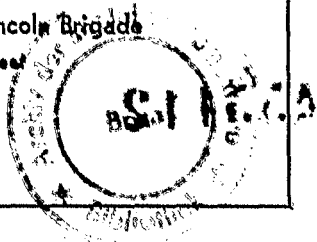


# CAPTURED by FRANCO

By LOU ORNITZ

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*"... in the story you are about to read of my experiences, I have eliminated a number of incidents. These refer especially to the conditions under which the American members of the Lincoln Brigade lived in Franco's concentration camps. When thirteen other Americans and I were finally exchanged for fourteen Italian aviators, we were warned by the fascist authorities to be careful of what we said of the treatment we had received in the prisons. We were "gently" reminded that Americans were still in prison. For this reason I have omitted a number of incidents. But in spite of all hardships the morale of those Americans remained high. Despite their sufferings in the concentration camps they still carry on the best traditions of the Lincoln Brigade as those traditions were developed in the front line trenches..."*

Louis Ornitz

## FOREWORD

WHEN Lou Ornitz came back from Spain he had to face a lot of questions. "What made you go?" was the first. "And what did you do before you went?" was bound to follow. Perhaps the person he was talking to would hold off with it until he had heard about Lou's experiences in Spain. But the question was bound to come. And it's an important one; for when you know what Lou Ornitz was and did before he went to Spain you'll find it easier to understand why he went there in the first place.

Today Lou Ornitz is 27 years of age. He is one of nine children. They were all born in America; but the parents came from Europe. That's enough to describe an important part of American life—the struggle for adjustment and the contribution of the immigrant to our civilization. It makes it easier to visualize the young boy as he made his way from one state to another. It goes without saying that these were no leisurely trips made easier by an ample bank account and a Pullman car. He worked and was on his own as he made his way about; and the same applies to the foreign countries to which he later went. But when you ask him about those days he explains that he wanted to "meet people." He wanted to "learn to talk with them and understand them."

Later there was a weekly paper in New York City that Lou Ornitz edited and published. A semi-official organ of the Democratic Party, it was called the "Uptown Democrat." He still traveled. He still wanted to "meet people," to "learn to talk with them and understand them." But it was a different sort he came into contact with now. They were mostly newspapermen and old friends whose work had brought them into touch with developments in the world

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today. He learned of the poverty and the oppression that exists in fascist Italy. Then Hitler came and the German people underwent the same experience as the Italian. The suppression of religious freedom and democratic rights under fascism—these were the aspects that appear to have impressed Ornitz at that time. He wasn't thinking so much about the worker in the shop and the peasant on the land. But then something happened that showed him how the whole thing linked up into a complete picture: The paper that he edited and published went out of existence because of financial difficulties. Its editor and publisher became a clothing worker.

Ornitz became active in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. He began to grasp the full meaning of fascism's threat to democracy. He carried his development further when he became active in the organization of textile workers in New England and the steel workers of Johnstown. There he became an organizer for the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee of the C.I.O. Ornitz, you understand, was still "traveling," as he had started out to do while a youngster in his 'teens. But he no longer traveled out of a desire "to meet people" and to "learn to understand them." He was now meeting them and understanding them quite well. Nor was he traveling any more in order to come in contact with newspapermen and artists who were "well versed in world affairs"; he was applying his knowledge in a practical manner to the world about him.

It was from this post as organizer for the C.I.O. that Ornitz resigned in order to go to Spain. . . . But here we will let him tell the story in his own words. . . .

LIEUT.-COL. JOHN GATES, *Executive Secretary,*  
*Friends of Abraham Lincoln Brigade.*

## CAPTURED BY FRANCO

The war had been in progress a few months. It did not seem just right. Franco claimed that he was defending Catholicism and culture. Yet he was "defending" it with Moors, with Italian fascists, and with German Nazis who hated and attacked the Church. I recalled the program of the "National Church of the German Reich," which declared its determination "to exterminate unalterably and by all necessary means the Christian faith which was imported into Germany in the fatal year of 800. . . ." I still had my notes on the sensational trial of Father Rossaint by the Nazi courts in which the Catholic priest told the judges: "In my discussions with young Catholics I took the view that *National Socialism meant chaos because it leads to war.*" And I knew that the Catholic Youth Organizations of Germany had been declared to be illegal by Hitler. If it is a crime to be a Catholic in Nazi Germany, how could Nazi Germany be defending Catholicism in Spain? That was a question which no one could answer.

But there was more to the picture than this piece of hypocrisy. The Spanish struggle identified itself in my mind with the War of Independence that we Americans fought in 1776. The Spaniards in their fight for freedom were standing off the attacks of Hitler and Mussolini who were the enemies of freedom and democracy the world over. The war in Spain was therefore a universal cause. With the fascist invasion defeated in Spain, would the rape of Austria have been possible? Or Munich? Or the later, complete destruction of Czechoslovakia? Would we in the United States feel concern over Nazism's penetration in South America or Nazi spy rings within our own borders? Would there have been a need here for the drain and the cost of an expanded armament? It is here that we see the direct interest of the American people in the outcome of the Spanish War. It explains why several thousand other

Americans and I went to Spain. We went there because Spain was the front-line in which American democracy was being defended.

### MEET THE AMERICANS . . .

Upon returning to America after having been away for two years, I find it extremely hard to recognize myself. For that matter I find it difficult to recognize those hundreds of my friends who have been killed in Spain, or those who returned alive, or those—and these I knew most intimately—who remained behind in the Franco prison camps. This difficulty crops up whenever I read a certain section of the American press. This is particularly true of the Hearst papers. I discover that we are a pretty frightful crowd. In fact, we went to Spain because we wanted “to kill priests” and “violate nuns.” We are, in short, “mercenaries!” I would accordingly like to give you a brief picture of some of my friends who are still prisoners: just a few words concerning the life they led and the things they did before going to Spain. I think this would serve as an answer to those who would have you believe that we did something un-American in going there.

Velmar Edward Hodges of Kentucky is still in a fascist prison. Hodges is one of those who is painted as un-American by the press. But let's see what he really looks like in terms of American tradition. If you were to leaf through the pages of a Kentucky history, you would find among the first settlers of that state a family by the name of Hodges. Edward is a direct descendant of that family. He spent a little more than ten years serving in the United States army where he held the rank of sergeant. When he left the army he studied engineering. After that he worked as an engineer in one of the country's largest construction companies.

Ed Hodges, the Kentuckian, the former U. S. army sergeant, the construction engineer, is one of the “red demons” about

whom the Hearst press likes to talk. The truth of the matter is that Ed was never connected with any political party. Even after I met him in prison he was very vague about aligning himself with any political movement. Time and again he described himself as “just an old fashioned Democrat.” What had brought him to Spain, in other words, was neither the desire for “mercenary gold” nor the theories of Karl Marx. He had applied the principles of Jeffersonian democracy to modern life; and that application of the deepest American traditions had led him to the Spanish trenches.

Hodges' whole mode of thinking, and his attitude toward the Spanish struggle were an outgrowth and development of his American background. He was a Jeffersonian Democrat, and Spain was fighting for a democracy rooted deeply in the people. But if the attitude of Edward Hodges toward the Spanish struggle was an outgrowth and development of his American background, his participation in Spain's struggle was a conscious defense of that background. This was brought out very clearly in the military lectures that he gave us in the prison camp. Those lectures were more than bits of instruction in military tactics. They were lessons in international politics as seen by an American soldier who had Kentucky and Thomas Jefferson at the roots of his being. “It is a simple matter,” he declared, “to defend the United States. If you want to defend a position on the battlefield, you must surround that position with fortifications. Hitler's drive for expansion has led him to attempt the use of German settlers in penetrating the South American countries. That brings the fascist menace home to us in the Western Hemisphere. We must defend America, therefore, by building a ring of fortifications around the United States, a *ring of democracies*. They will be the best guarantee that our own American democracy will be preserved. And one of the best of those fortifications is a democratic Spain.”

The American traditions that expressed themselves in this manner in Ed Hodges could also be found in Homer Chase.

