenches of Spain. I want to tell you the story of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. I want to tell it in my own words and to write the things that I have seen. I hope that what I say will reach you and the fascist machine guns won't get to me before I finish what I have to say.

It is ironical that as I write about the scenes of war, I lie huddled in a trench, in a field of olive groves near the Jarama River, 40 kilometers northwest of Madrid. War amidst olive branches—classical symbol of peace. And yet it is not at all strange or ironical because we 2000 Americans fighting with the Loyalist Government against the fascist invasion of Spain are fighting for peace, for human liberties.

We Americans did not come to Spain because we have any romantic childish notions about war, nor were we impelled by fanfare and large cheering parades. We left America quietly, without publicity, with the serious mindedness as to the work before us; compelled by the need to fight against the criminal invasion of Spanish soil, which represented a threat to human liberty everywhere.

Our Battalion was formed between the last weeks of December and the first weeks of January. We consisted at that time of 470 men, men from every part of the States and Cuba, Mexico, Porto Rico, Canada, Hawaii, and the Philippine Islands. Of the James Connolly Section, 105 seasoned fighters from the Irish Free State who came to make up the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. The First Aid Division of the Battalion, composed of well trained first aid men, includes one whole unit from Holland. The Antonio Guter-ras Column consisting of Cubans forms a significant part of the Battalion.

These men, every one of them, are as much opposed to war as I am. We had in our ranks men who were in Leavenworth Prison in 1917 for refusing to participate in the World War.

There were seamen such as Robert Pick and Charley Edwards (who have since been killed in action) who refused on a score of occasions to handle shipments of munitions to the Italians invading Ethiopia. There were students who led the national student strikes that swept America—men who only a short time ago carried on a passionate struggle for pacifism—college professors who less than a month ago lectured in universities on the destructive effects of war on education and culture. The very character of the Battalion is perhaps the best indication of the purposes of the Battalion.

We had come to Spain not to involve America into war, but to give our services in a fight to keep war out of the world. We believe with all our hearts that democracy attacked in Spain is democracy attacked everywhere—that the fight for peace today is best done by fighting in the front line trenches in Spain against the foreign fascist invasion that moves towards world war. We are opposed to a policy of neutrality that condemns the assassin and his victim alike.

These men of the Lincoln Battalion feel that the American nation cannot sit quietly in its own room and close its door on a fire that is raging in the building. It seems perfectly obvious to us that the American people must join the democratic water brigade to put out the fascist fire that is spreading throughout the apartment house of the world.

There exist certain splendid traditions—traditions which the American people hold dear, which makes our action more understandable. There was a time when we needed help, when the American colonies were invaded by the soldiers of Royalist England assisted by the mercenary Hessians and that help came. Lafayette, Kosciusko, Pulaski and others, who left their native soil to fight with the American people against the reaction that threatened our existence. We have built monuments in tribute to the contribution made by these men. I do not urge monuments for the Lincoln Battalion but I do expect understanding and support from the American people should be forthcoming. Perhaps I can make my point even more clear.

If we would but apply our criminal and civil laws to international affairs we would arrive at a simple and proper understanding. We condemn murder and robbery even though we may not

be the victims. To fail to do this would be to encourage murder and robbery and eventually we would be victimized. To fail to support the democratic liberties of the Spanish people against fascist invasion invites attack on our own shores, on our own liberty. To hesitate in condemning the armed uprising of a fascist minority against the popular people's government is but to place temptation in the path of our own reactionaries.

The experiences we have had in Spain since our arrival confirmed our early impressions. We have seen the ruthlessness of Italian and German planes hurling death on undefended Spanish cities. We have seen the long lines of orphaned, homeless children and crippled men and women which attested to the efficiency of Italian and German military training.

We have captured and interviewed Italian and German prisoners who gave evidence to the foreign invasion provoked by Hitler and Mussolini. And we have been moved by the splendid spirit and heroism with which the Spanish people manned the barricades and trenches in defense of their homes, families and liberty.

Let me begin my story with a letter A. Ripps, a member of our Battalion, wrote to his father.

CHAPTER TWO

DEAR DAD:

OUR trip here was a long and hard one but once we got into Spain we forgot all about it. It would be hard to find words to describe the beauty of this country. For miles and miles we passed through grand rolling hills and majestic mountains. Our first view of the Pyrenees made us speechless. They are snow-topped mountains that stretch as far as the eye can see. It was a beautiful sunset when we first saw them and the snow seemed like a brightly-hued blanket thrown over the top of the mountains.

"We passed through miles of flatlands that were bounded by small mountains and every single inch of these lands was cultivated. The landscape looked like a checkerboard. Now and then we passed through picturesque little towns containing magnificent castles or churches or forts, the kind you see in picture postcards.

"Not until we got to the big cities did we realize that we were in a country that is engaged in a civil war. There were the Spanish fighters either being trained for the front or recently back from the front. And, of course, those courageous fighters of the International Brigade.

"SALUD, COMPANEROS!"

"Everywhere we were greeted with enthusiastic cheering. At every station our train stopped we were saluted. In Barcelona we were greeted by a large band and we paraded through the city. Thousands lined the streets and shouted 'Viva los Americanos' as we passed.

"On the train a handsome, weather-beaten peasant woman got on and piled into one of our compartments with huge bundles and began to chat very pleasantly with us in Spanish. When we got an interpreter she told us proudly that two of her sons were fighting at the front.

