

BILL FEELEY

SINGER, STEEL ERECTOR, INTERNATIONAL BRIGADER

("one man in his time plays many parts" – W. Shakespeare)



**PUBLISHED BY THE CONSTRUCTIONAL DIVISION OF
THE AUEW AND THE GREATER MANCHESTER TRADE
UNION SPANISH SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE**

This Pamphlet was produced as a Tribute to the Life and Work of

BILL FEELEY

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SPONSORED BY
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AN INTRODUCTION FROM JACK JONES (FORMER GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS' UNION AND CHAIRMAN OF THE TUC GENERAL COUNCIL, INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE, A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE.)

This publication represents one man's view of the Spanish Civil War. His description of the period, based on his own experience, is moving and of great interest.

The fact that he was prepared to leave his home and if necessary lay down his life in a foreign country, in what he regarded as a battle for freedom, is a tribute to him.

His independent working-class outlook is emphasised throughout his writings.

It was this independence which undoubtedly led to his profound hatred of Fascism.

Over the last 40 years or so the world has witnessed the inhuman features of Fascism and the Democratic forces of the people drove back the dark bestial dictatorships in many countries. Unfortunately this did not happen in Spain until recent times. But the flower of democracy and liberty has been reborn there; it is a delicate plant and strong efforts will be needed to help it grow strong.

There and everywhere the remnants of ultra reaction are ready to take advantage of any situation to restrict the progress of ordinary people. Encouraging educational efforts to spread knowledge and understanding about the values of democracy is a vital necessity. Extending the areas of participation by the people themselves in the making of national and local policy decisions is the main approach by which democracy can be sustained. This is well understood in the Spain of today which is witnessing a remarkable growth of trade unionism and democratic political expression.

But we in Britain must be vigilant too. The activities of the National Front and other extreme right-wing movements serve to remind us that the influences which brought Franco to power in Spain and which murdered Allende in Chile are present in our own country. Young people in particular need to be made aware of these dangers and I hope they will join up and strengthen the trade unions as one means of preserving the democratic traditions of Britain.

Bill Feeley's example could be an inspiration to young people to play their part in the fight against Fascism in today's conditions. I hope many young people will read this publication. Bill Feeley saw Spain from his own outlook and background and some of the views he expresses might not be accepted by everybody (including myself !) but his work should stimulate thought and add something more to the real history of Spain's struggle for 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'.

Jack Jones
1.6.1978.

BILL FEELEY—THE TRADE UNIONIST

by John Baldwin, OBE, General Secretary
AUEW (Constructional Section)

Bill Feeley died on 25 October 1977. Bill started the St Helens Branch of AUEW (Constructional Section), and was an honorary member of our Union. While there is a Union, he will always be remembered.

He was a dedicated Socialist and saw that the struggle to improve living standards and conditions must, of necessity, be linked with the political struggle for a new social system—Socialism.

He was one of a small band of heroes, members of our Union, who served in the International Brigade, along with Sam Wild, Fred Copeman, George Cornwallis, Johnny Monks and Syd Booth, who invested their lives to stop fascism at a time when it was not understood that fascism and racialism could only lead to world war and a curtailment of all human liberties.

Our Union, from its inception, has always stood for Socialism and international brotherhood. At our National Conference in 1977 the following resolution was passed:

“This National Conference congratulates our EC and the TUC and the Labour Party on its splendid stand in support of the Spanish Workers fighting to free themselves from fascist dictatorship.

“Conference recalls with pride the outstanding role played by some of our members who served in the International Brigade and we call upon our EC to support in every possible way solidarity and action to end fascism and for peace, democracy and a free Spain.”

Bill Feeley was a reflection of that spirit—a truly human man. Not for him the narrow sectarian attitude. His love of music and culture brought him into company with peoples of all lands. He abhorred bigotry and sectarianism in any form.

Bill was a shy and modest man and at all times sought a development of the movement and never any position for himself. He was one of the rank and file, unsung and often unnoticed who carried out the basic organisational work without which no union could exist. Leaders come and go, it is the rank and file, people like Bill who are the power and the strength of the organised working-class.

I remember his happiness at the ending of Francoism in Spain and the birth of democracy. I was glad he lived to see it. He never at any time wavered in his belief that the struggle was always worth it and had a Socialist optimism that there would be a ‘different order of things’.

All Bill Feeley’s life was given to the winning of a democratic Socialist Britain. He epitomised the words of Santiago Carrillo, the General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party:

“Is it worth giving one’s life, or going to prison, if necessary, for the cause of Socialism and freedom? With all its deformities, with all its problems, Socialism is the only system which puts an end to capitalist exploitation. It is the only system in which the material and moral conditions can be created with the development of freedom, with the development of man.”

HONORARY MEMBERSHIP TALKING BLUES

When I first started steel erection
I thought "This job's far from perfection.
"I'll stick it for maybe a year or two,
"And then I'll look for pastures new."
But strong in the arm and weak in the head,
I reckoned without that sticky red lead.
It held me down and changed my plan,
And now I'm a veteran spiderman.

Thirty-five years with a union card;
Carrying that was not too hard,
But messing about with stanchion and girder
For thirty-five years—that's bloody murder.
Young man, if you think our job's exciting,
Do anything else not iron fighting.
Lay bricks, make bottles, sell door-to-door,
Get work on a farm, in a garage or store.

Keep away from industry's highest place.
You'll need more up there than amazing grace.
You'll shiver and cling, with your body all numb,
While the winter wind makes the steelwork hum;
You'll hammer and wrestle and drag and mule
On a structure designed by an obvious fool,
And when with snot and blood you're plastered,
You'll call the draftsman a stupid bastard.

For the tallest tales you could wish to hear,
Join the steel erectors over a beer,
But, when from your seat you have to rise,
Try not to trip over the girders and guys.
Joking apart, where workers combine,
In demonstration or picket line
To better their lot, those men from space
You'll find, fightin' in Industry's Highest Place.

W. FEELEY

OUR COMRADE IN SPAIN—AND SINCE

I was pleased to be asked to write a few words about my old friend and comrade, Bill Feeley.

My association with Bill ranged from the battlefields of Spain in the ranks of the International Brigade to the struggles of the Constructional Engineering Union for improved wages, safety and the closed shop in the steel erecting industry. Bill was the moving force in the formation of the St Helens Branch of the CEU, of which he was Secretary. He was a member of the North-West Area Conference, a Shop Steward and delegate to the Union's Biennial Conference.

He was a modest man, with a great sense of humour. Bill was also a cultured man, a lover of songs, music and poetry. He played a role in the work of the Workers' Music Association, attending their summer schools and conferences regularly. He was an accomplished singer, not only in English, but in Spanish and Italian; a prolific writer of songs and music for the guitar, an instrument he loved to the extent that I noticed when visiting him in hospital just before he died that his guitar was alongside his bed.

It is not possible for all of us to be as accomplished as Bill Feeley, but it is possible to follow his example of dedication to the cause of trade unionism and the working-class, thus assuring peace and progress which will enable all mankind, in unity, to establish the kind of world Bill Feeley dreamed of and worked for.