Homer Chase's family can be traced back to the 1770's. He was proud of those ancestors. He often reminded you that some of them had fought with Washington in the American Revolution. But where Hodges was Kentucky, Chase was Massachusetts and Boston. Not the Boston of Back Bay, but the Boston of those who must work in order to live, the Boston of the American trade union movement and its fight for an American standard of life. When Homer entered the trade union movement he was acting as a true descendant of those ancestors who had dumped boxes of tea in Boston harbor, had raised the slogan of "no taxation without representation," and had fought against King George and tyranny. When Hitler smashed the German trade union movement, Homer Chase knew what fascism meant. And when Hitler invaded Spain he traced the connection of fascism with Franco. He recognized the threat to the American trade union movement, which incorporated a good deal of that democracy, for which his ancestors had shed their blood to establish on this continent. So Homer Chase gave up his job and went to Spain. . . .

Then there was Maurice Conway. Conway is neither a Kentuckian and a Jeffersonian Democrat like Ed Hodges, nor a New-England-Descendant-of-the American Revolution, Boston-Trade-Unionist like Homer Chase. But he represents another aspect of American life which is just as truly a part of our country. Maurice Conway is Irish-American, a devout Catholic, and a doctor. It often puzzled me why he had given up his profession and all that went with it in order to fight for Loyalist Spain. In the prison camp he explained why he had come to fight for Loyalist Spain. *It was because he was a Catholic.* He had become convinced that Franco was not defending Catholicism. It had impressed him as a bit peculiar, that Franco, who posed as the defender of Catholicism, should, in defending it, call upon its worst enemies. "It is only in a democracy," he pointed out, "that we Catholics can bring a better understanding of the church to our fellow-men. Such

an understanding would be impossible in a totalitarian regime that oppresses the Church and molds it to the dictates of the state." It was fascism's threat to religious freedom that brought Maurice Conway to the Lincoln Battalion. . . .

Then there is Joe Young. He too is an American. Like Ed Hodges and Homer Chase, Joe can trace his family back to the early stages of American history. It's a bit funny to see him described as un-American in the press. It was one of his great-grandfathers, as a matter of fact, who presented the United States Government with the gift of an island some generations ago. Joe himself was a seaman before he went to Spain. He was active in his union, as Homer Chase had been in his. He also saw a threat to American democracy in the fascist invasion of Spain. But when he spoke of his reaction to this threat it was the voice of his great-grandfather, who had helped found America and make it a haven for the oppressed, that spoke through him. "We have got to help the oppressed people throughout the world," his ancestor had often declared. "America was founded by those who fled oppression in other countries. It is for this very same reason that we must fight oppression in other lands."

Edward Johnson was another of the Americans in Spain. Like Joe Young and his great-grandfather, Ed Johnson was linked up with the tradition of struggle against oppression. But the link in his case has been forged in the heat of the Civil War. Edward Johnson, you see, is a Negro. The "Abraham Lincoln Battalion" had an intimate and significant ring to his ears. He could see where the name fitted the Spanish scene. He, too, saw a threat to American democracy in the invasion of Spain. Ed had fought for America during the World War and had an honorable discharge from the army. Now he recalled what Mussolini had done to his brothers in Ethiopia. With Mussolini's invasion of Spain, the shadow of fascism drew closer to the Negroes of America. That's why Edward Johnson went to the Spanish trenches.

And so we find John Hollis Jenkins, professor of sociology

in the University of Washington. He too came from an early American family. And there is Irving Rabinowitz, equally American, though not from a family quite so "early" as that of John Hollis Jenkins. In Chicago he had been a physical culture instructor. And he too came to Spain. . . . John Higgins, Sam Grant, Bernard Cohen, Carl Geiser, Robert Steck, Walter Hannigan, Alvin Stevenson—these are a few more of the men described as "un-American" by the press, and they're as "un-American" as Kentucky blue grass, Cape Cod, or the Emancipation Proclamation. It would take pages to really give you the history and background of all these men. I'll just mention one more in this list. He was a particular friend of mine. Maybe he's un-American, too . . . for he's part Indian and part Scotch-Irish. It's hard to say.

All of these men have seen a threat to American democracy. They have served in the front-line trenches in Spain. They were later captured and are still held prisoners. They suffer from all those tortures that the fascists the world over have made so peculiarly their own. There are 87 or more who are still being held there in Franco's prisons. . . .

## CAPTURED . . .

### 1.

It happened on July 26, 1937. I had been assigned in the early morning to do recuperation work. This meant that I was to retrieve exploded shells on and around the battle-front. The metal thus brought in was to be remade into munitions later on. While on my way to the front, I was overtaken by a dispatch rider who handed me a message from headquarters. It stated that our right flank was breaking and would retreat very shortly. I was to proceed at once to a specified section of the front to retrieve two artillery guns. These were to be brought back and then set in position to lay down a cover barrage for our retreating flank.

The units in question retreated sooner than we had expected. We had barely loaded the artillery guns on the truck when we found ourselves completely surrounded. Dark faces were drawing in on us out of the bushes and the high grass; Moors. We saw at once that it was useless to put up a fight, yet the temptation to do so was strong. One of my Spanish comrades reached for his gun, but that was as far as he got. In another two or three minutes they had closed in on us.

"Rusos?" was the first question thrown at us by the Moors. It came from all directions. There was 150 Moors. Almost every one of them pointed at us and asked whether we were "Rusos"—Russians. When I told them that I was an American they said it was impossible. They said this over and over again. Then an officer came up who convinced them that we were Americans. But even then they were suspicious. Prior to the officer's coming, one of the Moors had forced my mouth open. What he was looking for I did not know at first. But a few minutes later, when we were being marched to the fascist headquarters I noticed some Moors bending over dead bodies. They were pecking away with stones at their teeth.

I suddenly realized that these glorious defenders of Nazi culture were trying to get the gold fillings out of the teeth of those dead men. Fortunately I did not have any gold fillings in my own or the Moors would have knocked them out to get the gold from them.

There were four other Spaniards with us as we were being marched to the fascist headquarters. . . . The sergeant in charge of the guards kept edging in toward me. Finally when the other guards got ahead he lagged behind near me, taking up the rear. He kept pointing at my finger. At first I could not make out what he was pointing at, for, as was natural with a prisoner, I marched with my hands in the air. But he repeated this gesture until I looked at my hand and noticed, on one of my fingers, a ring bearing the star and emblem of the Spanish republic. The sergeant kept motioning to me to take it off. Then he brushed against me and whispered his warning.

Understanding a little Spanish I understood his warning to get rid of that ring. A few minutes later I was able to slip it off and hand it to the sergeant. Then we marched on for another few minutes when he edged up to me again. I was unable to understand everything that he said but I did manage to get a few of the ideas that he let drop. I was not to declare upon being questioned that I had come to Spain to fight the fascists. I was an ambulance driver who had been assigned to a truck for this one day. I was to insist that I had been a medical student. With a story like that, he explained, I might be able to get away with my life. But if I failed to do so—and here he pointed significantly to a hole that we were passing. I looked toward the spot. But all I could see were human feet sticking through the shallow covering of earth. He told me that the men killed there had been captured only two hours before.

2.

After two hours of marching we reached the fascist headquarters. Before we went in the sergeant slipped me some

fascist money and two packs of tobacco. He wanted to tell me something but someone walked by at the moment and he stopped. Soon after, he came up close to me. I heard him whisper *Viva la Republica*. He did it hurriedly and moved off at once. A few minutes later I was taken into the fascist headquarters. There I was questioned by a Spanish general, a German Gestapo agent, and an Italian Military Intelligence officer. They asked me any number of questions: "How many Americans are fighting with the Loyalist Government?" "How many planes and tanks do you have?" "What units are on this front?" and the like. Despite the fact that the fascist sergeant had told me that I could get away with my life, I fully expected to be killed. When they accordingly asked me how many Americans were fighting with the Loyalist government I gave them the exaggerated figure of fifty thousand. And in reply to the question about tanks and planes, I said that boatloads were coming in every day.