"A stately old man, a peasant too, got on the train with two bags filled with lemons and oranges which he proceeded to pass

out among us. He was going to the front to join his 19-year-old son who was fighting there.

"A railroad worker on the train found it hard to believe that we came all the way from America to fight for Spain. When we explained to him how the workers of America have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to help the Spanish workers, we had to prevent him from kissing us.

"All through Spain the workers are fired with one purpose—to drive the fascists out of Spain. To that purpose everyone is united—Communists, Socialists, Anarchists, trade unionists, Republicans, and yes, even priests who are fighting with rifles in the front lines. Everywhere is shouted 'NO PASARAN'—they shall not pass. To that the International Brigade has added—'NOSOTROS PASAREMOS'—we shall pass.

"One night on the way here we stopped over night in a town near a railroad station and we were quartered there in a beautiful castle. A few hours after we arrived a group marched in from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. A while later came a group of anti-fascist Germans. After that came a bunch from—of all places—Palestine! We were hoarse from cheering. Christ, one can't help but feel the strength of the international sentiment for human liberty. It made each one of us feel strong. All of us together will be invincible. We just *can't* lose.

"All along the route we met contingents from France, Belgium, Poland, and Holland. Everywhere we go we show the Spanish people examples of organization and discipline. In every town and city the Spanish people receive us with friendship, respect and comradeship. The people know and in some cases have felt the terrors of fascism and the behavior of our boys have earned their respect. They do not treat us as ordinary soldiers but as comrades.

"The local people go out of their way to see that we are comfortable. Everywhere we go they follow us and watch us with interest. We always have a gang of kids around us chattering away at our doings. One day an airplane passed over the town and the kids scattered in all directions to places of cover. The poor kids know the dangers of ruthless fascist attacks. But it was a loyalist plane as we saw immediately."

CHAPTER THREE

As the Americans poured into Spain, we were placed at Villa Nueva de la Jara, a town near Albacete, as the training base. For more than a month we were rigidly trained in military strategy and tactics, in field maneuvers and in the handling of the rifle and machine gun. Classes were conducted in street fighting, scouting, machine gun, mapping, chau-chau gun, and in grenade throwing. Lectures were regularly delivered by men from the ranks who were acquainted with the various phases of methods used in fighting. Every day a few hours were spent in drilling on the open field, and sham-battles were conducted as if we were in actual warfare.

The training we received at the base did a great deal to prepare us for the front and made us realize the absolute necessity of working together. "Discipline" became our motto and emphasis was placed on it at every occasion. It can be honestly said that the Americans demonstrated their calibre by bringing about a thorough and efficient organization among a conglomeration of men from every part of the globe who had but one aim—the unconditional defeat of Fascism.

When the Lincoln Battalion was finally complete, it consisted of two infantry companies of three sections each, a machine gun company, a first aid and medical division, a kitchen staff attached to the supply and transport department, a political bureau, an armorer department, and a headquarters and military staff. The James Connolly Section and the Antonio Guiterras Column were part of the first company. The entire battalion numbered close to 500 men. (Now more than 2,000 are members: Editor's Note.)

The first batch of Americans, mostly New Yorkers, to arrive at Villa Nueva de la Jara were quartered in a huge abandoned building. The impressive thing about this building was that the walls on the inside were decorated with drawings by members of the French Battalion with different slogans of the Popular Front, such as: "No Pasaran," "Red Front," "Down With Fascism," and

others written in many languages. The clenched fist of international solidarity was conspicuously stamped on them.

On the outside, on the very top, brilliant flags waved gallantly in the breeze. The building was in an unsanitary condition when the Americans moved in. It required several days of unceasing and intensive work before it was made livable. The civilians cooperated valiantly and did all they could to make the Americans comfortable. They even gave hundreds of mattresses so our boys could have something better to sleep on than just a plain stone floor.

A close attachment and comradeship developed between the Americans and the inhabitants in spite of the language difficulties. Consequently, the civilians, together with a committee of Americans arranged a holiday for the second group that was scheduled to arrive. It was a warm day. The whole town closed shop and turned out to the public square where a band played as the new American and Irish contingents marched in with full packs on their backs in the midst of cheer and applause. The People's Front Mayor gave a welcome speech which was translated into English. Speeches were made by a few members of the battalion. The demonstration was moving and the welcome inspiring.

When not on duty the boys occupied themselves in many interesting ways: some spent their time writing letters, others sat around the radio trying to catch the news regarding the progress of the war, and a few left their barracks entirely for long walks in the nearby hills. In the evenings large crowds of children gathered around the barracks doorway and sang songs. Aaron Harris, now in the hospital recovering from a wound, taught the children to sing American songs. Their little tender voices shrilled through the narrow streets of the town:

*"On the line, on the line,
On the peekit, peekit line," etc.*

As a reward candy was distributed to them which they accepted as little children do the world over.

The Barracks' Library, set up by the new lodgers of the building, was a popular place to come for reading and discussion.

One Sunday a football match was held between the Irish Section and the Dutch which resulted in a draw since everybody

played the game differently. On the next Sunday we were taken to see a bull fight at Motilla, a town near the base. The fight was gory and the matador was not especially good. Since it was the first time that most of us had ever witnessed a bull fight, it proved to be an odd and interesting day, though some of the boys expressed it as being a rather cruel sport.