Salud,

Sam Wild
Commander British Battalion, Spain

The Common Cause of all Progressive Mankind
Excerpt from "Britons in Spain" by William Rust

On the departure of all the International Brigades from Spain, La Passionara, addressing the women of Spain said:

"Mothers ! Women ! When the years pass and the wounds of war are staunched; when a present of freedom, peace and well-being dispels the memories of the sorrowful and bloody days of the past; when feelings of rancour are dying away and all Spaniards feel equal pride in their free country—then speak to your children. Tell them of the men of the Internation Brigades.

"Tell them how, coming overseas and mountains, crossing frontiers, bristling with bayonets and watched for by ravening dogs thirsty to tear at their flesh, these men reached our country as Crusaders of Freedom, to fight and die for the freedom and independence of Spain over which hung the threat of German, and Italian fascism. They gave up everything: love, country, home, fortune, mothers, wives, brothers and children and came to say to us: 'We are here. Your cause, the cause of Spain, is ours; it is the common cause of all advanced and progressive mankind.'"

The British Battalion arrived back in London on 7 December 1938. They were met at Victoria Station by Mr C R Attlee, who welcomed them as "heroes of the democratic faith, back once more to continue the struggle in this country."

He was followed by Sir Stafford Cripps, William Gallacher, Tom Mann and the President of the Mine Workers' Federation, Will Lawther, whose youngest brother was killed in Spain. Then Sam Wild replied with a few brisk soldierly sentences: "We intend to keep the promise we made to the Spanish people before we left—that we would change our front but continue to fight in England for the assistance of Spain."

A sharp word of command rang out and these soldiers of the real Britain, still mobilized in the cause of democracy and peace, lined up on the narrow platform and the Battalion led by three wounded men began its last march.

HASTA LA VISTA MADRID

by Bob Cooney

Political Commisar—British Battalion International Brigade

Written for the Reunion of the British Battalion of the International Brigade in the Cora Hotel, London, 1965.

Seven and twenty years !
That long ?
It seems but yesterday
We left that war torn hill
Above Gandesa

Is it perhaps because I'm growing old
That thought now skips so lightly down the years ?
And the travail of a quarter-century
Melts in the vision
Of those great days
Those days we **LIVED**
And **KNEW** that we were living

We were at war—
And yet we were at peace
We knew a peace we had not known at home
Where conscience nagged
And conflict raged within us

SPAIN !

We woke each morning to the thought of Spain
Spain in our thoughts all day
And into each troubled night
Disturbing thoughts
Reproaching thoughts
Home was no longer home
For we were in the rear
While the battle raged at the front

Comrades we'd never seen
Yet knew—and loved—
How dear they had grown—
Leaving their ripening crops
To reap a different, bitter harvest
Fighting a war we knew was rightly ours
Since the fascist poison-weed
Drew sustenance from the rotten soil of Clevedon
Making England a dirty word

England had to be cleansed
So we went to Spain
Where the defeat of Hitler started
—And more than that—
For freedom's an infectious thing
No frontier can contain it

And many a freedom fighter
Who served his stern apprenticeship in Spain
Proved every inch a craftsman
In later battles
In the Hitler rear
In Italy and in France
In the hills of Yugoslavia
In Germany itself

—Even in far off Cuba
Men who had learned their craft in Spain
Communicated skills
To a newer generation
Of Freedom fighters
Giving this proof—this guarantee
No freedom fight is ever really lost
While men can learn
Each human mind's an outpost
And the frontiers of freedom expand
Conquering minds and hearts
Prelude to the conquest
Of cities and of States
Till the world is wholly free
Then men will strive for higher freedoms still

What does El Caudilo see today ?
As he sits and broods
Lonely and afraid
In his palace—now become a jail
What does he see ?

Hitler's gone !
Mussolini's gone !
Batista's gone !
Who goes next ?
SALAZAR ?
—or even ?
Perish the thought
But the thought won't perish

In London today,
In Paris today,
In Warsaw, Prague, and Rio de Janeiro
There are men and women
Exiled those seven and twenty years

But today
There's a spring in their step
And a meaningful phrase on their lips
A phrase that is **more** than a phrase
It is a promise !
A promise to Spain

To themselves and to each other
And a promise to you Caudilo !

“HASTA LA VISTA, MADRID”

How do you like that promise, Caudilo ?
Will you be there ?
We'd like to know
For we are coming too

There is so much
We want to see once more
We will stroll in the Puerto del Sol
And the Ramblas or Barcelona
We will cross the Ebro
And drink with our friends in Mola
—Friends who'll be **FREE** !

We will look at them
And at each other
And each of us will think
This is why I came in '36

And if I live to be a hundred
I'll have this to be glad about
I went to Spain !
Because of that great yesterday
I am part of the greater tomorrow

HASTA LA VISTA, MADRID !

The Following Account of Bill's Funeral is Reprinted from the St Helens Reporter:

Nearly 200 people bade a sad farewell to old soldier and life-long Union man, Bill Feeley, last Friday.

The crematorium was so packed some people were forced to wait outside during the service.

He was a founder-member of the AUEW (Constructional Section) in St Helens, and was made an honorary member two years ago after 35 years' membership.

Billy, aged 63, of Hammill Avenue, Dentons Green, was also the last British Soldier to fire a shot in anger against Franco in Spain in 1938.

He was a member of the International Brigade which was formed to fight Fascism in 1936.

When the troops were ordered out as the war was lost Billy and other British soldiers stayed as late as possible to give the others time to retreat. He was wounded in the process, but made it back.

Two of his comrades on that mission paid their respects on Friday. These were Syd Booth from Manchester, and his commanding officer, Major Sam Wild from Altrincham, who won the Medal of Valour in the campaign.

Also at the funeral were Mr Wilf Charles and Sam Howard, the North-West Divisional Organisers for the AUEW, and steel erectors from all over the area who knew Billy through his union involvement.

He was a national delegate and worked at Ince Refinery until shortly before he died in hospital.

Billy's other main interest was playing and composing music. When the Brigade was featured on television, he played the guitar and sang a song he composed about Spain and the War.

Lloyd's letter's too late

ST. HELENS-born Bill Feeley and Australian Lloyd Kernot were comrades-in-arms in the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War and later were merchant seamen together.

But they lost touch with each other for almost 20 years, and when Lloyd persuaded his daughter to write to St. Helens Lions in an attempt to trace Bill, he was just four months too late.

For Bill died last October, ironically in the midst of organising a reunion for Spanish Civil War veterans.

Lloyd Kernot's daughter, Leone Rennison, wrote to the Lions to seek their help.

Although Bill is now dead, his brother John still lives in St. Helens and the Lions were able to contact him, and he has now written back to Mrs. Rennison with the news.

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"There Are No Political Parties in the Republic Today—Only Anti-Fascists."

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

BILL FEELEY
International Brigade

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR 1936-38

Bill Feeley

My parents were Irish immigrants, and I was sent for education to an old Roman Catholic elementary school, blackened with the much of the St Helens air. Elementary meant, generally, fitting you for exploitation by the all-powerful glass magnatures, or the pit owners, if you were lucky, otherwise, to sign your name, twice weekly, at the Labour Exchange.

