

Americans at the Ebro

The Lincoln-Washington Brigade in the Loyalist Drive

EDWIN ROLFE

Barcelona, September 1 (By Cable).

AFTER a month of the fiercest fighting this war has seen, the Lincoln-Washington Battalion is in a secondary position away from the lines again. The twelve days they spent, together with their brother battalions of the Fifteenth Brigade, on the Sierra Pandols was the kind of ordeal that demands more than mere good soldiery. The punishment they took without flinching—the long marches, the many times they went over the top, the artillery barrages that could not drive them from their sandbag gunpits—these are but a small part of the story of a month of heroic action, a month of the toughest and most intense action, as any of the men will tell you, that the Americans have gone through in all the time they have been in Spain.

And now they are at rest, tired, fagged out, sleeping it off. But they know they have done more than a good job. For the story of their twelve-day defense of the Sierra Pandols has already become, in Spain at least, one of the epics of this war. Imagine them today, spread out under the olive trees, talking in small groups, chewing the rag. See them here, going over the details of the battle, mentioning names of comrades who lie buried where they fell, saying merely, "Too bad, he was a swell guy," which means more than tears. Listen to them recalling the exciting, terrible hours, talking of home and parents and wives and girls, whom they long for more deeply and profoundly than anyone who has not been here will ever fully realize. And then the tiredness will overcome them at intervals, and they will drop off to sleep any time of the day. But they were in just the same state when they got their first eight-day rest before they were called on to relieve another division on the Sierra Pandols. They were tired—yet they went into action without hesitation. And now they have been cited—the whole Lincoln-Washington Battalion—in a special brigade order of the day. Here is part of the citation:

The Fifty-eighth Lincoln-Washington Battalion is due praise for its distinguished action during the past days. The commanders and commissars have rivaled each other in heroism side by side with the soldiers, thus preventing the enemy from advancing a single step. Despite the slight protection provided by the trenches and despite the enormous amount of artillery and mortar fire employed by the enemy, it was in no way able to break the tenacious resistance of our comrades. In every case the battalion, causing with its sure fire a great number of enemy casualties, completely repulsed them. This is how Spain is being defended and how the orders of the command are fulfilled. The order was for resistance. The Lincoln-Wash-

ington Battalion understood its importance and carried out the order magnificently.

Let me outline, in the brief space I have, the chronology of the Americans' part in the Ebro offensive. Breaking camp the night of July 21, they proceeded under cover of darkness to a position near where the crossing of the river was planned. At dawn of the twenty-fifth they proceeded to the river, foregoing the usual morning coffee and bread. They crossed in small boats while the enemy shelled the approaches to the river and while a huge bomber soared overhead. Then they marched under a scorching sun till late afternoon, when they occupied a hill near the town of Fatarella. The next morning they entered the town, only to turn it over to another division while they moved on to capture half a battalion of the enemy. Another night and forenoon of steady march followed, after which the battalion deployed against the contacted enemy, driving them steadily back till nightfall. By this time the fascists had sent up reinforcements—and the battle proceeded, with the Lincoln-Washington fighting along the line at different positions from Villalba to Gandesa till the night of August 6, when the whole brigade was relieved. Eight days of semi-rest, with fascist aviation always overhead, then on August 15 they went in at Sierra Pandols where they fought, solid as the rock of the Sierra, until the night of August 27. I won't even attempt to tell the story of the Lincoln-Washington at Sierra Pandols—a short cable couldn't do it justice. And now they are at rest—or semi-rest—again. And as Captain Wolff, commander of the battalion, remarked of his men early in the campaign, "They are all heroes, every one of them."

To compile a list of their outstanding deeds, you would have to reprint the whole battalion roster. But let me mention some of them. Captain Lamb, who, together with Commander Wolff, enjoys the unstinting love and admiration and respect of all the men, was wounded July 27 and carried off to the hospital. It was from the looks of it a "two-month wound," but Lamb was back again in two weeks and went through the whole Pandols action. Harold Smith of Queens, N. Y., Company Two commissar, wounded slightly but painfully, early in the action, who refused to leave the comrades till Wolff ordered him to. Lieut. Bill Wheeler, commander of Company Three; Sergeant Luke Hinman of California, chief of the scouts, who has been proposed for special citation; Dave Smith of

New England, a short and chunky tower of strength in Company Four, and his youthful company-commander, Lieut. Donald Thayer of Wisconsin; Morris Goldstein of Nebraska, Company One commissar, who, like Smith, refused to leave his men after being wounded, until ordered out; and Archie Brown of San Francisco, who succeeded Goldstein as Commissar.

Then there is Yale Stuart, who lost his left arm while on an important battalion mission—which he carried out perfectly after his group was ambushed. He too was proposed for citation. It is about his progress that the men are most concerned, for he is one of the best loved men in the battalion. And those two tireless transmissions men, Harry Fischer and Martin Sullivan, who dragged the heavy wirepools on their backs under intense enemy shellfire day after day, repairing lines and maintaining important communications. And Johnny Rody, Company Four stretcher-bearer, who worked tirelessly to get his wounded comrades to safety; Lushell Mc-Daniells, San Francisco Negro, whose reckless grenade-throwing won him the respectful nickname "Fantastico" from his Spanish comrades; and Frank Stout of Nevada, who disregarded the doctor's decision that he remain behind because of faulty eyesight. Stout insisted on going through with the others, performing outstandingly till he was wounded.