They knew I was lying. But since I felt that I was to be shot in any event, I kept up the farce. After about ten minutes of this sort of give-and-take, the German Gestapo agent broke in and put a stop to it. He declared that he knew how to handle me. He came over to me, twisted my arm behind my back and said in German: "We know how to make these fellows talk. It's pretty hard to make you Americans open up, but we'll get it out of you." After that he made an effort at what he called "being nice." His "niceness" consisted of a few more questions that might have come directly out of a Nazi propaganda book. Wasn't it true—he asked—that President Rosenfeld, the Jew who runs the United States, had sent me to Spain to fight for the Loyalist government? I was a bit amazed at having that sort of a query put to me in all seriousness. I recall that the Spaniard, the German, and the Italian spoke English with an excellent Oxford accent. It astonished me that men who spoke with so excellent an Oxford accent could seriously believe that Roosevelt's real name was Rosenfeld or concern themselves with such problems

as whether he was or was not a Jew. But the German went on with—"We know that all you fellows who believe in democracy are Jews."

There was a bit more of this, and then I was thrown into a cellar. . . . I could not sit down. I kept pacing the room. I expected them to drag me out at any moment, put me against the wall, and shoot me down. Later the four Spaniards who had been captured with me were brought into the same room. I took out the tobacco that the sympathetic sergeant had given me and passed it around. We rolled cigarettes and began to smoke. But we barely had time to finish the smoke before the door opened again. The guards took the Spaniards out. Soon I heard shouts of *Viva la Republica* which were cut short by a volley of rifle fire.

I paced the floor again and without a stop. Waiting for the firing squad, which I felt would inevitably come, was a torture in itself. Suddenly it grew dark and I realized that night had fallen. I could not sleep. I could not even bring myself to lie down and try to sleep. I kept on pacing the floor all night long until, suddenly, precisely as it had previously grown dark, it now grew light. The door opened and in walked a Spanish guard. I felt that now my time had come. But it made no difference. I had died several times during the night through sheer waiting for death, and by morning I was quite calm and prepared to die. But instead of death another guard walked in behind the first, and in his hands he carried not a gun but a pitcher of coffee. He poured some of it into a tin cup, gave me a piece of bread, and left.

It was hard to think. I could not concentrate. The minutes dragged by slowly. The sun was getting high and it was very hot. During the late afternoon dinner was brought in. When I saw the food, I had the sensation of hunger. But the first few spoons of beans destroyed it. I felt filled and unable to take another bite. It was this endless waiting, you understand. I knew that I was going to be shot, or thought

I knew. But when were they going to take me out and put me against the wall? That was the question that tortured me and kept me pacing endlessly up and down.

Again, and with the same impression of suddenness, night fell. It had barely fallen when the door opened once more. Two guards came in, tied my hands behind my back, took me outside, and began to march me. I was convinced that they were taking me to my death. We approached a wall, and passed it. There was a second wall, and then another, and another, but still we kept on marching. We reached a field and went into it. For two hours we moved across an endless succession of fields until a little church loomed up without warning in the dark. They took me in, wrote down my name and nationality, and then threw me into another room. No one appeared to believe that I was really an American. They insisted that I was Russian.

In that other room I found myself among thirty-four Internationals of all countries. I could not have been there for more than five or ten minutes when the door swung open. They came in, two Moors, and took one of the Internationals out. By this time, finding myself still alive after having been thoroughly convinced that I was about to die, I no longer knew what was going to happen. But I learned soon enough when those horrible screams began. There were screams that tore me from my sitting position and forced me upright with every muscle in my body tense and quivering. I did not know what they were doing to that fellow but I knew that he was screaming in torture. He screamed for about five minutes, and then there was silence.

The door to our room opened and the Moors threw the International in. Most of us had been partially paralyzed by the horrible screams of this tortured International. We could not move. But the few who could, rushed over to him. We found welts and cuts on every part of his body. We tore our shirts into strips for bandages. But before we could bandage



his wounds the door was thrown open again. They took another one out. . . .

This time we knew what to expect and we were prepared for it.

The screams were now in English. They were screams that begged for mercy, that begged to be shot like a soldier and not to be tortured. They were endless and horrible. Over and over again I use the word "horrible" to describe these screams. I cannot help it. There is no other word that describes them. We heard the sounds of stick, and whips, and rubber truncheons beating human flesh. Human flesh makes a terrible sound when it is beaten. And all this time those screams kept pouring out of the man who was being beaten. We lived in a thousand deaths just listening to those screams. He screamed for a few minutes, and then everything was still and quiet again. When they threw him back in among us we all felt paralyzed. Not one of us could move, not even to help that suffering body. We could only stand and look while they took out a third International. It was the same story all over again. Now the screams were in Polish. I could not understand the words, but I knew that these were screams for mercy. I knew that my comrade was begging to be shot, and not tortured.

I was next. . . .

Two Moors grabbed me by the arms and dragged me into the next room. I was almost dead before they got me there, simply from listening to the screams of the others. I can remember nothing more than the sight of huge Moors armed with rubber truncheons, and a little Spanish captain who spoke in a broken English. He said something about showing the American what Franco thinks of those who believe in democracy. He made some signal to one or another of the Moors. They laughed. Then I was beaten and kicked. . . . Those kicks and blows seemed to come from all directions. They poured against me without a stop until I lost consciousness.

It was three weeks before I came to. I turned in my bunk to find three other comrades in the same room with me. I spoke to them in English. "Sprichst du Deutsch?" one of them asked in his turn, and I answered that I could. I wanted to know what happened. Vaguely I recalled that at some time in the past there had been other Internationals with me. But the Germans who were with me now answered that there were only four of us left out of the thirty-five.

As I began to recover my strength I became better acquainted with the men who were in the room with me. One of them was Fritz, a young Austrian of nineteen. Then there was Albert, a young German. And finally there was Robert, a middle-aged Frenchman. I learned that the three of them had been taking care of me. They had received medicines illegally through a sympathetic guard. It was this that had enabled me to recover despite the condition in which I had been brought to them.

## FROM ONE PRISON TO ANOTHER . . .

### 1.

The prison into which I had been thrown was near the town of Grifón, near Navalcarnero, and southwest of Madrid. We were kept there for a few weeks and then sent to another prison. There we were put into solitary confinement. I don't remember the name of the city, but I do know that we had to travel all night by train in order to get there. There was an old castle that looked as though it had been standing there for several hundred years. But now it was used as a prison camp. We were immediately taken to one of the cellars deep underground and locked in a little dungeon. We were kept there, in complete darkness, for about two and a half weeks. There were no windows. The only opening was a small door.

We were fed in the morning. The mess consisted of a concoction of hot water, olive oil, and garlic. Then, later in the day (you really did not know whether it was day or night, but you knew that several hours had passed), they brought us a plate of beans. I said that we were kept in darkness for two and a half weeks. The truth of the matter is that we had no way of knowing whether it was two, or three, or four. But we were kept there long enough to enable them to work a new form of torture on us.

One day they took us out and threw us straight into the sunlight. . . .

It was horrible torture. I wished I had been one of the fortunate thirty-one Internationals who had been killed during the first part of my imprisonment. Being thrown into the sunlight in this sudden manner shot a million pains through the back of my head. I thought that my head would swell up and burst. Tears gushed out of my eyes and I could not

see. I did not know where I was going nor what they were doing to me. I only knew that they were prodding me with bayonets. I felt that they were pacing me around some sort of yard. I heard people laugh and call us "crazy foreigners." Then someone else remarked that it was much better this way, much better than just shooting us.

I did not know how long they kept me out in the sun. Finally they threw me back into the cell again. There I was kept for another week or so. Then, as suddenly as it had happened before, I was taken out; the same thing happened all over again. I wished I was dead. But they only threw me back into the cell again. Shortly after that someone interceded on our behalf. We were given better food. We were placed for a few minutes each day in a dimly lit room until our eyes became adjusted to daylight again and we were able to stand the sun.