To sublimate any unhealthy aspirations we might have to improve our world, there were two religious lessons a day, with a holiday brochure for the hereafter called *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*. To avoid caning, we had to learn the answers to its questions, parrot fashion. There was no obligation to learn their meaning. One boy asked teacher to explain a sin intriguingly defined as "all wilful pleasure in the irregular motions of the flesh." Sir replied "You'll know when you're a bit older." Now nearly fifty years older, the best guess I can hazard is relief from severe constipation? Maybe not.

When I was fifteen, some well-meaning person sponsored me for a job in a local bottle-works, where bad working conditions and low wages were deadlocked by the employees' terror of unemployment. St Helens had more than its fair share of the nation's two million workless.

It was a period of poverty, slums, works and pit closures, vicious means-tests and hunger marches. In this atmosphere, the British people were conned, by one of those fraudulent "patriotic" appeals, which are used with nauseating regularity on our political scene, into electing a "National Government", open to all reactionaries and careerists, whatever their previous label.

This gang "solved" Britain's problems by appeasing the Fascist regimes of Germany, Italy and Japan, until World War 2 loomed dangerously close. When Hitler and Mussolini joined forces with Franco to subjugate the Spanish people, meeting stubborn, unexpected resistance, the National Government dug up the ancient Foreign Enlistments Act, to make it illegal for British volunteers to join the International Brigades.

In the so-called Non-Intervention Pact, they conspired to deny arms to the Spanish Republic, making it a sitting duck for the lavishly supplied tanks, planes and submarines of Italy and Germany.

By August 1937, along with two other St Helens men, I had decided, if possible, to go to Spain. In the atmosphere of frustration that prevailed, it was like plotting an escape from a long stretch in gaol. We knew that only the Communist Party would be brave enough to flout the convenient Foreign Enlistments Act, so we approached the local branch, and were soon put into the pipeline.

This meant first going to London, and there obtaining weekend tourist tickets to Paris, which served as temporary passports. In Paris, foreign volunteers were accommodated for a couple of days, then directed to a train for Beziers, a town near the Pyrenees, with a Communist municipalite. I followed a bunch of Canadians into a compartment, trustfully because they spoke some French, but we were on the wrong half of the train, and, eventually, found ourselves in a small country station, well off the proper route.

The only transport available to get us back on course was a small Chevrolet truck, whose owner agreed to convey us, but when those husky Canadians mounted it, the back tyres went almost flat. In the end, Blacky, the biggest of my companions, rode astride the bonnet, to spread the weight. Riding through the sunlit countryside and waving to every astonished passer-by, we were in high spirits. As one Canadian remarked: "Well, I wish we'd got the right train, but this is more fun than a picnic."

The south-bound train stopped for a while at every little station, and, at one of these, some of my friends alighted to buy lemonade from a platform stall. When they re-boarded, and the train still lingered, the youngest Canadian and I jumped out to quench our thirst. Then the guard's whistle blew, as my companion was trying to press a tip on the reluctant lemonade vendor, a young girl. The train started slowly moving, and we could have jumped on, but the platform staff pulled us back and slammed the doors, leaving us feeling not only foolish, but also apprehensive.

The next train to Beziere was due four hours hence, and every platform along the route was patrolled by non-intervention enforcement officials, wearing black arm-bands. In that small station, we were very conspicuous, and we cringed as one of these gentry approached. I felt like running off, but, to give him his due, Monsieur Official was very pleasant about it. We pretended not to understand even the most obvious questions, and a small interested group gathered round us.

Eventually, they brought a schoolboy with a fair command of English, so we had to answer.

"Passports?" On the train.

"Luggage?" On the train.

"Have you friends abroad?" Yes.

"Where are you going?" Beziere.

"And where then?" Back to Paris.

Finally, with broad grins all around "Not to Spain?" Our feigned horror at this suggestion brought an explosion of laughter, because everybody knew perfectly well we were lying.

However, a blind eye was turned, and, when our train came, a fraternal porter slapped our shoulders and said "Votre train, camarades." One of the black band men worried us a little by entering our compartment, but he alighted at the next station, leaving us in peace.

The other Canadians were waiting for us in the station at Beziere, a pleasant town where we stayed that night and most of next day. My two mates from St Helens had already departed for Spain.

The next evening, we boarded a coach for conveyance to the Pyrenees. French workers gave us the Popular Front clenched fist salute, as we passed them on the road. Near the frontier, we were joined by two guides, who distributed rope-soled shoes all round, then led us into the mountains, as the sun began to set. We walked in single file all night, pausing for just one brief rest, trusting the guides completely in the darkness. When they said "Jump" we jumped, when they said "Climb" we climbed. As dawn broke, Spain lay below us, and our feet were very sore.

One American looked back up the savage, boulder-stewn slope, and said "See all them rocks up there? Well, I trod on every one of 'em."

That was the first hardship of our military careers, and by no means the worst, except for one of my St Helens friends, Jim Johnson who, after the Pyrenees ordeal, was medically examined, then sent home because of a weak heart. For the rest of us, there

was the Spanish food, wet stew with floating oil, synthetic coffee and a red wine, so dry it just screwed your face up, till you acquired tolerance, and there were the flies, millions of them, that just refused to be brushed off. Then followed the dreary journey to the base at Albacete, which, somehow, lasted two days, by train and lorry, and the issue of new uniforms, which could split down the seams if you breathed too hard.

I was one of about twelve British recruits sent to a sniping school, where we trained with new Russian rifles but, in the absence of equipment, learned only the theory of range-finding and telescopic sights. This was in a pine wood, at a place called Pozo Rubio, and we slept three to a tent. To bathe, we walked about a mile to a stream, through dry, grey vegetation, with cricket-like insects spraying up from our feet and keeping up a continuous chirruping.

Along with the English-speaking section, which included Americans and Canadians, there was a German-speaking one, who looked the most convincing soldiers, and a Slav section, who sang gloriously nearly all the time, whether marching or resting. At the camp bar, you could buy nearly every kind of drink, except beer or whisky, also useful items like needles and thread. The latter were essential, because the Russian instructors wouldn't let you shoot on the range, if your pants were torn. All in all, they took a dim view of our section's unsoldierly bearing and inability to march in step. When we were on parade one morning, one looked in our tent and asked "Who lives in here? Gypsies?"

At the end of the four-weeks' course, our section won the shooting contest, and earned from the same man the sardonic title "Best shots, but the worst soldiers."

One of my tent-mates was Billy Donaldson, a likeable Scots lad, who was something of an expert on mountaineering and camping, also a connoisseur on booze. Led by him, we experimented with the strange multi-coloured liquids in the bar, until we decided that the best for us was orange curacao.

The other man was Joe Fillingham, who had originated from Warrington. He was a Communist Party member, and from him I learned the Red Flag, and, to me, the strangely-worded Internationale.

With some others, I contracted a painful dysentery at Pozo Rubio, despite avoidance of the suspect well-water. A Chinese doctor gave me a large capsule, which brought some relief, but the agonising symptoms kept recurring, for some weeks afterwards.

When we joined the British Battalion at Fuentes del Ebro, it was a bit of a shock to be issued with rusty old rifles, which had been fished out of a river. How they got there, we were not told. There, I saw my first dead soldier, a young man laid out in a cemetery, with a bullet hole through his forehead.

