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**GUSTI JIRKU**

# **We Fight Death**

**The work of the Medical Service of  
the International Brigades in Spain**



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# WE FIGHT DEATH

The work of the Medical Service of  
the International Brigades in Spain







**MAJOR Dr. OSCAR TELGE**

*Head of the Medical Service of the International Brigades.*

## P R E F A C E

by

**DR. JOLLY**

Division Commandant-Surgeon



The International Medical Service as I first knew it in December 1936 was a very different organisation from that of today. Since those first months nurses and doctors, surgical and medical materials have been pouring into Spain. Much organisational thought has been given to this service but however efficient we make it it will still fall short of what we should like it to be, in view of its enormous task of saving the lives of the best anti-fascist fighters in the world.

How tragically many of our best and greatest have died during the past year! Men who had fought fascism in their own countries under extreme difficulties for years, have fallen rifle in hand on the soil of Spain. Who can exaggerate the privilege which is given to us, nurses and doctors, and to you, anti-fascists of all countries, in helping to save lives such as theirs, lives so precious for the cause of the peoples of the world? Each day that passes brings its irreparable loss — irreparable if the example of those who have fallen does not raise up in every country men and women determined to fight to the death rather than to let fascism force mankind down to the depths of barbarism.



The attitude of the democratic countries in refusing Spain the right it has by International Law, to buy the arms it needs to equip its army for a speedy victory, is a factor which is prolonging the war. The one-way non-intervention schemes only serve to permit the rebels to maintain a struggle which would speedily collapse were it not for the assistance they receive from external sources. The prolongation of the war in this way makes our "ambulance" work more necessary and more important than ever. It is the very least that lovers of freedom and humanity can do to alleviate the terrible suffering consequent upon war.

We are dependant for all our means of working, for our instruments and all our other supplies on those who have made their decision and are on the side of the people against Fascism. Not every man can come to Spain, but every man and woman can feel that it is a personal responsibility to give the help needed for those who are in the trenches fighting THEIR fight. It is given to every man and woman to be here by proxy, to play their part in saving the life of some Spanish or International soldier, in making it possible for him to return to the front. Where the International Red Cross has failed so lamentably to give the aid the Spanish soldiers need, it is your duty and privilege, workers and intellectuals of the world, to continue to show your solidarity as you have done during the sixteen months of the Spanish war.

In spite of what Gusti Jirku has written in this pamphlet, those of you who have not seen a battlefield during an offensive cannot form a conception of the heroism and selflessness of the stretcher bearers and Battalion medical officers. I did not know that such epic bravery existed until I saw it. Never imagine that the most important person in a military medical service is the surgeon. Without the courage of the stretcher-bearers who bring the wounded from the lines to the First Aid Posts, the surgeon in the comparative safety of the First Emergency Hospital would be useless. Without the never-

failing assistance and co-operation of the nurses who work day and night in the operation theatre and ward, he could do little. Without the help of the anti-fascists throughout the world who have bought the instruments he uses, he would be powerless.

We doctors and nurses feel that it is a privilege to work in such



*Dr. Telge and Dr. Jolly (second and third from left to right).*

a medical service. In spite of our little language difficulties we all feel a deep sense of contentment and fulfilment in combining together for this work. Those of us who are only anti-fascists and have had no previous experience of difficult and dangerous work in political parties, find in this life a new significance. The necessity of learning by painful experience that personal affairs cannot be considered



before the needs of the objective situation is a discipline which must make all of us better men and women, better nurses and better doctors. To almost all of us has come a knowledge of the real significance of this struggle, the knowledge that on the outcome depends the whole future of mankind, fascism and the return to Barbarism or Democracy with its promise of the continued advance of culture and human happiness. In what better school can one learn of fascism than in an ambulance machine-gunned from the air, than in an hospital with its daily quota of maimed women and children?