Soon we were allowed the sunlight and the daylight all day long. We were permitted to mingle with the Spanish prisoners. When we began to mingle with the Spanish prisoners we were amazed at the high morale that they had retained. Notes were smuggled in to us from the Spanish population outside our prison walls. The Spaniards wrote us that they knew of the tortures that we were going through, we Internationals. They urged us to keep up our morale. "We will win in the end. Victory will be ours." These notes were smuggled in to us through sympathetic guards. Then, while we were in this same prison, we began to receive packages of tobacco, chocolate, money, and canned food. The notes swelled into a steady stream. The guards would walk over to us, look around to see that their officer was not watching, and then slip us the package or the note. "We are going to win," the guards would say as they turned away. At first I could not understand what they meant. But as they continued to bring us more and more packages as the days passed I understood to whom that "We" referred. "We" referred to the Spanish people. . . .

Later I passed through an entire series of prisons and concentration camps. We seldom stayed in any one place for more than two or three weeks. Invariably, at the end of that time, we would be shifted to some other camp. This convinced us of the deep antagonism felt in the fascist zone by the people against their rulers. The authorities knew that endless efforts were made by the population to establish contact with the prisoners. And above all there was the danger that bonds of friendship would be established between the prisoners and the guards themselves. It was to prevent this that we were shifted about so constantly. Every two or three weeks there were new guards and a new prison.

I cannot write about all the prison camps in which I found myself at one time or another, nor about all the incidents that occurred there. I will merely select a few highlights of my experiences. One of these were the constant beating that we received, sometimes from the guards, but mostly from the officers. We were somewhat glad to get the beating. It is a strange thing to say and will be hard for many to understand that every time we were beaten it was an indication that the fascists had been suffering reverses. These beatings were often our only source of news. They served as a barometer of the military situation. The fascist officers acted as though they could stop a Loyalist advance by beating the Loyalist prisoners. . . .

We were soon sent to a prison camp at Trujelo near the Portuguese border. There we met thirteen other Internationals. Checking our figures we found that only seventeen of us had remained alive out of more than one thousand who had been reported as captured in the early fighting around Madrid. The other prisoners in this Trujelo camp were some three hundred Spaniards. Most of them were Basques and Asturians. We became very friendly with the Basques, whom we knew to be Catholics. Among them there were Catholic

priests. They often explained the motives that had led the Basque Catholics to support the Loyalist government.

It was around these priests that one of the most vivid of the incidents I passed through in the prison camps centered.

The incident took place on the night Teruel was taken by the republic. That day the sergeant of Civil Guards who was in charge of the yards got drunk. From 6 o'clock that evening until 3 o'clock the next morning the prisoners were horribly beaten. The group of which I was a part was beaten from six to midnight. After the beating we dragged ourselves to our bunks. This consisted of a thin cotton blanket spread over the cobblestone floor next to the entrance of the bull ring. (The bull ring itself was the concentration camp.) I could not have been in bed for more than a hour when one of the Basque prisoners crawled over to the Internationals. He told us that a Basque priest had been beaten to death. He asked us whether we would attend a secret mass.

Though we were suffering from the pain and exhaustion of our own beating, we agreed to come. We followed him along the ledge of the wall in the prison yard, knowing full well that if the guards would spot us they would shoot at sight without bothering to halt and question us. Finally we came into a small stone room. There, lying on the stone flooring, was the priest who had so often explained to us why the Basques supported the republican government. Mass was said over him by another Basque Catholic priest, also a prisoner. I can still recall quite clearly some of the sentences he uttered over the dead body of his fellow priest. "Before us, lying on this stone floor," he said, "there lies a Catholic priest killed by those who declare that they defend Catholicism. He was killed because he was a Catholic priest. He was killed because he carried out the wishes of his God that he be with his Catholic people and serve them no matter where they were. He was captured by the Italians and Moors outside Guernica. He was taken prisoner while administering religious solace to the wounded at the front, to the Catholic soldiers fighting

with the Loyalists. In doing so he was fulfilling the dictates of his faith. It was for doing so, that he was killed." When the priest finished his utterances he turned to me and asked if I would speak. In the poor Spanish at my command I did speak. We spoke, the priest and I, not only in the presence of death, but under the threat of death. There is no doubt that we would both have been executed had the authorities learned of this secret mass.

Two days later Albert, my German comrade, developed extremely severe pains in the head. For two days he remained on his bunk, a thin blanket on the stone floor. He asked constantly for the prison doctor. But when he did come he did not even bother to lean over and take Albert's temperature. He simply thrust his foot under Albert's side and turned the sick man over. It was resentment at this treatment that made Albert refuse to speak to the doctor. In an effort to obtain aid for him we intervened and described to the doctor the pains from which the young German suffered. "He's seriously ill," we said. "He may die unless he received the proper attention." "He'll be better off," the doctor replied. Then he turned and started to make off without even having taken the sick man's pulse. We stopped him and pleaded with him to tell us what should be done for our comrade. "Give him an aspirin," was the answer he gave us. For a day and a half after that "medical examination" Albert lay screaming with pain. It was unendurable. Finally he stopped screaming. His eyes bulged in their sockets. He lay there for hours. He could not recognize us. Then he lost the power to speak.

He died shortly after this. . . . That left us with sixteen. . . .

## SOLIDARITY...

### 1.

From the bull ring of Trujelo we were taken to the prison camp at Santander. Our guards marched us in chains through the streets. The fact that we were republican prisoners would in itself have been enough to arouse the interest of the people. But when they learned from our guards that we were Internationals their interest became intense. The civilians stood and stared at us as though they wanted to tell us something but could not do so. During the halts we could see the citizens make peculiar motions with the hand and head. And when they finally felt that they had attracted our attention they would back up against a wall. After a cautious glance up the street from right to left to escape detection there followed a peculiar stroking of the hair with the back of the hand. And when we looked more attentively we could see that the hand stroking the hair had been curled into a fist. These people were stroking their heads, not with open palm, but with the fist clenched. The clenched fist held against the side of the head is the salute of the Spanish republicans. To give that salute openly in fascist Spain would have meant death. But the people felt impelled to let us know that they too were for the republic. That furtive suggestion of the republican salute was their way of doing so.

There were many other ways in which the people under fascist rule showed that their true sympathies were for the republic. At the busy and crowded railway station, while we waited for the train to carry us to another prison camp, old men and women would often bump into us as though by accident. Then they would hurriedly lose themselves in the crowd. But we would reach down into our pockets and find small coins, or notes that told us to keep up our courage "be-

cause we are going to win." Slogans painted on the walls were of course a common method of expressing solidarity with the republic. When we left the railway station at Santander we saw soldiers busily engaged in painting printed signs off the walls. I passed close to one of them but all I could see was *abajo*, meaning "down," and then *Franco*. The other words had already been erased, but that was enough. . . .

2.

In the prison camp on the outskirts of Santander we seventeen Internationals found ourselves among 1,200 Spanish prisoners. Within a few days time we had developed numerous acquaintanceships among them. This was quite easy. We were the Internationals. These people had been deluged with stories about us. They had read in their newspapers that we were responsible for the saving of Madrid. And so they were eager to ask us questions, to do things for us, or to go out of their way to make us comfortable. They would tell us about their part in the defense of the North before it was conquered by the Italians and the Moors. They were proud of their anti-fascist political affiliations. They would boast about their membership in the Anarchist movement, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, or the Basque Catholic Party. America was very much in their minds. They were eager to learn about it. Would America finally support Spain and help put an end to this slaughter of an entire nation by foreign invaders?

In this particular prison visitors were allowed once each week. About three hundred visitors would enter the camp every Sunday. The first Sunday we were there we were all prepared to receive the visitors. Many of the Spaniards had promised to introduce us to their brothers, or sisters, or other relatives. We were told that they were going to bring us gifts because they were appreciative of the work we had done around Madrid. Later that morning three thousand visitors showed up. The grapevine system had worked. Word

had spread through Santander that seventeen Internationals were in prison. Almost everyone in the town wanted to see these people who had been responsible for the saving of Madrid.