Of the sniping school "graduates", I alone was allocated to a machine-gun outpost, a fact to which I may owe my survival, as the mortality rate amongst the rest, in the infantry companies, was appallingly high.

Every man in that first machine-gun crew was an ex-Catholic, but the Christianity flexible enough to bless the armies to Franco and Mussolini had been too much for us all. One, Danny Doyle, had left England without telling his mother, then wrote to her from Spain. She sent him a parcel, with a letter saying "I was said to learn you had joined the enemies of God. I hope the cake keeps fresh."

In the nearby town of Quinto, I went into the badly battered church. It had been used as a last-ditch fortress by the Fascists, who had taken some civilians in with them. The place was littered with enemy ammunition. Seeing something shining in a crack of the stone wall, I fished out a small rosary, which someone had evidently hidden, in

fear of what we wicked Reds might do to the bearer of such a token. I wished I could have told this scared person that my own mother, whom I had left weeping at home such a short time before, always carried a rosary in her handbag.

I was intrigued by Spanish swearing, which was all profanities like "Shit on God!" rather than the British sexual vocabulary. I wondered if this was just a product of the Civil War, until I revisited Spain, as a tourist, in 1975, and heard the same exclamation used in casual conversation.

The food was better with the Battalion, because our English quartermaster, "Hooky" Walker, produced a more palatable end-product from the Spanish army rations. On the debit side, we all acquired body lice, from which there was no escape, despite the periodic delousing ritual, which always failed to kill the eggs in our blankets.

In November, from a rest position near Madrid, Joe Fillingham and I shared a one-day leave in that strange city. One suburb was the front line, within artillery range of the centre. There life went on almost normally, with shops, bars, brothels and buses functioning. We slept in the Hotel Alfonso, whose lifts had been immobilised by shell-fire. In the Puerta del Sol, we found a photographer, who posed us for a picture, and faithfully sent the copies on to us, care of the Battalion.

Major Attlee and Ellen Wilkinson visited us at the village of Mondejar, and, in his honour, the Number One Company was christened the Major Attlee Company. When he got back to Westminster, the Tories took him to task for the bad company he was keeping, but no British politician ever bestowed his name on a more illustrious body of fighting men.

We spent Christmas, 1937, in Mas de las Matas, a village in the Aragon, and I can't remember any Christmas dinner I've enjoyed better than the miracle contrived by Hooky Walker and his kitchen staff. At this time, the Battalion was visited by Professor J B S Haldane, a great progressive popular science writer, and Harry Pollitt, the then General Secretary of the Communist Party, an eloquent ex-boilermaker with a warm, human personality.

Behind our celebrations, we were aware of the Spanish troops freezing in the snow of the mountains round Teruel, which they encircled and took, by a brilliant surprise Republican manoeuvre, at the end of December. Franco's generals had been caught with their pants down, but we knew that massive counter-attacks would soon follow and we would be involved. In early January, we moved up to the front, and it was cold.

We floundered through deep snow drifts to the top of a hill, where we found there were ready-made trenches and dugouts filled to the brim with snow. The shovels went into action, and, that night, we slept quite snugly. The next day was bright and sunny, but the snow was still there, and I slid down the slope with the mess detail to meet the food wagon on the road below. The stew was in dixies, easily carried by two men. I was handed the cognac issue—in a wide shallow pan! Aware of its need, I tried hard to save it, but, floundering up that hill in soft soft, sometimes sinking to the hips, it was impossible, and, halfway up, we did the only sensible thing; we drank what was left before it, too, sloshed away.

After that, we were billeted in a disused railway tunnel, with long icicles hanging from the roof. Fires were kept burning, and all our eyes smarted from the smoke. I was glad to do a night guard outside, despite the cold. We received oranges with the juice frozen inside, and our breakfast "coffee" became brown ice, if not drunk quickly.

When we moved to Teruel, itself, the machine-gun company occupied a deep, fortified trench, which successfully withstood the full power of Franco's artillery. We were

luckier than the rifle companies, who were caught in the open valley below our position, and severely mauled, in a defensive action. The Major Attlee Company lost thirteen killed, including my former tent-mates, Bill Donaldson and Joe Fillingham, and eight more Battalion soldiers who died in the same battle.

After five weeks in this trench, I had almost finished my two-hour guard stint one night, when a runner appeared, with the message "Get 'em all out. We're moving."

Soon, we were walking in two files, on either side of a narrow road, with unlighted lorries tearing up and down the centre. Despite all my efforts to combat fatigue, I kept dozing off on my feet and straying into the road. It was a scarifying experience.

As day broke, they packed us into the backs of lorries, till flesh and blood could compress no further, and we set off up the zig-zag mountain road. At the top of a ridge, we emerged into bright sunlight, with the only visible clouds a floor beneath us, and a few mountain peaks sticking out. Then we descended again, through the vapours, into the murk of the January day.

These "camion" rides always went on for hours and hours, with the lads sometimes making playful bets as to whether we would go over the cliff at the next mountain bend. One member of our gun crew, despairing of a stop, relieved his bowels over the side, in full flight. That polluted slipstream got our heads down more effectively than the heaviest shellfire.

The Spanish truckdrivers assumed an air of authority, when transporting the foreign soldiers. One, driving a truck that I was on, ignored several urgent signals for him to stop, and carried on sublimely till a shell burst at the roadside, about five yards from us. Then he executed the quickest three point turn I have ever seen, to get back out of range.

After leaving Teruel, we fought a successful action a hundred miles to the north, at Segura de los Banos. In spite of a prodigious expenditure of shells and aerial bombs, the enemy only managed to kill two of our men, but left a pile of their own corpses on a hillside. Then we returned to the Teruel front, but, by this time, the town had been recaptured by the fascists' counter offensive. Their further advance was contained, however, and a quiet period followed.

During this time, we received a lot of new recruits from Britain, and those veterans who were a bit off-colour qualified for a ten-day convalescence at Benocasim, on the Mediterranean shore. I was amongst these, and looked forward to the break, in spite of the verdict of a previous visitor "It's all right, if you like eating cauliflower every day."

The convalescent centre was a cluster of villas with a private beach, once a playground of the wealthy. Each patient had a daily medical check-up and, when my jaw swelled up, an Austrian dentist extracted a hollow tooth, very skilfully, in the well-equipped dental surgery. The beds were comfortable, there were showers and clean underwear, and the daily cauliflower omelettes were not too bad.

But, every day, bulletins about the military situation were pinned up, and it was obvious that, after I had left the Battalion at Belchite, all hell had broken loose. Franco's army, with hundreds of tanks, guns and aircraft, including dive-bombers, had broken through and, each day, we learned that new towns and villages had been evacuated.

At the end of the ten days, a crowd of us were loaded into a coach, taken to a cross-roads near the front, and dumped there to find our units, as best we could. I was the only English-speaking passenger, and only two others were not Spanish. Fortunately, we had our Esperanto, rudimentary Spanish, and were able to communicate. We three

foreigners, French, British and Slav, decided that, as we all belonged to the same division, we should forage together.

Accosting every officer we could find, we met only negatives and shoulder shrugs. After a few of these, our Slav friend became exasperated, and stormed "Bueno ! Marchamos a Perpignon" but his threats of desertion were wasted on people with heftier problems of their own. Eventually, our persistence paid off, someone offered me a "camion" lift to my battalion, and I left the other two hot on the trail of theirs.