The food we received at the base was exceptionally good at times, especially when we were able to convince Jack Sherai, our Japanese comrade, that it was his duty to cook. He insisted that he came to Spain to fight Fascism and not to cook. At the front he has been in the place he wanted to be: behind a machine gun or a rifle giving the fascists hell.

The day before we left Villa Nueva de la Jara for the front, a dance was held for the Americans in another old building adjacent to our barracks. The interior of the building was decorated in the most elaborate fashion, displaying pictures of popular heroes and posters around the walls. Crepe paper was extended from corner to corner in the most artistic twists and turns and small decorations hung from overhead. The solemn building was turned into a vivid center and there was dancing, refreshments, and movies. There was never a happier crowd of people in the town.



The Lincoln Battalion Moving Up to the Front

CHAPTER FOUR

THE order to move to the front found the battalion ready and willing. We left for the front late in the night of February 15, and traveled all night at a snail's pace. Before we had gotten very far, we were haunted by a plane circling continuously overhead. We did not know whether it was our plane or the enemy's; consequently, we were forced to travel by crawling slowly.

The truck drivers were not permitted to use their road lights and so attract the plane's attention. It was a bitterly cold and dark night; one of those nights when the moon keeps out of sight and makes it exceedingly difficult for anyone to find his way through pitch darkness. More than once we thought the driver was going to run off the road and turn over into a ditch.

The next day, late in the afternoon, we arrived in Marata, a town along the Jarama sector of the Madrid front. We hadn't arrived more than ten minutes when we learned what that plane was.

It was evidently a fascist scout plane which had been watching us and our arrival. As we piled out of the 40 or 50 trucks which had carried us through the dark and long night, we were suddenly attacked by a large group of airplanes, perhaps fifteen. They dropped bombs and they strafed us with machine guns.

Fortunately, we had been trained in just this kind of warfare. We dove for shelter and in four or five minutes a fleet of Loyalist planes attacked our attackers. It developed into a furious dog fight.

Four of our fast pursuit planes cut off two huge Junker bombers. Within a very short time our attackers fled, all but the two bombers which plunged to earth in flames, giving us a cheering welcome at our front-line base. If the Fascists thought by this attack to drive us off or to frighten us, they failed miserably. We lost none. None of our men were injured. Everyone felt as though this were just one of those things that grown-ups try to frighten children with. But we are not children, we are soldiers.

Following the attack, we had a brief dinner at the English cook-house. We prepared to travel by truck again. No one knew where we were going or what was expected of us, except those in command.

As the sun began to set the chill of the night replaced the warm breeze of the day, our trucks placed themselves in position for the short trip before them. Night had fallen before we had gotten far, so that our trip from Morata was made in darkness. The night, like the previous one, was ink-dark. After arriving at a position of about 400 meters behind the front line trenches, we got off the trucks and took our places in ranks, not without many difficulties because of the darkness.

To add to the confusion was the heavy, rolling noise of several tanks crossing our paths.

We finally located ourselves and climbed up a couple of hills until we reached the very crest of a hill said to be a strategic one because it overlooked the country for hundreds of yards around. In diamond formation, section after section in proper order we were told to dig in.

"With what?" we asked.

"Come on, dig in, dig in with your bayonets or use your helmets."

The order did not have to be repeated many times because the bullets began to whistle over our heads threateningly and we flopped to the ground on our bellies and dug. We were told that there would be artillery bombardment in the morning and that we better dig in a good place for shelter.

The night was extremely cold. We kept warm by working all night, keeping in mind constantly the artillery that would come over and that we must dig to protect ourselves. Morning came. Those who dared to sleep were stiff with cold.

About six o'clock the expected artillery barrage began. Most of us had never been under fire before. The bursts of shells around us was a terrifying introduction. Boom! a shell just before us. Boom! another behind us.

"They are using heavy artillery." Chelebian had his head blown off. "What are they trying to do, kill us?"

It did not take us long to realize that we were in a war, a life very much different from that at the base. For seven days and

nights we held that hill popularly known as "Suicide Hill." Every day we dug deeper, constructing a regular line of trenches. During these days we were subjected to the most serious of artillery bombardments. The fascist planes made desperate attempts to strike our position with their deadly bombs. The first day we were on the hill, the bombers laid their eggs.

The next day they paid us two visits, both times dropping bombs and once succeeding in using their machine guns on our trenches. They made several other visits on subsequent days. But at no time did our planes give them a chance to do much damage. Every time that the fascist planes engaged in a battle with ours, one or two of them would be riddled and brought down from the sky like a tailless kite taking a nose dive toward the earth.



The General of the Brigade Sings For the Boys in the Trenches

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CHAPTER FIVE

ON FEBRUARY 22, we were removed from Suicide Hill and occupied a position in the second line trenches. The next day, February 23, we were shifted to the right flank where, after the necessary instructions were given, preparations were made for an attack. The whole battalion was now in a trench on territory which was previously captured from the enemy after long and severe battles. As we looked over the parapet ahead of us about 400 meters, the white line of the fascist trenches could be seen in between the clustered olive trees. Their trenches lay on the slope of a hill looking down on us.

Dusk approached and the order was given to get ready to go over the top. We wiped our rifles and properly adjusted the ammunition belts around our bodies. Most of the boys were joking, but the grimness of the situation could not be hidden. We bombarded the fascists with trench mortars.