Life has a new significance too in the real joys of day-to-day international co-operation. In my surgical team of ten the following nationalities are represented — Spanish, American, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Esthonian and English. The growing understanding and co-operation even under the greatest stresses of danger and fatigue is a reflection of our common purpose. It was not always quite so easy, but gradually over weeks and months we have all learned to see in true perspective the necessity and the common purpose which have brought us here together and which continue to bind us together in our work.

And it *must* be so at this critical moment in the struggle against fascism. Our enemy is pitiless and barbarous. It is because of this that all those who are against fascism must see and work for that unity which will enable us to march forward, winning a world of freedom and of happiness. Thus shall we conquer.



## WE FIGHT DEATH

### *The Work of the Medical Service of the International Brigades in Spain*

*The eyes of the world are on Spain, on the brave Spanish people who in their fight against Fascist barbarism and for a new democratic Republic have become the torch bearers of progress. On the outcome of the war in Spain depends the future of Europe and the world. We must never forget that Fascism is war. Everyone knows that towns and villages in Spain have been bombed by German and Italian planes and that the destructive power of the latest weapons has been tested on women and children — weapons which have been supplied to Franco in great quantities in spite of "Non-Intervention".*

*The working-class has understood the true meaning of this struggle and has stood by the Spanish people from the very beginning. Many of its best representatives are in Spain fighting in the International Brigades which are now a part of the Spanish Republican Army. They have played a heroic part in the Anti-Fascist fight.*

*But it is not only the workers, with the fine traditions of their movement, who have realised the significance of the war in Spain. The great majority of intellectuals also realise how much is at stake; and at this point we must turn our attention to a great historical fact — the*



formation of the *International Medical Service in Spain*, which has been achieved with the help of all progressive doctors, nurses and first aid workers in the world.

Only the burning determination to fight Fascism could create such a powerful organisation.

Over 220 doctors, 580 nurses and assistants, and 600 stretcher bearers are working in our Service. Its rapid development has been due to a large extent to the efforts of the *Medical Aid Committees*, to the generous financial assistance given by members of the *International Brigades* themselves, and to the help of the Spanish people who have always been eager to assist us in every way they could. Today we have more than 23 hospitals with over 5,000 beds, 13 surgeons' groups fully staffed and equipped, 130 ambulances, 7 surgical wagons, 3 evacuation groups to transport the wounded, many cars and a large supply of surgical instruments. All this is placed at the disposition of the Spanish wounded as well as of the *Volunteers of the International Brigades*.

Many languages are spoken and many nations are represented in our *International Medical Service*, but we are all determined *Anti-Fascists* with one purpose: to help our wounded comrades.

We must say that with a few exceptions the *Red Cross* has proved a great disappointment.

Our own organisation, which was formed by doctors of many different nationalities, has done magnificent work quietly and unassumingly. This pamphlet can describe only a small part of that work, but nevertheless it gives some indication of what we have achieved.

We are proud of our doctors, nurses and stretcher bearers.

Some of our best comrades have fallen. Dr. Heilbronn, a son of the "real" Germany; Dr. Robbins, a young American; Dr. Grosev, a Bulgarian *Anti-Fascist*; Dr. Solenberger, a young Englishman. Our victory will avenge them.

The lives of many thousands of wounded have been saved by our men and women comrades. They have worked steadily on without any

fuss through bombardments and under machine gun fire. They are heroes, the pride of all who stand for progress. The day will come when the Spanish people and all mankind will thank them for the work which they have carried out in the true spirit of international solidarity.

This little book tells what they have done and will persuade many people to help our organisation in its great work.

We owe a great deal to those who have strained every nerve and made every sacrifice to form the *International Medical Service*, helped by all progressive people throughout the world, and especially by the doctors and by the heroic Spanish people.

**Dr. OSCAR TELGE**

Head of the Medical Service of the  
*International Brigades*.

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## WHERE IS THE FRONT?

The question makes the Doctor smile. He points to all directions of the horizon.

“Everywhere — Heaven and earth! You’ll see soon enough for yourself.”