I found the Battalion reorganising, after nine days of disastrous retreat. A new figure to me, in our midst, was Major Frank Ryan, known, during the Irish troubles of the twenties, as the Robin Hood of the Dublin slums, a big man with a swagger and a permanent twinkle in his eye. Alas, our acquaintance was to be short-lived. In the next action, he was captured by the Fascists, who sentenced him, at first, to death, then, after protests, to thirty years' imprisonment. During the Great War, he was reported to have died, mysteriously, in a sanatorium in Dresden, Germany.

The battle in question was at Calaceite, and showed bad reconnaissance by both sides. We were marching along a road one morning, with the machine-gun company in the rear. The men in front had passed round a bend into a cutting where they were out of our sight. Then there was a holdup. We had no idea what was happening, until we heard a loud roar of engines and the crackle of machine-gun fire. Next, an Italian whippet tank came round the corner, firing at us. The Battalion had walked straight into an enemy armoured column, and it had taken some minutes for both sides to realise that they were not with friends.

We hastily set up the machine-guns at the roadside, and opened fire. Danny Doyle, the Number One, was hit in the hand, and I took over the gun. As we were moving to a better vantage point, one of the other crews got in a lucky shot, and the tank burst into flames. Two men jumped out, but died instantly, in a hail of bullets.

The road was now blocked by the burning tank, and a second one kept nosing into sight round the bend. Each time, I sprayed it with bullets and the driver, fearing to share the fate of his comrades, backed off. Once we saw a group of foot soldiers, trying to locate us, but they evidently lacked enthusiasm and speedily dived back to cover. After about an hour, we discovered that the Battalion had entirely disappeared from the scene, leaving only our four man crew.

We set off down the road, the way we had come, trundling the wheeled gun carriage behind us, just as another enemy reconnaissance party was sent round. One soldier spotted us and ran a few paces after us, calling on us to stop, but, when we loaded the gun and started to aim it, one of his friends grabbed his arm and dragged him away. We carried on, feeling very vulnerable on that straight, open road.

Before we had gone much further, a rumble behind informed us that our adversaries had cleared the road, and a tank was rapidly overhauling us. To our right was a high, terraced ridge, to the left a four foot drop. We took the gun down the bank, and lay low. The tank stopped beside us, and a voice from within shouted "Hombres !" We kept silent, and the tank crew discreetly resumed their scouting mission, to return in about five minutes, passing us at high speed towards their own column.

Our situation was not urgent. Someone suggested, mistakenly, as it happened, that there were friendly troops up on the ridge, so we started to climb, carrying the gun and carriage. When we were halfway up, the whole armoured column of tanks, trucks and motor-cycles came roaring along the road below us, and, to save our lives, we had to dump the gun (with the lock removed) and run for the top, whilst bullets cracked around us. None of us was hit.

Out of the sight of the road, we moved off across country, guessing the direction of our own lines. Suddenly, we came face to face with a Franco machine-gun crew, carrying their gun, about fifty yards away. Surprise was mutual. Danny Doyle, perhaps harassed by his wound, raised his hands and went towards them. I shouted "No!" and the rest of us fled, pursued by a few wild shots.

We found ourselves on a road, which we followed, until we heard a vehicle approaching from ahead. We hid and an ordinary car passed, revealing that we must still be in Franco territory. Returning to the high ground, we walked parallel to the road, till we were overlooking a big house, in the grounds of which a man was exercising a horse. Then, nearby voices drew our attention to the presence of soldiers moving all around us. We lay low in bushes, as two of them passed within a yard of us.

It was by now early afternoon, and the bright sun gave me an idea. "At this time", I said, "the sun's position will be roughly south-west, so if we set off and follow our shadows, we should be travelling north-east, and this is bound, eventually, to take us back to Republican territory."

The chosen course pointed down the hill and across the road. Descending, we heard a shout. A fascist officer was standing in the doorway of the house, beckoning to us. We hurried on down to the road, expecting him, at any moment, to come galloping along it on his horse. But we were unmolested, and followed a beeline over rugged hills and valleys, till we came across a shepherd boy, with his flock.

"Cuyo es este territorio?" we asked.

"Republicano" he replied. Our navigation had proved correct.

We were given a little food in a nearby village, snatched an hour or two of shivering sleep, in an olive plantation, then, next morning, joined the stream of refugees on the roads. That afternoon, we found the remnants of our Battalion, in the process of reforming. Nearly three hundred were missing, captured, killed or wounded.

In that Calaceite battle, I had been near enough to an enemy tank almost to touch it, and it grieved me, for a long time, to think that I had nothing really effective to hit it with. I vowed that this would never happen again, and, somewhere, I picked up one of the Republic's home-made anti-tank bombs. This was a tin cannister about ten inches long and two inches diameter, with a chemically impregnated fuse stuck in the top. You were supposed to light this, then separate yourself as far and as fast as possible from the infernal thing, which was lethal to a tank.

God knows what the contents were, but they must have been fairly stable. I used to carry it in my haversack, which I used for a pillow at night, and, every morning, there was a new dent in it, where my head had rested. Alas, our war was not scripted in Hollywood, so I never again got near to an enemy tank.

Shortly after Calaceite, the Republican forces retreated across the River Ebro, and blew up the bridges. The ensuing spring and early summer left me with the most pleasant memories of my sojourn in Spain, though, by April, Franco's troops had reached the Mediterranean coast, cutting Republican territory in two.

In one place, when doing a rota of guard duty, we had to carry our guns past a copse, where nightingales sang beautifully. Glow-worms illumined the warm night and croaking frogs added percussion to the choir of the crickets. The war seemed a million miles away.

For a time, we manned a machine-gun nest, precariously overhanging the Ebro, but there were few shots fired. Propaganda speeches were shouted across the river from our side and, on one occasion, a group of Spanish soldiers from each army spontane-

ously carried white flags down to the river banks, and entertained each other across the water, with music and song. Our officers, naturally, took a dim view of this, and sternly banned any further fraternization.

There were some interesting characters in our machine-gun crew here. The Number One was a huge, muscular Scotsman, George Jackson, who had been discharged from the British Army as "uncontrollable". Once or twice, when he had imbibed too much of the local vino, this became an apt description, but, next morning, he would humbly apologise, and ask "Why didn't somebody clout me?" Well, we were all brave soldiers, but there was a limit.

The two Bennett brothers were Englishmen, who, amongst other things, had been hoboes in America, and used to entertain us with their stories and "jungle" songs. Long before the coming of Johnny Cash, I learned from them the words of "Birmingham Jail" and "Standing Round the Watertank". Then there was the aristocratically named John Scott-Peet, who had been teaching English in Czechoslovakia, before he came to Spain. After the Great War, as plain John Peet, he became Reuter's correspondent in Berlin, but, complaining that his reports were being distorted, defected to East Germany, where he now edits "Democratic German Report", a news review published fortnightly, in English.*

Later, we were moved into a place, we called Chabola Valley, because we all built little shelters out of branches, and the Spaniards called them chabolas. At the bottom of the valley was a stream, with clear pools, where you could bathe in the warm afternoons. There were twenty-four hour passes to Barcelona, and we were visited by delegations from the rearguard.