"O.K., boys!" "Get going!" The first section of the first company led the charge. The Irish followed, the Cubans, and finally the second company advanced to the right.

Rodolfo De Armas, leader of the Cuban Section, was the first one killed. After rescuing a comrade, he charged again and clenched his fist high in the air and beckoned others to follow. At that moment a bullet struck him in the leg and as he stooped forward to grip his leg with his hands two more bullets hit him, one in the head and the other in the jaw. The losses of the Cuban Section were heavy.

At the outset of the charge one of our tanks, about 40 meters ahead of our trench, was hit by an enemy bomb and exploded into flames. Soldiers near the tank were promptly compelled to leave their places of cover and seek safer spots. The flames from the tank shot upwards into the sky like a huge bonfire. We advanced very slowly and cautiously, tree by tree. The fire from the enemy was still light. As we advanced out of the olive grove, we moved into an open field with nothing but the roots of grape

vines for shelter for about 200 meters. We charged rapidly over the soft ground seeking other cover. We were supplied with plenty of grenades. As we charged half way up the field, a deadly machine gun cross-fire opened on us. By this time quite a number of our comrades, dodging from place to place like ducks in a shooting gallery, arrived very close to the fascist trenches. Others scattered all over the field, taking cover as effectively as possible behind the grape vines and ferociously digging in.

Cries of "First aid, first aid," could be heard all over the field. Comrades fell to the right of us and to the left of us, dead or wounded.

The enemy machine guns kept constantly spitting away and plowing up the ground with the powerful thuds of the bullets that dug into it. Men could be seen laboring desperately with their helmets or bayonets, digging in as much as possible. Some used bullets to scrape the dirt from under them and pile it in front of their heads for protection. Others dug with bare hands ripping and tearing the skin and finger nails. The merciless cross fire continued for hours. It was humanly impossible to advance further. Some of the men close to the fascist trenches hurled grenades.

The following extract from Paul Burns' diary gives a detailed story of the first battle:

"To the right was a company of Spanish and on the left across a road pelted by a rain of fascist bullets were the men of the Dimitroff Battalion.

"The attack began late in the afternoon and continued into the night.

"Over a field dotted by occasional olive trees with only the scant shelter of vineyard growth between, the advance was continued.

"Given a withered grape vine, a mound of earth, or the more pretentious shelter of an Olive tree and the boys dug in and opened fire on the fascist lines.

"In one of these interludes beneath an Olive tree I looked around—on my left was Charlie Donnelly. Beyond him the Cuban Section stretched between the road on the extreme left and the Irish Section. To the right of the Irish Section the American Section dug in and fired.

"A few yards away in a little hollow of earth was Captain John Scott and with him Frank O'Flaherty, one of the three O'Flaherty brothers of Boston, who distinguished themselves by their heroic service and leadership under fire.

"Donnelly joined me under the olive tree. We fired until our rifles burned our hands, with scarcely a word beyond the 'Hi Charlie, how's it goin'?' and the reply, 'Pretty good, how're the rest of the boys?'

"The infantry continued the advance. Explosive bullets split the air and the machine gun bursts raked the field. From behind a row of trees the fascists increased the fire.

"Captain Scott rising had only time to shout "Continue the advance" when he fell with three bullets in his body.

"MacDonald and Wheeler, company runners, had both been wounded. Eddie O'Flaherty, the other runner, crossed the field to call Bill Henry, leader of the Irish Section.

"Bill Henry took over command. Captain Scott was moved from the field on a stretcher. Six men moved the stretcher forward.

"At the edge of the field an eight foot drop to the road exposed the stretcher to enemy fire.

"A raking fire came from the fascist lines and four of the rescue party fell. Among them Joe Mendelowitz, shot through the left eye, the others whether killed or wounded were unknown to Gomez or myself, the two survivors. We carried our badly wounded leader to within 100 meters of the First Aid Station where we were assisted by two other comrades. At the First Aid station, my arm with a bullet wound through it was dressed. Gomez returned to the battle with another rescue party. He was wounded later."

When the order came to retire, it was done in an orderly fashion. The wounded were brought in. Several First Aid men were wounded or killed while tending to the injured comrades on the open field. Some rescue work was done by volunteers. Later we were shifted to a first line trench.

George Jacobs and J. Lenoris, unaware of the fact that the battalion had retreated, remained in their places of cover, behind a tree, not more than twenty meters from the fascists. They lay all night in the one spot and nearly froze. As they dug deeper and deeper, the snipers seeing dirt fly around the tree shot

following story of Slim Greenleaf comes from the pen of regularly. In the morning when they made their terrifying discovery they began to crawl back. In jumps of 3 to 5 meters from one hole to another they moved toward our trenches. The fascist machine gunners let loose every time they made the slightest move. In the middle of the field as the two men made a fierce dash forward, Lenoris got riddled in the back. He was rescued in the night. After eight hours of creeping, waiting and dashing, Jacobs succeeded in getting within fifty meters of our trenches where he collapsed. When he was pulled in, it was seen that his shoes were ripped almost completely from his feet by machine gun bullets. Bullet holes through his coat along the arms demonstrated how narrow was his escape. He was not wounded.

In the final history of the Lincoln Battalion many brave deeds must be recorded. One in particular may be told here. The V. O'Donnell.