We drive along the sun-scorched road, the famous Guadarrama road where so many have given their lives. On our left are fields. The harvest has been gathered. On the right there are great rocks, and in the background rises the dark mass of the Sierra de Guadarrama, with a few white patches where the snow remains even during the hottest days of Summer. The car climbs up the steep winding road in clouds of dust, passing heavy trucks and ambulances. Suddenly something makes us look up. A squadron of planes is overhead — white planes — Fascists!

“Now we’re for it”, says the Doctor. “Don’t get worried if there’s a bit of a noise. This road is rather a popular target. They try to get the ambulances with the wounded.”

We are going as fast as the car will take us. Ambulances pass us at top speed. The wounded are staring out of the windows, gazing anxiously at the sky. All at once another squadron comes into view,



then a third. The last two are following the first on the right and left. They are gaining. Soon they will have reached it.

"Those are ours!", exclaims the Doctor.

Immediately we feel as safe as if we were sitting quietly at home. Our planes chase the Fascist squadron along the sky. It will not be long before they are level with the white planes. But our car takes a sharp turn and the hunt disappears from our view.

"All's well that ends well", says the Doctor. "But don't imagine that it's always like that. Have you really made up your minds that you want to go to the Brigade's first aid post? It's now in V..., the village we took the day before yesterday. A few kilometres behind our lines—but not really "behind" the front. The front is everywhere in these parts. You're quite sure you want to go?"

I certainly am. I want to see those comrades who are the least mentioned of all our heroes. The tireless fighters against death: doctors, first aid workers and stretcher bearers.

Tacktacktack... Over the plain down to which our road descends we see little flashes of light. Clouds of smoke and dust are rising and planes are circling overhead... Tacktack... Then a series of loud explosions. Our anti-aircraft is replying. Fluffy little white clouds cover the sky.

"They are coming!" shouts the driver. We have no alternative but to drive straight on into the fire. The road affords no protection. A tank coming back from the front takes refuge in the ditch. A motorcyclist is lying flat on the ground.

"Go ahead!" shouts the Doctor, "We must get to the first aid post. There are sure to be wounded."

We feel a tremendous shock. We stop breathing. About twenty yards to the side of the road a bomb has fallen. No one has been hit. Our anti-aircraft answers with heavy fire. And we drive on into the village, which only the day before yesterday still belonged to the Fascists, past the church which is completely destroyed.

"This is where the Fascists left their wounded when they retreated", says the Doctor. "We found every one of them dead—buried in the ruins of the church. They were nearly all Moors. We found the knapsacks of the dressers with the dead, and we searched them. What do you think we found?—Dressings—nothing else at all. Not even iodine—not even tourniquets, which are the first essential for stopping bleeding. And there's no shortage of material on their side—only bad organisation and callous contempt for their soldiers. They squander human life even in their own ranks."

The car pulls up on the market place. Among the ruined houses there is one which until now has been left untouched: it is the Brigade's first aid post. There is a large room on the bottom floor, full of wounded men lying on stretchers. The ambulances brought them out of the line, from the Battalion first aid post where their wounds received the first dressing and they were given coffee and stimulants. Now the first aid men are kneeling beside the stretchers. They renew the dressings with the help of a young Czechoslovakian doctor. They hand round lemonade to the thirsty and give injections to the badly wounded. A young Spaniard is lying there, deathly pale, with a very swollen throat. An explosive bullet is imbedded under his chin. He looks round with wild unseeing eyes, and dies... The Head Doctor is leaning over a dark skinned boy whose cheeks are covered with blood trickling from a wound in the head. The boy stretches up his hands imploringly, and keeps saying the same words over and over again in some incomprehensible language.

"He is a Moorish prisoner", says the German dresser. "He is begging to be shot."

I look at him in amazement.

"The Moors believe that we stab them to death", the young German explains, "And their religion demands that they should die by a bullet, or they will not be allowed to enter Paradise. They will be very astonished when they are neither stabbed nor shot, and do not





*"Behind" the front.*



*Brigade General Copic and Gusti Jirku at a Battalion first aid post.*

enter Paradise but a good hospital instead, where they be well looked after."