I remember one very eloquent young lady, who told us that the women of the factories sent us "millones de gracias". The interpreter, with pronunciation difficulties, translated this phrase as "millions of t'anks". In view of our chronic weapon deficiencies, there were some sardonic grins at the unconscious pun, but we couldn't offend our popular visitor by laughing aloud. Her final peroration was applauded, without translation, by the most backward linguist amongst us: "En la Republica hoy, no hay Socialistas, no hay Comunistas, no hay Anarquistas; hay, solamente antifascistas." **There are no political parties in the Republic today, only anti-fascists.**

After a period of training and resting in Chabola Valley, we started rehearsals for the Ebro crossing, using a nearby ravine as an imaginary river. About this time, I met another man from St Helens, Jimmy Nixon, a veteran of World War One. He was operating a heliograph, and grumbled a bit, because he was not allowed to teach his fellow-signallers Morse Code. The system adopted was rudimentary, because of the time factor, but it irked Jimmy. Another magnificent griper of the same generation was old Ferguson, in the machine-gun company. He had been recruited for Spain in an Alaska soup-kitchen. When upset by some army procedure, he would criticise it by saying that even in the "old imperials" (imperialist armies of the First World War) they wouldn't do that. Two great old-timers.

When the time came for the real river crossing, much to my surprise, a number of us with even slight impediments to forced marching were placed in what was called a "compania inutil", and left behind. My handicap was a pair of boots, which had been left too near a fire to dry, after a torrential downpour. The uppers, made hard and brittle, had to be broken off short before I could wear them.

The compania inutil stayed on in Chabola Valley, a site so pleasant that we didn't mind being called a useless company. All we had to do was a rota of guard duty on a house, occupied by a Spanish officer, and a few Brigade prisoners (mostly, men who had

deserted and been brought back). These dug anti-air-raid trenches by the house, and, at night, slept in an open field, whence they could easily have escaped in the dark, despite our presence. None ever did, because we were all very friendly, and they didn't want to give us any trouble.

The house had a greengage tree in its grounds, just by our guard post. The fruit was ripe, and a delicious refreshment, until, one day, the officer harvested all that was left. Once I was sat sitting on a bank, nursing my rifle, when some kind of snake slithered under my knees. I jumped up, pretty smartly, but it disappeared into the grass, and I wasn't enough of a biologist to pursue it.

In between guards, we set outside our chabolas, eating the abundant grapes, fastidiously spitting out the skins and seeds, walked around, near naked, in the hot sun, cooled off in the stream, or traded yarns with our companions. One of these had been a union organiser for the CIO in America, and reminisced about pitched battles with anti-labour police and company thugs. My closest friends were two Jewish lads, Dave Mindline, a London signwriter and artist, and a Chicago taxi-driver, whose name I forget.

Dave had a great gift for memorizing the utterances of Battalion officers, usually when they were excited about something, then, later, mimicking them to the life. Even his victims had to smile, when they heard these human tape-recordings.

The Chicago lad was astonished when Dave and I confessed that we couldn't drive a car. "Every kid of fifteen in our place can do that," he said, "and, at our age, you're just nobody if you haven't been across America, riding the freights. He had a dry wit. When the men started on a favourite topic of conversation, the kind of food they had enjoyed at home, he'd say "Stop masturbating yourselves", at the same time miming the act with his right arm. After the first time, the mime alone was enough to put the message across.

Every day, we read a bulletin about the successes of our comrades in crossing the Ebro, and consolidating their positions. In spite of the attractions of the valley, after six or seven days, I was beginning to feel a bit guilty, and was relieved when we were all quizzed by an army doctor, to assess our combat capability. Most of us were quite happy to be declared fit. My prescription was the issue of a pair of alpargatas (rope-soled canvas shoes) to replace the damaged boots.

So we boarded the inevitable trucks and were taken across the pontoon bridge up to the front, where our Brigade was, for the moment, in reserve. One young Spaniard, who had been having frequent epileptic fits in the rear, was also, to our surprise, included in the draft. As soon as his next fit started, however, an American doctor ran over, shouting to the men who were trying to help him "Dejale ! Dejale ! Leave him alone ! He only does it when there are people around." As soon as they obeyed, the "epileptic" calmed down and stood up. The poor lad's symptoms were hysterical, brought on by fear of the front. Whether his fears were ever realised, I don't know; I never saw him again.

I was grieved to learn that, during my absence, two of my last crew, Jackson, the "uncontrollable" Scot and Gordon Bennett, one of the English hoboos, had been killed. The latter's brother had been compassionately withdrawn. Another man, for whom I had very warm feelings, had also died there, Sam Pearson, a Cambridge university graduate and a staunch communist. When I was first directed into the machine-gun company, Sam asked if he could take my place to be with his friend, George Cornwallis, but I turned him down. Shortly before his death, after a long spell in hospital, he confessed to me that he was feeling a bit demoralised, but he still criticised the Spanish doctor for keeping him under his care too long.

I joined a new machine-gun crew, and we were kept busy, moving from one hot spot to

another. Most of the fighting, now, was for the possession of hills, which kept changing hands, with heavy casualties. From one position, we watched enemy planes pattern-bombing other parts of the front, till the rising smoke darkened the day, and it seemed as if nothing could live beneath it. A little later, we were in an area subjected to this treatment. We all had our little holes to dive into, and there we crouched while the bursting bombs shook the earth, like blows of a giant's club. When we emerged, there were craters all round, but the only casualties were five dead mules, which had all been tethered to the same tree.

Some of our men had little bits of wood tied to a string round their necks, to bit when the bombs were falling near. Personally, I felt nothing but contempt for the airmen's expensive, but pathetic attempts to kill us. It is possible that, at one time or another, Hitler's mighty Condor Legion might have killed a Republican soldier, but, if they did, I never heard of this singularly unlucky or careless person. We were not the helpless civilians of Guernica.

I used to sit outside our foxhole, counting the planes as they came droning over, practically unopposed. about a hundred at a time, and watching until I saw the bombs start to emerge. Then, I'd go to ground. Sometimes, instead of little black dots, spreading white clouds would be disgorged. Slowly descending, these broke up into thousands of leaflets, worded in Spanish, telling us how hopeless our chances were, and advising us to give in.

Occasionally, when they were not too hopelessly outnumbered, our little red-starred Russian fighters engaged in dog-fights with the German and Italian machines, I saw planes of both sides brought down, but the Republic seemed to have a slight edge in the fights I watched. How I longed to be up there in a cockpit, belching lead at those Fascist vultures, with only fuel gauge and ammunition supplies dictating the time for retreat. But only Spaniards were allowed into the Republican Air Force.

The fighting became daily more intense, with the increasing superiority of Franco's weapon-power. The Republicans were unable to get artillery across the river, and the enemy concentrated against us the heaviest gun-fire of the Civil War.

The numbers one and two on my gun were both veterans of the formative days of the Brigade, a Scotsman named Smith, and a tall Irishman, Tom Murphy. I don't remember much about poor Smithy, but Tom was an amiable ex-world traveller, with an irresistible philosophy. His favourite theme was "There's no real love in the capitalist world. Even the mother pats her little lad on the head, and says 'There's a great boy. You'll soon be growing up and going out to work for me.'" I met him in Hyde Park after the homegoing, and he was still expounding this theme to the political debaters.