"On the night of our offensive, February 23rd, Moroney, Slim Greenleaf and myself left the farm house at six p.m. as usual, with the battalion's supper on our truck. We had two kilometers of a hill climb to make mostly in low gear, over a road eaten up by explosive bullets and occasional shrapnel. Slim was our driver. He was about six feet, two inches tall and twenty-four years of age. He had been in many seamen's strikes in Boston. Slim was a most abused comrade, since apart from being a sailor he could drive a truck, and each time our hot liquids spilt in the truck, rightly or wrongly we blamed him. But Slim could take it with a smile. Slim was O.K.

"We made the hill without a scratch, though rifle and machine gun bullets exploded on each side of the road as the truck neared our lines. He drew up as usual just behind the English munition dump. My fear that our comrades would be under so much fire as to make it impossible to leave their positions to come and draw their supper was justified, since we ourselves had to seek protection from the fascists' fire—they could not see us of course—by keeping low. In fact we sat down with our backs to the stones which flanked the road.

"An hour passed, and still we waited. It was then 7:30 p.m. Presently a member of our General Staff came up and told us the position of the battalion. The hot food was useless.

"Well, we made ready to return so as to fetch canned food, when volunteers were asked for what turned out to be a particularly dangerous rescue.

"A wounded Cuban comrade, heavily built, had been calling for help from the hollow of the road, three quarters of a kilometer further on, round the bend, and had been lying there since the beginning of the attack.

"Slim listened to the plan of rescue as it was unfolded. He seemed to be visualizing in his mind's eye the cross fire of machine gun, explosive and anti-tank bullets, as they split the air, resounding on the stony bank of the road four meters above the body of our wounded comrade, whose appeals for water and aid were becoming gradually weaker and more intermittent.

"Was the fascist fire weakening, or were they merely playing a cunning game? Was there a real chance of a successful rescue? Maybe there was. Maybe they would not be able to get within a radius of four feet of our comrade.

"Whatever was passing in Slim's mind that night we shall never know. His thin and youthful face cleared as he said 'Come on, boys, let's go!' Slim and Moroney were to join the other comrades of the rescue at the dressing station, one hundred meters further on, near the bend of the road. As the night closed around them, Slim appeared to be silent, while Moroney was doing the talking.

"An hour passed at least when Moroney returned. He was alone. An explosive bullet had killed Slim as he crawled along four meters behind his companions.

"The rescue was affected during that hazardous hour by the remaining three comrades. The wounded Cuban was lost to the fascists, but Slim died in "no man's land" on the Jarama front in defense of world democracy."

This charge enabled the battalions on the left flank to move forward and consolidate into more strategic positions.

Because we moved so much, because the kitchen staff was just beginning to get properly organized, we received hardly any rations for three days. The next day, however, a huge bowl of coffee was sent through the trenches. Each man took his share and passed the bowl to others. When it got to Bob Norwood and a group of men who happened to be chatting together, he got

his cup and thrust it into the bowl with great eagerness. As he raised from a bent position with cup in hand, he said to the comrades around the group, "Come on, boys, dig in. I've got mine." At that very moment he was struck by an explosive bullet. He fell face down into the coffee—dead.

Since that time, however, the food situation has improved. We are now getting three meals a day—hot meals. They come regularly, come fire or flood. The one thing the Fascist bombing seemed never able to stop are the boys on the food trucks.

They roll right up to the front lines along the road we built for them, deposit their hot meals and we get food such as no soldiers ever got before.

Of course the boys kick, soldiers always grouse. Sometimes the beans are too hard or the meat isn't done enough, but generally speaking, we are well fed, as well fed as soldiers ever were in the history of warfare.

No praise is too high for the boys who drive those food trucks. They roll through barrages; they roll through machine-gunning and bombing from airplanes; they face fire, they face flood, they face terror of all kinds, but they get the chow through to us and then they go back and do it again.

We must here speak of Commander Merriam. He is 28 years old, formerly an instructor of Economics at the University of California and a soldier, every inch of him. He is a worker. He worked in a paper mill, in log camps, as a cement worker, in the Ford assembly plant and he has developed into a wonderful soldier.

He is the commander of the Lincoln Battalion and the commander who led us into that horrible twenty-seventh day of February. Struck in the arm and shoulder by Fascist bullets, he continued to rally the men and force the fighting. A leader all can follow, Merriam has shown that the American intellectual is a soldier when he has to fight for freedom and liberty.

The heroes of that day are numberless.

They comprise Irish, Cuban, Canadian and men of all nationalities and races. There was Copeland, the Englishman, who was a metal worker, a seaman in the British navy and a heavyweight boxer. He is now the commander of the English battalion, attached

to our group. What a fighter! He never knows when to rest or when to retire.

And the Irish—they lived up to the great tradition of their country. There are 105 of them attached to the Lincoln Battalion and they call themselves the James B. Connolly Company. How they fought and died for freedom! Commanded by Jim Kelly, they battled without rest for twenty-four hours. Captain Tumilson, Commander of the Machine Gun Company died as he picked out a spot to aid the Passionaria Battalion. The Irish loved him and they fought for him. Among those that died that day in the Irish Company was Charles Donnelly who was killed in action and William Henry who died at his side.

Probably the greatest hero of all the Irish was Father McCrorty, a priest. We learned to love him for his honesty, his bravery, his fearlessness in battle. He died a hero, shot through the head by the Fascists as he was tending a wounded man.