When the visitors were admitted they filed past us in groups. They looked at us eagerly and smiled their friendship. But they were afraid to actually come over and talk with these men who meant so much to them in their hopes for freedom. They were afraid that some fascist official would see them. Despite the caution that the crowds showed, however, the officials felt that things were going too far. In about two hours the visitors were driven from the prison yard. But by the time they left, the Internationals had been given four gunny-sacks full of tobacco, fresh bread, chocolate, canned milk, and sausage.

That afternoon the guards were tripled in numbers. Four brigades of soldiers were called out to patrol the streets of Santander. We learned that the Visitors' Day just past had been regarded by the fascist authorities as a popular demonstration against Franco. In consequence we were all confined to our quarters for the next few days. But we quickly took advantage of this confinement by deepening and broadening our contacts with the Spanish prisoners. We learned that the people of Santander were still carrying their struggle against Franco. Information of these activities would be received from their friends or relatives by the Spanish prisoners and they would pass the details on to us. They told us that the mines and factories in the North of Spain were controlled for the most part by the Germans. In those mines and factories the Spanish workers vied with each other in the task of slowing up and even completely halting production. We learned that in the mountains of Asturias guerrilla warfare against the fascist is still being carried on by ten thousand men, women and children. These guerrilla fighters leave their hiding places at night, attack military concentrations, capture ammunition, and make their way back to their mountain

hide-outs before daybreak. Later this was verified by a young twenty-two year old Asturian who was captured by the fascists during one of these raids.

This, and other forms of the secret struggle for the republic carried on by the Spaniards was answered by the fascists with wholesale terrorism. The prisoners in the Santander camp told us of an act of terrorism that had been committed some two weeks before we came. Two trucks had been crowded with young girls between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two. They were then taken out and mowed down by machine-gun fire. They had been captured when the city of Santander fell. They were denounced as spies, as having been volunteer nurses caring for the wounded in one of the republican war hospitals. When these girls were taken out for execution the citizens of the city were invited to watch the slaughter. The mass execution was Franco's way of gently hinting that further resistance to fascism could only lead to further butcheries of this kind. The sister of one of the prisoners had been among these victims. He was proud of the fact that she, and the other girls, when they faced the machine-guns shouted "*Long Live the Republic*" before they died.

## PRISONERS FROM THE FIFTEENTH BRIGADE . . .

### 1.

From Santander I was taken to a little town fourteen kilometers outside of Burgos. We arrived there in the early hours of the morning. At a distance it looked like a beautiful place. But as we approached, the beauty dissolved into the gray walls of an old building. I was reminded of the monastery in which I had been kept in solitary confinement and darkness for weeks on end. At first I thought that the same thing was going to happen to me again. The very thought of that monastery I had been in was enough to plunge me into hopelessness and despair. And here was another monastery! "Good Lord," I thought, "must I go through that again?" The thought kept running through my mind as we drew closer to the building and then halted in front of it.

We piled out of the trucks and were lined up at inspection while a short sergeant who carried a stick looked us over. He looked, frankly speaking, like a scoundrel, and a pretty mean one. Later we learned to call him "El Palo" because of that stick he carried in his hand. He called us by name one at a time, and as he called us we walked up to him and halted at his command. He demanded why we had failed to give him the fascist salute as we approached? He spoke so rapidly that we could not understand what it was that he said. That rapidity of speech was deliberate. When he spoke to us, and we failed to answer him because of our inability to grasp his flow of words, he hit us across the face with the stick that he carried in his hand. Later we were photographed and fingerprinted. Then we were marched into the cellars where an officer spoke to us in understandable German. He suggested that we make ourselves comfortable. Then he laughed and looked around at the room as though to point the remark and

thus make sure that we caught the humor of his comment. The place was large, damp, and utterly barren. The officer laughed again and walked out. . . .

We no longer knew what to expect. For all we knew this was the place where they were finally going to finish us off. But regardless of our fears we were all tired enough to lie down and attempt to rest. That same afternoon they brought us some food. The ration had certainly grown small enough. Some of the prisoners interpreted this as further proof that we were about to die. Why bother to feed prisoners whom you will soon kill? The conviction was further deepened by the fact that we were not allowed out into the prison yard. We were left to ourselves all through that day. A few of us started some card games in an attempt to distract our minds from the present circumstances. We did not know what was going to happen to us the following day. It might be our last. But our fatigue kept us from thinking about it too much and we stretched out for some sleep. So tired were we that we dropped off as soon as we hit the stone floor. . . .

2.

I had slept for only a few hours when I was awakened by the sound of many feet trampling the stone floor around me. I thought at first that I was dreaming. Then the apprehension of immediate death, developed earlier in the day, returned. It occurred to me that the fascists had decided to take us out of the prison at night and shoot us down. The thought brought me to with a start. In the dim light I saw a large number of men walking about the room or sitting on the stone floor. I jumped up at once and demanded to know what was taking place. I was in such a state of excitement that I began to shout in English: "What's going on here? What's going on here?"

"Holy smokes," someone yelled back. "What the hell do you think is going on here?"

It was English; and what's more it sounded American.

"Are there any Americans here?" I immediately yelled back. "Are there any Americans here?"

"Sure, a couple of Americans here. . . ."

There were two voices answering me now. . . .

"I'm Lou Ornitz. I'm Lou Ornitz. Who are you? Who are you?"

We could not see each other. The place was swarming with prisoners. The men were tired and shifting about, hunting for a place to sleep. One of the fellows finally came near and shouted my name. *Lou Ornitz!*

"Who is it? Who is it?" I called back anxiously. Then he was at my side and I saw that it was a comrade of mine from the same outfit—Matthew Dykstra. We threw our arms around each other, bear-hugging from sheer joy. He told me that everyone had insisted that I was dead, that I could not have survived. He kept on feeling me to see if I was all in one piece with nothing missing. In the excitement of the meeting I forgot to inquire about other comrades and friends of ours. When we were through bear-hugging and shoulder-slapping, another prisoner came over. He too was a friend of mine, one of my first instructors in Spain, Frank Ryan, from Ireland. It was the same story all over again. We bear-hugged and shoulder-slapped and he too told me that he had thought I was dead.

By this time it dawned on me that there were hundreds of prisoners in the room. How had they all been captured? Was the war over? That night they all gathered around me. I was full of questions. After all I had been a prisoner for over a year by now and they had been through so many actions. We asked each other about comrades of ours and tried to trace their whereabouts and fate. I demanded to know how so many of them had been taken prisoner. They told me about the enormous shipments of men, munitions, and planes that Franco had received from Italy. It was this overwhelming advantage in war supplies that had made possible the Aragon offensive. Many of our men had been cut off, sur-

rounded, and captured. I asked them whether all the prisoners were here. They answered that there were two other rooms filled with them in the same building. In the darkness, judging from the noise, the excitement, and the bustle of several hundred moving bodies, I thought that the entire International Brigade had been captured. I was to learn better later on. . . .

Little by little we were finally able to control ourselves. We spent the entire night asking each other questions. "How do things look now for the Loyalists, especially in view of the help that Franco is receiving from Italy and Germany?" One of the first questions that I can remember asking them was: "Isn't America doing anything? Isn't the United States doing anything?" It was hard to believe them when they told me that the embargo was still being maintained on Loyalist Spain by the United States. I could not understand it. I could not understand how the American people could let down the Spanish republic. Wasn't Loyalist Spain fighting the same sort of war that we in America had fought in 1776?

"Well, we're all tired," someone suggested. "Let's go to sleep. We'll talk some more tomorrow." They all went to sleep but I could not. I stretched out besides Matt Dykstra. All night long I asked about other comrades. Then he told me that two friends of mine were in the next room. One of them was Bob Steck, whom I had known in the States, and who had come to Spain with me. Then there was Max Parker, another fellow from the same outfit who had been captured a bit later.