One day, these two were carrying the gun and carriage to a new position, when a burst of machine-gun fire killed Smith outright, and broke Tom's arm. The latter was sent to the rear, where, eventually, he lost the arm. A young Scots lad, Tom Mitchell, took over the number one position and I the number two. We were now the only Britishers left in the crew, which was made up by the addition of three Spaniards, two of whom were newly conscripted from the depleted manpower of shrunken Republican territory. These had, obviously, little heart for soldiering, and I was a bit worried. Then, Tom Mitchell, troubled by an old shrapnel wound, went to the first-aid post, and never came back. I found out, much later, that he had been sent to hospital.

The next day, all the number ones and n.c.o's were summoned to a meeting, and informed that the Government had decided to disband the International Brigades, but our brigade had one further action to fight, and it was hoped that we would acquit ourselves well. To my relief, the gun crew was augmented by the addition of Syd Booth, a good, experienced man from Manchester.

We relieved the Thirteenth Brigade and, in our case, this meant installing the machine-gun in a nest, already prepared, at the top of a ridge. We had little knowledge of what was going on, except that enemy projectiles of all kinds were bursting around us, from first light. I was not unduly worried, as it would have taken a direct hit to dislodge us.

I had not slept for two nights, so I left Syd with the gun, and tried to snatch a wink or two, in a shell crater. The continual horrible racket didn't help, but, when something heavy thudded on to my blanket, and, on investigation, turned out to be a lump of hot iron from a mortar bomb, I said "To hell with it!", and went back into the gun pit.

Out front, everything was shrouded in smoke and dust. Some time later, we spotted some vague figures moving on the crest of another ridge. I called over Jack Nalty, our Irish company commander, and asked if they were enemy troops. He shouted "Yes, that's them," and we opened fire. The figures disappeared from the skyline, but we kept firing bursts at the position.

I occasionally caught glimpses of Nalty, passing the back of our replacement, going from one gun to another. As we were firing blind, I decided to ask his advice. On emerging from the redoubt, I saw below us and to our right a stream of Republican soldiers retreating, at the double, across a dip and up the opposite slope, with machine-gun bullets kicking up the soil around them. My heart sank as I thought "Here we go again."

I warned Syd and, in a few minutes, Nalty came running, with the order for us to get out. We stripped the gun, and Syd began lifting the carriage to his shoulders, to carry it down. I advised him to drag it, as he couldn't have relinquished it without help, and under heavy fire, it could have been a fatal encumbrance. The Spanish lads seemed to have disappeared, so I grabbed the gun, and we ran down the slope, to the deadly bullet-swept strip.

Something hit my temple, and, when I put my hand to it, it came away bloody. I dived behind a scraggy olive tree, but, between me and the tree, two scared recruits were already lying, one on top of the other. The upper man had a hand wound which was dripping blood on to the other's right ear. I had lost Syd, and unrecognisable men were still dashing madly through the hail of lead, or hanging back, plucking up courage. I called out to them to go singly, to reduce the gunners' target, and an English voice replied "Right! I'm going now." Then the owner of the voice went at top speed, with little fountains of earth following him. He disappeared over the top, safely, I hope.

Bullets were thudding into our tree, which seemed to me more like a Japanese bonzai, every minute. I was preparing myself for a dash, when there was a sharp bang, and a jagged hole appeared in the top of my left trouser leg. Then blood started to ooze out. Unable now to assess my running ability, and fearing to draw fire on the other wounded men lying around, I played dead, until those accurate machine-gunners raised their sights, and began firing over our heads, at some target further back.

I crawled up the ridge till I was near the top, then jumped up and, thankfully, found I could run. A few shots cracked by, but I reached cover, without mishap. There was no one in sight except a dead man, so I just kept walking down a long, empty valley. The head wound was very slight, and I diagnosed it as a blow from a stone kicked up by a bullet. The hole in my thigh was so wide that I thought a bullet had ploughed across it, without penetrating. Not until later did I find the small hole, about five inches away, where the bullet had entered, to spread out in passage, perhaps by bouncing off a bone, and make a crater coming out.

The first people I encountered after walking about a mile were the sanitarios of our Battalion first-aid post. I told them what had happened, They put a dressing on the

big wound, without discovering the other. In fact, it was their bandage chafing on the entry hole that, eventually, made me aware of its presence.

After an ambulance ride, another brief examination, then a train journey, I found myself in Gerona Hospital, which was terribly crowded with wounded. There was a shortage of doctors, and comparatively minor wounds like mine were left to the mercies of half-trained nurses. My particular ministering angel treated me by squirting high-pressure water from a big glass syringe into the wound.

As I lay on the bed, undergoing this treatment, two old patients were talking, and I overheard one say "Muey joven." (very young) and the other answer "Si, pero valiente." (Yes, but brace) I was too embarrassed to reveal that I understood them, and, anyway, I didn't feel much like a hero. Once again, we had left our precious gun lying with the dead and the wounded, and it disturbed me. I was consoled to learn, later, that both weapons and wounded had, on this occasion, been recovered, when it grew dark.

After two days, I was transferred to an international hospital at Santa Coloma, sited in what had been a hydro, where the rich went for therapeutic treatment, in the natural warm water. The walls bore huge murals showing classical figures entering a pool lame, and emerging full of joie de vivre.

The chief asset of Santa Coloma was the presence of a very good English doctor and nurse. Inspecting my leg, which had, by now, become a bit sore, the former said "That's a nasty infested wound," and began packing it with gauze every day, to prevent premature healing. Then he gave me a stick, with which I walked around for about five weeks. It was a luxurious life there, with real beds, regular food, good, if not too plentiful, and big hip baths, each with a single tap that always disgorged water, at exactly the right temperature. There was even a functioning cinema in the village, but the programmes were mostly news-reels.

The infection removed, my wound soon healed, and I was discharged to las Planas, a distribution centre, near Barcelona. I only spent one night there, in a gloomy, barrack-like building, and my sleep was disturbed by the loud moaning of a man, who had been "wounded on the Barcelona Front," (contracted venereal disease). I was glad to get away, and rejoin the survivors of the British Battalion, in the little town of Ripoll, near the French frontier, where they were awaiting repatriation.

For the first time, I learned that Jack Nalty had been killed in that murderous valley, Syd Booth was still in hospital with multiple wounds, and many other familiar faces were missing. The last British life had been sacrificed on Spanish soil, but our Spanish comrades still grappled with the Fascist beast.

In Ripoll, we were interviewed by the British members of the League of Nations commission set up to observe the dissolution of the Brigades. The British Government had agreed to treat us as Distressed British Subjects, and arrange our passage home. After the interviews, we had to be vaccinated, to please the French Government, who then, on some pretext, kept us waiting for permission to pass through their country.

Ripoll was a quiet town, where, if you had money, you could buy drinks, but little else. We were billeted in a disused cinema, and there was a voluntary entertainment committee, who organised concerts with the talent we had amongst us. We had a small Battalion library, with books in English and Spanish. Whenever I could manage to concentrate, I tried to augment my knowledge of the latter, but it was difficult, in that big communal living room. The newspapers published photographs of the medal it was proposed to mint, for presentation to the foreign volunteers, before they left Spain. Due to pressure of events, this never materialised.