The Battalion Renders Homage to Those Who Have Fallen on the Field of Battle

CHAPTER SIX

WITH sixty-six American reinforcements on February 27, we prepared for another attack against the fascists. All morning a heavy rifle and machine gun barrage was sent over. The fascists did not retaliate. About noon the order came to go over the top. The sun was hot. Group by group hopped the trenches charging the fascists who were only about 250 meters away. A few groups got over with scarcely any casualties.

Then the enemy machine guns began their ugly work.

They grazed the sand bags all along the line in a constant staccato. Heavy firing came from both sides. Bullets sprayed in our direction like the heavy pounding of a riveting machine. Cross fire from many machine guns made an impenetrable stone wall against advance. More groups and sections went over. Soon the calls for First Aid came and then became insistent.

Many men were wounded just as they climbed the parapet to go over. Some from among the recent arrivals, uniformed and inexperienced, went over the top with full packs on their backs. They charged like a cyclone toward the fascists. Many wounded men crawled back to the trenches safely; many were killed in the attempt.

Before the whole battalion had gone over the top, a wounded comrade from "no man's land" made his way back to the trench, but was too sorely wounded to be able to climb over the parapet into safety, so he called for help.

Paul Niepold, section leader in the second company heard the call and quickly ran to his aid. He lifted the wounded body over the trench and seized him with his strong, muscular arms. He pulled the groaning comrade toward him. Suddenly, an explosive bullet hit Paul in the chest and he fell on his back into the trench. He lifted his head in a last gesture, his eyes blazed a farewell. His head snapped backward heavily for the last time.

Robert Merriman, battalion commander, during the charge got a bullet through the right shoulder and had to be removed to a

hospital. The men were forced to retire. The losses of the day were great.

An extract from Joseph F. Rehil's diary accounts some incidents of the day:

"I am sent with some other comrades on what is called a special detail. I wonder what it is.

"I found out about the special detail bringing supplies to the trenches, that is, food, water and ammunition. I hear we are planning an attack today. All the boys are at the front. We bring the food into the front line trenches. Jeez, the bullets sure whiz by.

"Never knew there was so many bullets in the world, and all of them seem to shoot around me.

"Saw a few of the boys being carried down on stretchers. Most of them are French or Belgians suffering head wounds from shooting over the sand bags. Very fine spirited men. They have their hands up in salute all the way down to the ambulance.

"The signal is given to go over. The Spanish on the extreme right are scurrying for shelter. Then our boys go. I pass Jimmie, he smiles confidently and I give him a slap on the shoulder. The fire from the fascists seems incessant. Rat, tat, tat, a tat! It goes on for hours. I see another comrade who came across with me on the S.S. Paris. His gun was jammed, poor guy was actually crying. I can understand how he feels, like myself, we never saw a rifle before.

"While there is no food or ammunition to be carried up, we carried down stretchers. Night is falling and it is raining very hard. The ambulance post is quite a distance away and there is a very slippery and narrow path up along the hill side. Christ, it is risky carrying the poor wounded comrades along the path. We try hard to save the wounded from being jolted.

"This goes on for hours. I just got back from one trip and there is another to be taken down.

"I am almost exhausted. All of the comrades are doing their share.

"Very few of us get a chance to eat and we're soaked to the skin.

"At five a.m. we finally go to sleep—or fall exhausted I should say. There is not a dry blanket in the whole Brigade, I think. Three of us get under a wet blanket and try to go to sleep."

Many of the world's noblest characters were lost on this important day. Douglas Seacord, Battalion Adjutant, was killed while leading the attack. He was a young man of 32 from Tennessee, with high technical and military abilities and had been an instructor at West Point. Before coming to Spain he had been writing for the New York Daily Worker. He had also done excellent union organization work among the fishermen or Provincetown, Mass.

His most amazing characteristic was that of being able to handle men. Although strict when it came to giving orders, he was never harsh nor severe. He became admired by all for his remarkable personality and capabilities of leadership and command. His personality became the pivot around which the Machine Gun Company was formed at the base. Upon arrival at the front he was made Adjutant. Under fire he was level-headed and bold.

The Irish respect their dead—they honor them. Not only the ones who died in this war against fascism, but those who died against British imperialism. I will never forget that Easter Sunday service held in the front-line trenches, facing the fascists less than two hundred paces away.

The Connolly company fell into line. Kelley stepped out and spoke, not only in honor of those who had died fighting the Fascists in Spain, but in the honor of James B. Connolly, for whom the company was named, the leader of the Easter rebellion in 1916. It was one of the most impressive sights I have ever seen.

The Cubans were no less great fighters than the Irish and the Canadians—oh, the Canadians. They proved the statement made by Lord Beatty, during the World War that the greatest soldiers in the world came from Canada.

Take the case of Francois Billedeau of Toronto. For three days he went over the top, three times each day and each time he returned, he returned with prisoners. A kindly fellow, he was loved by all of us. General Copic, the Czech who commanded the Division, was so pleased with the work and the heroism shown by Billedeau that he decorated him and presented him with a gold watch. Billedeau tells stories of Almeria, the town to which he was sent when he was wounded. It is a town in southeastern Spain

where many wounded soldiers are recuperating. (*This is the town which the German battleship shelled: Editor's note.*)

The Negroes in the front-line trenches are showing their white-skinned brothers that they, too, have a hatred of fascism. There is Oliver Law, who took command of the Tom Mooney Machine Gun Company, highly respected by his fellow soldiers, he has also been honored by the supreme command.