These names make only a small dent in the list of men that you at home would call heroes. As I said before, to reprint the whole battalion roster would be justified. They worked and fought as only men can when they are imbued with the deepest strength and conviction, the most unflinching loyalty to the ideals which brought them here, to the mud of Jarama, the dust and loneliness of Aragon, the snow and ice of Teruel, the nightmare retreats of March and early April when many of them had to swim for their lives in the swift and treacherous Ebro current; and the triumphant recrossing of the Ebro in midsummer heat—which brought them in sight of Gandesa again.

And now, at rest, they talk and sleep and gripe about the food and the lack of cigarettes and the scarcity of letters from home. And they gripe most of all about the rats, the men who deserted—they have another unprintable expression for them. They read the American papers, two or more weeks late in getting to them, and their anger and contempt are boundless toward the likes of Abraham Sobol and Alvin Halpern. They tell me things about these deserters; Lieut. Lewis Secundy, who was wounded in this action but is now up and about and ready to go back, was in charge of an Anglo-American group at the transport base in June 1937, when Sobol arrived. "I put him on a job driving a truck," Secundy told me today, "and a few days later I had to slap him in jail for driving while drunk and overloading his truck. Then I put him in the grease-pit to get him out of harm's way, but I had to have him

arrested a number of other times for drunkenness and for committing nuisances. Late in June I sent him to one of the International Brigades—not the Fifteenth—and then one day in August when I was commander of the Fifteenth Brigade auto-park, he was transferred into the service. I had a long talk with him, and told him that if he behaved half as badly as he had back in the base he would be kicked out. For a while I had him on the greasing job, but then a shortage of drivers forced me to put him on a truck. He was frequently drunk. Finally, at Teruel, he was hauled on the carpet for looting in town, for getting drunk, and for stealing comrades' personal possessions. He was put in the brigade jail, and later sentenced to a labor battalion. While he was in jail he sent me a cringing letter, telling me he recognized he had made a grave mistake. He wrote that he didn't want to be put in with deserters and other types of their kind. He wanted another chance. He wouldn't misbehave, he wrote, and wouldn't I please get him out. Well, during the big retreat he saw the opportunity he had been waiting for, and he deserted."

The rest of the men feel about deserters as Secundy does. It is easy to sell lies, concocted to justify one's own cowardice, to Hearst. It's easy to testify before the Dies committee, which is always on the alert for such weaklings who sell out. It is far harder to remain steady in the face of bullets, to feel fear and, overcoming it, act with courage; to long for home so strongly that you grit your teeth to keep from sobbing—but act like men when it's time for action; to renounce—many forever—the comforts of men to fight for the rights of man. The men of the Lincoln-Washington know these things just as the people of Spain who have fought in this bloody war for more than two years know it, and they know themselves. The war has ripped all illusions from even the youngest of the volunteers, leaving only the reality. That reality is harder than anyone who has never been under machine-gun fire and bombs and artillery fire can ever know. Yet the men of the Lincoln-Washington, knowing it well, chose and continue to choose to fight for Spain's free existence, for the world's democracy—to be true to themselves and their innermost convictions.

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Bible Platform

THE Tories of New York State, having formed their own Conservative Party, expect to back a statewide ticket headed by Borough Pres. George U. Harvey of Queens, the most reactionary of New York City's five borough presidents.

Harvey will run for governor on a platform consisting of the United States Constitution and the Ten Commandments. He has renewed his pledge to fight Communism (for some time he has ranked as the No. 1 Red-

baiter among elected officials in this area), and he has said that he will fight fascism and Nazism also, two isms that have never bothered him much in the past.

Harvey once knew the Ten Commandments in Greek, and he says that he read them in English only a couple of months ago.

"Could you name them now?" he was asked.

"I certainly can."

"Well, what are they?"

"Say, what is this?"

After further discussion, it developed that Harvey could not recite the portion of his platform that came from the Bible. "The reason we picked the Commandments was that our form of civilization rests upon the Ten Commandments and the Bible," he explained. "And the Communists and fascists violate every one of the Commandments."

"Do you think that the CIO violates the Commandments?" was the next question.

"I think that those in charge of the CIO break the Commandments," he hedged. "Homer Martin has proved that the leaders of the CIO are Communists."

Asked what he would do if had to live next to a Communist and obey the Biblical injunction to "love thy neighbor as thyself," Harvey said that he would first try loving the Communist and would then try to con-

vert him into the Conservative Party. So far as the records show, the borough president of Queens has not yet wasted any affection on known radicals, suspected radicals, or just plain unionists."—FEDERATED PRESS.

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New Soviet Theaters

SOON construction of the Central Red Army Theater on the Commune Square in Moscow will be complete. It is still concealed by scaffolding, but in a few weeks' time the curious passersby who watch its progress with keenest interest will be able to take their seats as spectators in the huge auditorium. Moscow will be the richer by a large theater and a noteworthy piece of architecture.

Architects Alabian and Simbirtsev have designed the building in the form of the Red Army emblem, the five-point Soviet star. The result is an edifice of a unique kind, a tall, five-angled construction which will be surmounted by a statue about forty-eight feet high, of a Red Army soldier. The ground plan, composed of the five triangles which form the points of the Soviet star, have been very skillfully used. They contain the main entrance, buffet, an auxiliary stage, and dressing-rooms for about two hundred artists. Each



"Damn that fellow Roosevelt!"

Ned Hillton