The next morning, in the daylight, we were able to see each other more clearly. Later in the day we were moved into larger quarters and all the prisoners came together. The number captured was not as large as my excited mind had pictured it on the night before. We checked the number and found that not more than 450 Internationals had been taken prisoner. They came from some twenty-five nationalities scattered through the various units of the brigades. Dur-

ing the next few days the fascists sent in other prisoners in an effort to swell the numbers of the Internationals already present. We talked with them and learned that they were in reality Spanish subjects. It did not take us long to learn the reason for this maneuver. It was not merely a propaganda case that Franco was trying to build up. These men were to be used for the exchange of prisoners. Each real or supposed International was to be exchanged for an Italian prisoner. It was for this reason that the 450 authentic Internationals had been increased to 650 by adding prisoners who were in reality Spanish subjects. . . .



## SAN PEDRO DE CARDENAS . . .

. 1.

San Pedro de Cardenas prison is the former palace of the Cid, the legendary figure who did so much in driving the Moors out of Spain centuries ago. Later it was turned into a monastery, and still later it became a prison camp. It is situated on a high plateau, so that even in June and July the weather frequently turns cold. Over the entrance to the prison, and carved in imported Italian marble, there is an equestrian statue of the Cid. He sits astride his horse with a sword in his hand. The upraised arm is about to sweep down at the heads of the Moors who beg for mercy at his feet. Wind, rain, and time have broken the sword short at the hilt, so that the Cid is pictured with his arm raised in the air in an exact imitation of the Spanish republican salute. From time to time, when we marched into the yard for food, we brought this to the attention of the guards. We declared that he must have been a good republican to raise his fist in that salute. The guards seldom felt comfortable at our remarks, particularly when we reminded them of the Cid's struggle against the Moors and his fight for the freedom of Spain. Franco, we told the guards, brought back the Moors whom the Cid had done so much to drive out. That would puzzle and embarrass the guards; and in their embarrassment their answer was a smack on the bottom with the butts of their rifles. . . .

At one side of the prison there is a church. The prisoners, Spanish as well as Internationals, were compelled to attend mass. But the authorities did not see fit to use the church for the celebration of mass. Later we learned why this was so. It was because the church was being used as an ammunition dump. This practice of placing an ammunition dump in a building near a prison camp was a very frequent one in fas-

cist Spain. It was intended to prevent the Loyalist fliers from bombing those dumps. The prisoners were often placed in the same building that housed the munition dump itself.

The 650 Internationals, both those who were authentically so and those who had been made such for purposes of exchange, were about equally divided between two floors of the prison structure. Each floor was about 25 feet wide and 150 feet long. The space, of course, was insufficient for so many men and they were naturally very much cramped for room. In one respect this lack of space might be considered an advantage. During our first few months in this prison we were issued no blankets and no mattresses. Body warmth was our only protection against the cold that prevented us from sleeping during the night. During the day we were much better out of doors. The cold and the rain were preferable to the drafts and the continual dampness of the rooms themselves. The Spanish prisoners who had been there before us had seen at least two prisoners die each day during the winter months. There were windows in the rooms. But they lacked panes. So we closed them up as well as we could with rags and bits of old board. But still the dampness and the chill held.

The day's routine began with a bugle call at 5:30 in the morning. "El Palo" ("The Stick"), the fascist sergeant, would bang us across the legs with the stick if we did not get up fast enough. Naturally, after having been kept awake most of the night by the cold we didn't get up fast enough. There were only five washbowls for the 650 men. Even at that it was often impossible to wash for weeks on end because the faucets were closed, or because the water would come out in an almost invisible drip. I might add, as well, that there were not more than five toilets for these 650 men. The insufficiency of these hygienic facilities was made even greater by the fact that 20 per cent of the men suffered from diarrhea.

Once up, we marched out of the building to salute the flag. The fascist camp commander would put us at attention and order us to give the fascist salute as the flag was raised and the

bugle sounded. The bugle ended its notes when the flag floated from the head of the mast, but we were still kept there at attention with our arms outstretched in the fascist salute. *España!* the commander would shout, and the prisoners would answer with *Una* (One!). *España!* the commander would bawl again, and we answered *Grande!* (Great!) *España!* he yelled for the third time, and we answered with *Libre!* (Free!)

That last response of *Libre!* was given all our lung power. We put all our force into it. After a time the fascist officials "got wise" and for a time they felt it unnecessary that we should give the fascist salute. But news of our little maneuver ran like wild-fire among the Spanish prisoners. They responded to the idea particularly when they learned that it was the Internationals who had turned that response of *Libre* into a battle-cry during the salute.

The little ceremony in the ward ended with the fascist anthem and then we filed back into the building for breakfast. This consisted of a plate of hot water with olive oil, garlic, and a bit of dissolved bread. At first this sort of a diet was rather hard to get used to. It gave almost everyone diarrhea. Most of the Internationals spilled the stuff out rather than drink it. But later, when the cold weather set in, we felt the need for a hot drink in the morning. And as far as the diarrhea was concerned—well, what if you did get it?

From eight to ten in the morning we had classes which we organized ourselves. After that we went through the physical exercise session which we ran. We felt the need for exercising in order to keep the body in decent condition and the mind functioning normally. After this work-out we went back to our classes and continued with them until we fell out for lunch. Lunch usually consisted of some bean soup with an occasional sardine fried in oil. But the sardine was a nominal sort of thing, for nothing remained of it by the time you picked the maggots off.

Lunch was followed by more classes. The greatest part of the afternoon, however, was spent in delousing ourselves. The

lack of washing facilities kept us swarming with these lice, and the hunt for them was both vigorous and prolonged. At 6:30 "dinner" was served. It consisted of another plate of beans.

Supper was followed by the lowering of the flag, the fascist rigamarole of shouted slogans and salutes while it was being lowered, and a sermon delivered to us by a priest. This sermon invariably followed the same pattern. "My brothers," was the expression with which the priest began his sermon. But his feelings toward us were so "brotherly" that he turned red in the face whenever he looked at an International. The sermons as a matter of fact were not even meant for us. It was understood in advance that no favorable impression could be made on us with stuff of that description. The sermons though directed at us, were meant for the Spanish prisoners. They were told how great a man was Franco who had been sent by God to lead the Spanish people to salvation. God and Franco was always the theme at which this renegade priest hammered away. Later the firm was expanded a bit, without consulting the senior member, to include two more partners. It then became—God, Franco, Hitler and Mussolini.

## 2.

For a long time we had very little clothing. Those of us who had good trousers on reaching the prison were compelled to give them up to our fascist captors. Many of the men had no shoes and walked about in their bare feet. Others lacked shirts and relied instead on a borrowed blanket which they wrapped around their bare bodies. I recall that on one particular occasion there was a flurry of excitement in the prison camp. Rumor had it that visitors were expected. The rumor was confirmed on the following day when we were given smocks and told to put them on. The reason for this escaped us at first. The explanation, however, became apparent quickly enough. Many of the men, as I have already said, were without shirts, and others were walking around

with their buttocks sticking through the torn seat of their pants. The smock was intended to take the place of the missing shirt and act as a cover-up for the equally missing trousers' seat. The smock reached from the neck to the knees. And since it left nothing exposed but the trouser-legs, a visitor would have taken it for granted that the prisoners were fully dressed.

We understood of course that the fascists intended to put us on show. We were to be used for propaganda purposes. We were determined not to be exploited in this manner by the fascists. At the same time we wanted to make use of this opportunity to bring our miserable condition to the attention of the visitors as a demonstration that might lead to a new issue of clothing. The visitor, when he came, turned out to be the British Commission representative who had been sent to Burgos from England. Before we were marched down into the yard to see him—or for him to see us—many of us stuffed the skirt of the smock down inside our trousers, thus exposing the condition of our clothing. The sergeant at once ordered us to pull the smocks from inside our trousers and let the skirt cover us to the knees as before. But we were a bit too clever to be caught in this manner. We filed out into the yard with our smocks hanging down to the knees. But when we reached the Englishmen we calmly tucked them back into our trousers again. We turned in good fashion-show style and revealed the ventilation we were receiving because of the missing seats in our trousers. Then we threw the smocks open in front and showed the visitors that we had no shirts. It was a demonstration that led to beatings at the hands of the fascists. But we repeated the demonstration when other visits took place. In the end the prison authorities finally gave us a shirt, a pair of trousers, and rope slippers.