Then there is Rochester, a short, slim American negro who, in hand-to-hand fighting has proven himself the value of four men and Alonzo Watson, hero of heroes, who died fighting five Fascists in hand-to-hand battle. Let us not forget, either, the heroism of the Centurio Gutterrez, the Cuban section, fighting for freedom for Spain and hoping for a similar fight for freedom in Cuba. Heroes, every one.

I should like to tell you of William Garland, another American Negro, who suffered a bullet right through him. As he lay in the hospital, he sang spirituals and other songs which entertained the other wounded lying with him. He was considered by the doctors and nurses as one of the greatest assets of the hospital. Many a man whose mind was low was cured mentally by Garland's cheery and happy voice.

One New York boy who died heroically was Milton Rappaport. He was found five yards from a fascist trench still clutching the Mills bomb he was prepared to throw when the machine gun's burst got him.

Tales of heroism are so frequent here that one has to stop and think which one is more outstanding than any of the others.

Take the story of Abraham Skolnick, a dressmaker from New York. Skolnick fought through all the fights of the 26th, 27th, 28th of February. On the night of the 28th, he was relieved of duty. However, he volunteered to go out and bomb machine-gun nests on his own hook. Loading down his puny 120-pound body with twenty Mills bombs, he crawled over the top and returned in the morning with two bombs, saying he could find no more machine-gun nests.

Who in the Lincoln Battalion will not remember February 27th 'til the day of his death? Is there anyone in the battalion so caloused that he does not shudder when he thinks of the day when men cried in their desperation or whose faces were frozen into

immobility by the horror of it? The day when men of the Lincoln Battalion learned that all values are relative to life, and when life is cheap all other values cease to exist.

What of heroism can be said when all of the men of the battalion charged into face of certain death—to escape it only by some freak whim of fate? Was it cowardice that made some men scream like stricken animals, after a bullet had plowed itself into their flesh; was it bravery that compelled others to keep their reason though their life blood was streaming from their bodies? To describe the brave deed of one who risked his life for the sake of a comrade is to forget or ignore those countless deeds of desperate courage that were not recorded on human minds befuddled by the horror that encompassed them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AFTER the 27th the whole line concerned itself with consolidating the gains made. The fascists were prevented from getting control of the Valencia-Madrid road. So a regular system of zig-zag trenches were constructed with sand bag supports and peep holes to do the firing from. Communications trenches leading out of the main trenches gave an intricate network of narrow passage-ways fairly safe from stray bullets. The fascists too arranged a systematized line of trenches.

Martin Hourihan, former school teacher and seaman, succeeded Merriman as battalion commander.

Light exchange of rifle and machine gun fire continued at all times between both sides. It became more or less a battle between sniper against sniper, except that our artillery shelled the fascists almost every day. Morning—noon—and night, about their meal times the fascists received a disturbing barrage. They did not often respond with their artillery. Trench mortars, however, were showered upon us on numerous occasions.

The day March 14 is chalked up as a day of particular significance to the Lincoln Battalion and in the history of the brigade. On this day the fascists made a desperate attempt to break through our lines. They concentrated their heaviest fire on the battalion to our left which consisted of recently enlisted, young Spanish troops. It was a sulky day. It rained in jerks. Enemy tanks fired in our trenches and charged toward the young troops. Because of inexperience, confusion followed among them and they left their trenches to seek better cover behind the hills. The fascists, alert to what had happened, jumped into the evacuated trenches. The Americans were quick to grasp the criticalness of the situation and fought their way into the left flank. A few Moors were killed and the others fled. To the extreme left the fascists succeeded in holding 150 meters of our trenches.

J. Roberts Raven, who had returned to the front lines a few days previously, after having recovered from a wound suffered

during the attack of February 23rd, was one of the first to run to the left flank after the break. He was seriously injured in an heroic attempt to rout the fascists. This letter from the hospital written to P. Cooperman tells the story:

Dear Coop,

"Just writing to let you know what happened to me after you left. I rushed up about 350 meters of empty trenches bringing up all the Spaniards I could rally around. Then I met a Canadian. The trenches had been filling up gradually at our exhortation of 'No Pasaran.' Suddenly we ran into four soldiers whom we thought were our own at first, but their helmets and clothes proved them to be fascists. They tried to capture us. We tore away from them and ran back thirty meters and grabbed some grenades. My Canadian comrade opened the lever of his grenade and handed it to me which he should not have done. However, I crawled up towards the fascists under cover of the Spaniards' fire who had just come up, and was about to toss the grenade when there was a terrific concussion in front of me and I felt my face torn off. Naturally, I dropped the grenade from my hand having been knocked out. My own grenade exploded at my feet filling my legs with shrapnel.

"My comrades must have retreated again and I kept crawling blindly, dragging my body through those trenches over all kinds of obstacles calling 'Comrade, Comrade.' Words cannot describe the agony, the exhaustion with which I dragged myself through those narrow trenches. Finally, I felt somebody near me and he touched me, and an hour or so later somebody was carrying me and I landed at the hospital here. Most of the shrapnel in my legs has been removed, also both my eyes. They were too bad for repair. Tell my comrades I said, 'No Pasaran' and I hope we didn't lose those trenches."