To relieve the tedium, twenty-four hour passes to Barcelona were issued in batches. One recipient, with no money, came to me with his "salvo conducto", and asked if I wanted to use it. I had just received a month's back pay, for the time I had been hospitalised, so I took the pass, and went off to the city.

Before I had found a cheap hotel, I shared a drink with some sailors off a British ship running Franco's blockade. They were all on double pay for the danger, so, when one offered me free accommodation at his hotel, the post Orient, I went along. It transpired that he was dead scared of the bombing, which happened mainly at night, so he slept in the hotel basement, whilst I enjoyed the unbelievable luxury of a large white bed, with pendant light switch, central heating and inter-room telephone. Because our army wardrobe didn't include an overcoat, and the November nights were cool, I had my army blanket with me to use as a cloak, and I left this to him for bedding.

When the air-raid sirens sounded, I heard people running down the corridor, sometimes tapping at my door, but it would have taken a direct hit to get me out of that bed. I stayed in Barcelona for ten days with my twenty-four hour pass, a deserter from a non-combatant army. Other soldiers coming on leave kept me in constant touch with the situation in Ripoll.

There were places where you could get a free rationed meal by presenting the salvo conducto and having it date-stamped. A long queue always formed at these cantinas, but when I joined one, my nearest neighbours assured me that "internationales" were privileged to go straight to the front. Hunger was rife. Once, I saw a trader vending hazel-nuts in the street. A little queue had formed, and an old man was remonstrating with the person at the front, because he was buying too many.

Apart from their double pay, the sailors in the port could buy pesetas on the black market, at inflated exchange rates. Consequently, everything in the shops was terribly dear, and only the seamen and prostitutes prospered.

My sailor host at the Orient was an exception to this rule. He was a New Zealander, called "Bluey Kernot" a kind of sea-going hobo, who had stowed away at Oran to get his present job. He was so timid of the bombing that he neglected to do his watches aboard ship, so the skipper refused even to feed him. One evening, I went down to the ship with him to get some cheap Atlantis cigarettes, of which he had a small supply aboard. Because some planes could be heard in the distance, he stood there dithering for half-an-hour, with me, exasperated, sneering at his cowardice, before he plucked up enough courage to dash aboard for the cigarettes. These were not to smoke, but for selling to tobacco-starved Spanish acquaintances, so that we could both afford a few drinks.

Apart from this fault, Bluey was a remarkable and very popular man. He had a command of Spanish, which was adequate, if not strictly grammatical. Boarded at the Orient, were a lot of refugee children from all over Spain, and, whenever they saw Bluey, they would crowd around, asking him to do "Chamberline" (Chamberlain). This act of his was a product of the nefarious Munich agreement, recently signed.

Bluey would flap his elbows like wings, saying "Chamberline—la paloma de paz" (the dove of peace). Then he would indicate something falling from his behind, explaining "Huevos—huevos de Franco" (Eggs—eggs of Franco, a Republican term for bombs). To conclude the performance, he would give a life-like imitation of a hen clucking loudly, whereupon those bright-eyed children of adversity would squeal with innocent merriment.

One evening, I went into the Orient bar, and met a radio operator off one of the ships. He said "Oh Bill, I wanted to see you. Bluey's ship has sailed" (Sailing times were, of course, kept secret) "He asked me to get your home address, and pass it on to him, so

that he can write to you.”

I shook hands with Sparks and went up to the bedroom to fetch my sold possession there, the Army blanket. I didn't know whether Bluey had paid the hotel bill or not, so, draping the blanket round my shoulders, I left, without a word to anyone.

At the station, I found that there was no train for Ripoll, till morning, so I stretched out on a station bench, and made the best of it. Very early in the morning, a Spanish family came and stood by my bench, the children evincing great curiosity about my shoes, which I had taken off and put under my head, for a pillow, I sat up and let them share the bench with me, for, already, the station was somewhat crowded.

The woman asked me what number I had, and, when I failed to understand, her husband said that the military didn't have numbers. The numbers evidently referred to coach allocation, because all civilian trains were solidly packed with passengers. The Ripoll train was no exception. In the corridor, where I was jammed immovably, there was an old lady with her arm in a sling, crying because of the pressure on it, and a senorita tearing a strip off a hapless army officer, because he referred to her Catalan language as a dialect.

I had not realised that there would be some concern, in the Battalion, about my prolonged absence, but the papers had carried stories of bombing in Barcelona, and, for all they knew, I could have been a victim. However, boredom was understandable, and I was just mildly rebuked.

In early December, the frontier was opened to us. A motley collection of civilian clothes was distributed, and the French laid on a train. But, first, we had to fill in a DBS Form, acknowledging indebtedness to HM Government, for its expenditure on our travel and food. The latter item consisted of bread and coffee offered to us by the Salvation Army at Versailles station (which we declined) telling them that, if they had any spare food, they should send it to Spain) and a ham roll apiece, doled out aboard the Channel ferry. However, the French Front Popular generously filled in our dietary gaps and, once we reached London, we found hospitality in abundance, including a complete outfit of clothes each, from the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society.

We came back to a Britain, which, itself, was amateurishly preparing for war. In St Helens, I was puzzled by the box-like brick buildings with concrete roofs, and could hardly believe it when told that they were supposed to be air-raid shelters. Later, they turned out to be death-traps, and must have been designed either by idiots or for psychological purposes, only.

In April 1939, the Spanish War ended, and, in the world war that followed, Franco stayed neutral, because he was afraid to rearm his own people. The sacrifice of the Spanish Republic and the start of World War Two were both products of the appeasement policy, pursued by France and Britain to keep what Lord Londonderry called “a bulwark against Bolshevism”, materially, the Axis Alliance. Of course, it was naively intended that the inevitable armed conflict would be between Germany and the USSR with a weakening of both, that would leave Britain and France as the dominant powers in Europe. Like cads, the Germans and Russians declined the initial roles offered them. The results of the appeasers' gamble were the loss of millions of lives, destruction on a catastrophic scale, the end of Britain as a dominant world power, and as a fringe benefit, a boost for Socialism and struggles for national independence.

The British political scene today is similar, in many ways, to that in the 'thirties. Then, the Government was a coalition of Tories, National Liberal and National Labour, whose theme was that, to survive the current crisis, we had to endure low wages, high unemploy-

ment, poor social services and a reactionary policy abroad. Today, the coalition is unofficial, but, effectively, just as real. Instead of National Labour MPs, we have Moderate Labour MPs who are, of course, exactly the same thing. Perhaps if, Heaven forbid, the cycle repeats itself again, our votes will be solicited for Responsible Labour or Patriotic Labour; any high-sounding adjective will do except the old, true one, Turncoat Labour.

In spite of the unauthorised coalition, however, the British people are resisting the prescribed unemployment, stagnation and belt-tightening, as the quack remedies they are. Appeasement of American imperialism is putting our government, not only on the wrong side, but, increasingly often, on the losing side. And the great Spanish people will not, much longer, wear the yoke of the last Fascist state in Europe.



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