Apart from the clothing that we were able to obtain because of them, these visits were welcomed by us for another and equally important reason. A visit from the American consul, the British agent, or any other distinguished person,

always meant that we were given a special dinner. It is to be understood that we looked forward to these visits with a good deal of eagerness and expectation. Nevertheless the truth of the matter is that such red-letter days occurred only about three times in the course of eight or nine months. The special meals that marked them could not offset the wretched diet from which we suffered day-in and day-out. The men grew weak and exhausted. The daily sick role always totaled from seventy-five to a hundred men. Of these from thirty to forty were so ill that they remained lying on the floor all day long without being able to move. High fever, rheumatism, severe diarrhea and dysentery were the commonest of the ailments from which the men suffered. Cold troubled all of us all the time.

Among the prisoners there were doctors from the International Brigades who had been captured together with us. They were capable men and more than willing to care for our sick. But medical attention could be obtained, if at all, only by putting in a requisition with the fascist officials. That was a painfully slow process. It took us six or seven days to even get as much as an aspirin tablet. Many of the men were full of scurvy. Sore gums and loose teeth were prevalent conditions. We were covered with vermin. We were able to get a bath only once in two or three months when the guards marched us down to the river. But the river was a mile and a half away. In our weakened condition we had to halt and rest three or four times before we could reach the river bank.

Part of the drafty room in which we slept had been marked off as an infirmary. But a prisoner had to be seriously ill before he could hope for a place in that infirmary. And when he was admitted the best that he could expect was a straw mattress—with very little straw in it—spread over the damp floor. There was in the prison camp itself a hospital that almost deserved the name. But before one of us could get in he had to be at the very doorstep of death. I know of only

five Internationals who got into that hospital, and three of them died there. This instilled a fear of the place into the men. They felt that they would rather endure their sicknesses, and die, if it came to that, with their friends around them.

I know of Internationals who died because of the horrible conditions in the camp. Four died of peritonitis. They could have been saved by an operation. Our own doctors, who were prisoners with us, were willing to perform the operation. But they lacked the necessary surgical instruments and medical equipment. The fascists would not supply them with these things. In fact a few of the minor operations, such as infected fingers, or the removal of bullets lodged in the body, were performed by our doctors with no other surgical instrument than a pocket knife.

I particularly recall the case of two Frenchmen who were close friends of mine. One day they were suddenly stricken with appendicitis. The fascist doctors refused to do anything for them and they were left to lie there in pain on the stone floor. I sat up with them through two nights in an effort to ease them through the pain. Suddenly I caught myself screaming at the fascist doctor as he passed the window. I shouted at him that these two men were dying for lack of an operation. I pleaded with him to operate, or at least to give our own doctors the necessary instruments so that they could do so. But he merely looked at me and laughed.

Two days before they died they were taken to the prison hospital. Later a Spanish prisoner who worked in the hospital told me what had taken place there. The doctor refused to do anything for them. He said that it would be better for them to die. And so they died. But before their death a priest came to administer the last sacraments. This was not one of the Basque Catholic priests whom I described earlier. This was one sent into the prison camp by the fascist authorities. We had previously urged him to intercede for the two Frenchmen when they fell seriously ill. But he, like

the doctor, had only laughed at us. But now that the Frenchmen were dying, he, who had refused to do anything to save them, was at their side in these last moments. As one of the orderlies described it to me, the priest went up to the first Frenchman, who was already out of his mind, and administered the last rites to him. But when he approached the second, he found him still in possession of his faculties. The appendix had already burst. The poison was spreading through his system and the slightest movement shot innumerable pains through his body. But he still possessed enough strength to cope with this priest who had betrayed the church that he professed to serve.

The priest asked this International whether he was ready to receive the last sacraments. "Father," the Frenchman replied calmly, "I am a Catholic." And despite the excruciating pain that the movement cost him, he raised his hand to tear open his shirt, thus uncovering a cross that he wore. "I am a Catholic," he continued. "But Father, it is your task not only to help men die, but to save them from death when it is possible. I know that my friends asked you to intercede for an operation that would have saved me. I also know that you laughed. But now that I am dying you want to save me for God. I am saved for God," he ended, "I am a Catholic. But you are not." And with this he died after rejecting the last sacraments. . . .

That, however, did not end the hypocrisy on the part of the fascist officials. On the following day we were drawn up at attention in the prison yard. They brought out the first body in a coffin and carried it away as we looked on. We all saluted with clenched fists raised to our heads. That was our farewell to the dead International. We knew that we would be beaten that night for having given the republican salute in this manner. But we also knew that they would not have the impudence to stop us during the funeral itself. And they did not. The Spanish prisoners inside the building had come to the prison windows to join in the farewell to the two dead

comrades. When they saw us raise our clenched fists in the republican salute they cried *Long Live the Republic* and followed our example in giving the republican salute.

After the coffin containing the first Frenchman was carried along the length of our line, it was taken out through the back of the prison for burial. A few minutes later the second Frenchman was brought out, also in a coffin, and carried away for burial as we looked on. The next day, however, the hospital orderly revealed the full hypocrisy of this burial. The first body brought out, he informed us, was that of the International who had died without accepting the last sacraments. They carried him ceremoniously enough to the graveyard. But when they got there, they merely turned the coffin on its side, and dumped the body out into the grave. They then brought the same coffin in through the back door of the hospital, and placed in it the body of the Frenchman to whom the last sacraments had been administered while he was no longer in his senses. He was regarded as being worthy enough to be buried with the coffin itself.

### 3.

In view of these hardships one might expect that the morale of the prisoners would become low, but the opposite was the case. Our morale remained high. Our own sufferings, and those of the Spanish people, kept our sense of indignation very much alive. We were frequently subjected to third degrees at the hands of the German Gestapo agents. One of the German prisoners was frightened enough by these third degrees to be tricked into serving the Gestapo agents as a stool-pigeon. But we met this threat by tightening up on the organization that we had imposed on ourselves. If there happened to be a stool-pigeon among us we soon learned who he was. We isolated him completely from contact with the prisoners.

It was undoubtedly on the Germans and the Italians that the Gestapo and O.V.R.A. agents worked most in efforts to turn them into their tools. They were the ones who were

confronted with the worst fate—that of being sent back to Germany or Italy. These Internationals stood up well under the test. But a number of them made efforts to escape from the prison. Some of those who attempted to escape were caught, brought back, and shot. Most of the other Germans and Italians were soon told to pack up—they were being sent back to their own countries. It is painful to think of what must have happened in Germany and Italy to these brave fighters for freedom and democracy. . . .

When these comrades were taken away, the rest of us, our morale still intact, continued to organize our lives. We still attended our illegal classes. We had neither paper nor pencil, but we did manage to obtain bits of charcoal. With these we wrote on ordinary pieces of slate. The lesson thus written out was thoroughly memorized. Then we scraped the slate clean with a piece of broken glass and wrote the next lesson.

I don't believe I will be accused of super-patriotism when I say that the Americans played a leading role in maintaining the morale of the prisoners. We took the initiative in organizing the classes, and we were the ones who served as instructors. During the evenings it was the Americans who arranged the entertainment. They led in the singing, performed in plays and skits, and led the others into little tournaments of competitive skill. They also showed the others how to carve chess sets out of bone, wood, or soap (occasionally we would get soap). And they edited a prison newspaper that reflected the life of the camp, dealt with the conditions under which the men lived, and discussed the campaigns and demonstrations that we carried out. The tin can orchestra was their idea too. In short the spirit that existed among them spread through all the organizations and classes that were set up in the San Pedro de Cardenas Institute of Higher Learning.

## MR. CARNEY VISITS THE PRISON CAMP...

### 1.

By this time a number of visitors had come to the camp. The most outstanding visit of all was that made by William Carney, correspondent in Franco Spain for the "New York Times." By this time there were 75 Americans in San Pedro de Cardenas (Clarence Blair, Cohn Haber, Anthony Kerleck, and Rudolph Opera had been removed to the Saragossa prison), and it was Carney who had their names published in the "New York Times." But that was not the full extent of the information sought from us by this apologist for fascism.