On April 5, the battalion again went over the top supporting an advance movement on the left flank. The Garibaldi Battalion, fresh from their victories at Guadalajara, led the attack. The Domoroski Battalion to the right of the Garibaldi charged next, then came the Spanish troops and the Lincoln Battalion. The fascists bombarded our lines with trench mortars, heavy artillery, and rifle grenade bombs. A sweeping machine gun and rifle fire ripped open our sand bags. One of our tanks charging in front

of the battalions was incapacitated by anti-tank bullets. The Garibaldi Battalion recaptured the trenches which were lost to the fascists on March 14, and rounded up 150 prisoners.

Dave Jones, acting political head of the battalion, was wounded in the upper right arm in the act of rescuing a wounded comrade. The casualties of the day were slight.



Soldier of the Lincoln Battalion Waiting for the Signal to Go Over the Top

CHAPTER EIGHT

AS we became situated in a definite sector of the front, the need for diversion was felt. Frederick Lutz, new political chief, carried on the work where Jones left off. A canteen was set up where incidental articles could be bought, such as: candles, flash lights, writing material, etc., far too little to meet the needs of the men. The one thing that the men wanted most could not be obtained . . . AMERICAN CIGARETTES!!!

A small library was established that had on hand books by Jack London, Sinclair Lewis, Fannie Hurst, John Dos Passos, and many other well known writers. Magazines were passed out. Newspapers to meet the needs of practically every language group were available. There was so little reading material that the print was almost worn off the pages by constant thumbing. God, how we longed for more books from home. A barber shop was created to meet the tonsorial requirements of the men.

A hole in the ground deep enough to offer sufficient protection from stray bullets and a barber with a sharp razor, did a lot to keep the men in a healthy appearance. Next a radio was bought. Three loudspeakers arranged at proper distances made it possible for the whole battalion to listen in at convenient moments. A wall paper was made up of two iron posts with a canvas shelter half stretched between them. The name was given it after suggestions came in from the comrades. It was called "The Daily Manana."

The paper included news of the day, appropriate newspaper clippings, humor, drawings and cartoons sketched by local talent, special notices, letters of interest, biographies of those who died in battle, and stories, experiences written by the men themselves. In this way the wall paper became not only news but served as an expression of human emotion and gratified the intellectual needs.

An annoying problem was that of lice. The crawling vermin entrenched themselves in our clothes and conducted a War among themselves. What is more uncomfortable than lice making their nests on one's body? Of course a period of delousing followed.

Dr. William Pike, New York physician, did a great deal to keep the health standard of the men at a high level.

Seventy-three days of trench life, our best comrades killed in our presence, artillery driving us underground, bullets whining and crackling overhead, battles, blood, work, sometimes hunger—in spite of everything the battalion has carried on.

On April 29, the long expected relief for the XV Brigade came. The Lincoln Battalion with the other battalions of the Brigade was removed from the front and sent to the ancient town of Alcala de Henares, the birth place of Cervantes, author of "Don Quixote."

The fascist airplanes visit this town almost every other night dropping hundreds of bombs. Churches have been shattered and many homes in the working class district brought down in a heap of cement and bricks. This has been done to terrorize the population. The majority of those killed have been women and children. Now when night comes thousands seek refuge in underground tunnels of the town itself and about three thousand others—places in the holes of the hills nearby.

In this village we celebrated May Day. The Americans stood out prominently in orderliness and discipline as they marched from the barracks down the main street and into the Plaza de San Diego.

The Infantry led the parade; next came the Machine Gun Company, followed by a company of Spaniards; last came the First Aid and Medical Corp.

At the head of the parade a huge wreath with a red ribbon streaming from the bottom of it was solemnly carried by an American and a Spaniard. It was in memory of the comrades who died in action. The wreath was attached between two vertical rifles, and horizontal cross sticks above and below it provided a sturdy support. Across the top was a board of a half a meter in width in the colors of the government flag—red, yellow, purple—with the inscription "En Memoria."

In all their actions the men of the Lincoln Battalion have distinguished themselves by their unswerving devotion to the cause they have come to Spain to defend.

This is the story of the Lincoln Battalion thus far.

There is still work to be done—

This is the story of the Abraham Lincoln
Battalion, so far . . .

There is still work to be done—

TWO thousand Americans still man the trenches, writing their determination in blood that fascism shall not pass. They face great suffering and hardship. Every hour of the long day sees new sacrifices for the cause of human liberty.

These great American heroes give of themselves without complaint or grumbling, yet suffer for lack of those little comforts of which they deprived themselves to go into the trenches.

They write to us for American cigarettes. A good smoke helps to ease the strain of the long night patrol. They want chocolates—books and magazines to satisfy their intellectual hunger during periods of inactivity—socks—sweaters—blankets—first aid kits—shoes—these and other comforts which cost so little yet mean so much to the American fighters **MUST** be sent to them.

Yes, there is still work to be done. Work for us as well as for them. We must contribute what we can to help the men who are giving their lives to help us.

Won't you send your contribution today by money order or check?

Fraternally yours,
PHIL BARD,
Executive Secretary.

FRIENDS OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BATTALION
Room 810, 125 West 45th Street, New York City. LA. 4-4175

I enclose \$.....as my contribution to the
Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion.

I pledge myself to assist further in the work to help the men in
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