We knew in advance that Carney was going to visit us. We had noticed that a special meal was being prepared and this was a sure sign of visitors approaching over the horizon. Through a bit of careful investigation we learned from a trustee in the prison office that an American reporter was about to visit us. The name of the reporter was also given us after a bit more probing, and so we prepared ourselves to receive Mr. Carney of the "New York Times." An introduction to our guest was hardly necessary. We already knew what he represented. William Carney brought us two packages of cigarettes apiece, which was not bad at all, and described himself to us as "an American." To make sure that we got the point he repeated this self-description a number of times. If we remained unconvinced about his Americanism it was not for want of effort on his part.

In the article published by him in the "New York Times," Carney described our prison as a happy vacation resort in which the Americans were the only ones ungrateful for the favors bestowed by Franco. He also remodeled the surrounding landscape—which shows creative ability, to say the least. The river, which was a mile and a half away, and to which we

were taken for bathing once in two or three months, was diverted from its course by Mr. Carney's magic, and made to flow under our very windows. As a matter of fact we had invited Carney to visit our quarters to see how we lived. But from the lies and the exaggerations in his article you would never guess that he had been anywhere near us.

Carney's visit to us in the prison camp can best be understood from the nature of the questions that he put to us. "You know me boys, I'm an American. I'm here to help you." But we were already suspicious of him for we had read the articles he had written prior to our capture. "We're all very much interested in getting you fellows exchanged, all of you," he rattled on. "But there's only one thing holding up the exchange. The negotiations have gone through O.K. But we still have to find that organization that sent you to Spain. We have to get it to pay your fare back to the States. Now isn't it true that the Communist Party sent you to Spain?"

Now Carney ("you know me boys, I'm an American") knew quite well that we were prisoners in the hands of the fascists. He knew that if a few of the prisoners who were Communists admitted it, they would be shot. Yet knowing this, he put that question to us. As spokesman for the Americans, I told him none of us had been sent by the Communist Party. And furthermore, if there were negotiations for our release, various committees to aid Spain would be more than willing to pay our fare back. For that matter many of us had families who were ready to send the money for the trip home. The more the man talked the more suspicious became his sudden interest in our welfare. During the course of his talk with us he constantly repeated that question about the organization that had sent us over. We knew what he was driving at. It wasn't freedom from Franco's prisons that Carney wanted for us, but freedom from life itself, for that would have been the inevitable result had anyone among us admitted that he was a Communist.

As representative of the men I told Carney that if he was really interested in our welfare he could take a message for

us to the American State Department. That message was the following: As prisoners of war we deserved better treatment than that given to criminals. We wanted decent food and adequate medical attention. We asked for clean and sufficient living quarters. As Americans, coming from a democratic country, and as prisoners of war, we did not want to be forced to salute the fascist flag. As an American, I reminded Carney when our conversation ended, that the least he could do for us was to convey this message to our State Department. It did not take me long, however, to find out just how much of an American "patriot" Carney really was. That same evening, as we were filing out to salute the fascist flag, the prison commander pulled me out of the line. He repeated, word for word, the statements that I had made to Carney. Now it must be borne in mind that when Carney had interviewed me, neither an interpreter nor even a fascist official was present. Carney was alone with the 75 Americans in that camp. The message, in other words, that we had given to Carney to deliver to the American State Department, had been delivered instead to his true superiors—the fascist authorities in Spain.

That night I was severely beaten by the fascist guards and put on half rations for several days. Later I received an explanation of this beating from some Spanish friends who worked as trustees in the prison office. An hour after Carney left me, he 'phoned the fascist camp commander, told him that I was a dangerous agitator, and suggested that he "take care of me." Yet Carney, who betrays his profession as a journalist by writing lies, and betrays his loyalties as an American by attempting to put other Americans before a fascist firing squad, continues on the staff of the "New York Times." "All the News That's Fit to Print" still stands at the banner head of the "Times."

2.

The Internationals were often compelled to become actors in order to further Franco's propaganda efforts. One day they

took us out of the prison across a hilly field and then marched us back to the prison again in front of a news-reel camera. They repeated this performance three times. The news-reels was intended to show the capture of Loyalist prisoners. Each of us was captured three times in a row, thus swelling by that much the number of Internationals who had been taken prisoner. The news-reels were spread through Germany and Italy as well as invaded Spain. A deliberate attempt was made to create the impression that hundreds of thousands of Internationals were fighting for the Loyalists. Support for the fascist interventionist attack on Spain was dying in all the totalitarian countries. This was an attempt to bolster it up; or at least to crush republican sympathy by creating an impression of military disaster for Spain.

One of the most notorious of the fascist agents was brought into the Burgos propaganda campaign. He was sent on a visit to all the prison camps and interviewed the Internationals who were prisoners there. This man was Doriot, the head of the "Parti Populaire Français," the French fascist movement. We knew, of course, of Doriot's political background and his link with Trotsky. It convinced us more than ever of the direct connection between Trotsky and fascism.

3.

Many of the guards around the prison were very friendly. They were under the domination of the fascist officers, of course, and had to do as they were told. But they were not allowed to go to the front. The fascist commanders could not trust them for any other service than that of guards around the prisons. It was partially through them that we learned how deep was the distrust that separates the Burgos dictatorship from the people over whom it rules. And we also learned something of the methods used by the fascists in dragooning Spaniards into fighting for a cause that is not their own. The method is one of sheer blackmail. It was applied, not only to these guards, but also to prisoners taken from the Loyalists.

Such Spanish prisoners are closely questioned in an effort to learn whether they had relatives in the fascist zone. If they did, they were given the choice of entering the fascist army or seeing their relatives suffer imprisonment or death. Any attempt to cross the lines back to the Loyalists they were warned, would lead to certain reprisals against the family itself.

Later, when thirteen others and myself were exchanged, and on the way home, we came across another indication of the lack of support for Franco in the fascist zone. At the Burgos railway station we came upon two brigades of midgets who were being entrained for service at the front. They were all deformed in one way or another, and the average height was four feet. Franco was forced to call those midgets to the colors, not because of a shortage of manpower in the fascist zone, but because the manpower available could not be relied on as loyal to the fascist dictators. Nor were these deformed unfortunates loyal to Franco. They were going up to the front under armed guard. When they learned that we were Internationals they smiled and waved at us when their guards were not looking, and wished us luck. The whole thing was an additional explanation, although in a somewhat unusual form, for the refusal of the German-Italian interventionists to withdraw their forces from Spain; and it was proof, too, of the unbreakable spirit that exists among the Spanish people in their unceasing struggle for freedom and democracy.

## A FINAL WORD . . .

I have described to you the brutal conditions under which the Americans live in the prison camps of Franco. Despite their hardships and their privations those men still uphold the spirit of America and its democracy. It is on their behalf that I appeal to you. First of all they are fellow-Americans. But above and beyond that they are Americans who stand prepared to sacrifice their lives if need be in defense of our American traditions. Today more than ever we ask you to support their campaign. Send telegrams and letters to President Roosevelt and to Secretary of State Cordell Hull asking them to act so that the release of these men may be secured. But until that release can be produced there is much that you can do to make life easier for them. Let them know that America has not forgotten them. I can still recall the high spirit and the increased morale that they felt when they began to receive mail from home. "My people in America have not forgotten me!" This little act alone was enough to inspire them to renewed activity around the camp. Make their existence easier by sending them a monthly donation through the Friends of the Lincoln Brigade. We have just completed special arrangements with the International Red Cross whereby food parcels, blankets, clothing, chocolates, and money can be sent to these men.

I appeal to you on behalf of these Americans, on behalf of their wives, mothers, and families, to support us in this campaign to keep them alive by sending them aid until such time as we can secure their final release. We must work harder today than ever to obtain their freedom. If we wait it may be too late to speak of Americans who are prisoners of Franco. They may no longer be alive.