The wounded Moor is looking anxiously and longingly at the lemonade which the Head Doctor offers him. He dares not drink this "poison". I take the glass and drink. Then I give it to him. He takes it greedily, gulps it down and looks at us in utter astonishment. Nothing could have persuaded him of our intentions half as surely and as quickly as that glass of lemonade.

"Down into the cellar! Quick!" someone shouts from the door. And at the same time we hear the roar of planes. The stretcher bearers lift the lightly wounded on to their backs and carry them quickly down the stairs into the cellar. The two doctors and the German dresser remain behind with those who are too badly wounded to be lifted from their stretchers. Before two minutes have passed the house begins to shudder like a ship on a rough sea. The air is trembling with a fearful crashing and roaring. We are suffocating. The wounded cover their faces in their hands, and the Moor is praying in a whisper. I see, as if in a dream, the Head Doctor kneeling by the wounded and calming them.

The house stops shaking. From the broken window panes the glass is falling to the floor in splinters. We look at one another. We are still alive! The bomb has fallen about 15 yards away. The stretcher bearers bring the wounded back from the cellar, and at once put them into the ambulances. Each has been given injections, brandy or other stimulants. Their lives are now entrusted to the drivers who will take them over dangerous roads out of range of the firing to the hospitals. The ambulance drivers of our Brigades deserve a chapter to themselves.



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## A CLEAR NIGHT

The stars are too bright tonight. It is a night for planes and bombing. Supper has been finished in the first aid post — roast pork with fried potatoes, tomato salad, and black coffee.

The French cook looks after us well. He went on with his cooking during the bombardment. A young Spanish woman is sitting next to me with her baby in her arms. She gets the best of everything. "For the sake of the baby", says the cook. When the Brigade took the village she was found half-starved in a hiding place. She was placed under the care of our Medical Service and is now a member of the "family". Her husband is in the hands of the Fascists and it is doubtful whether he is still alive. Her sobs disturb the baby and a first aid man takes it and holds it for her. "What has become of her husband?" I ask. Without a word the Head Doctor gives me a sheet of paper. There is the heading: "Names of all villagers sympathising with the Reds", and there follows a list of many names which the Fascists had jotted down. Those included in the list were no longer in the village when our Brigades arrived — they had been killed or carried off by the Fascists or else they had simply vanish

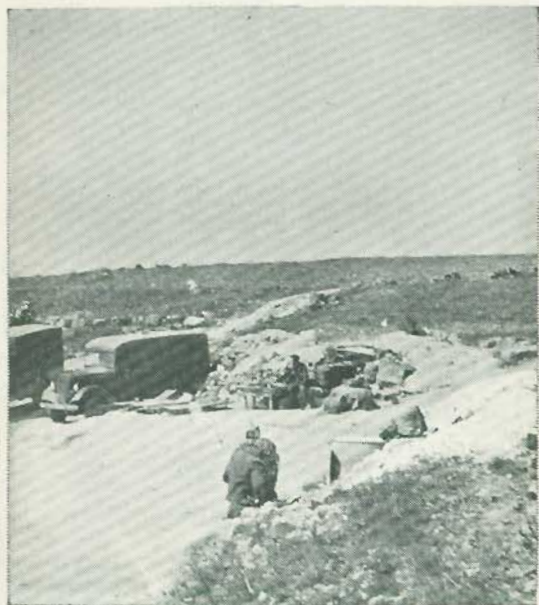
ed. Many thousands of women in Spain share the fate of this young wife...

An ambulance driver, Dick Lopez, asks me: "Are you coming with us?" He has to drive those with stomach and head wounds on to the next hospital where the operations will be performed. Some of them have been wounded today on the road — two others were brought in dead. The rest come from the front line. In front of the house in bright moonlight stands the ambulance. On it there is a small metal plate with the inscription: "The workers of Battersea to the fighters for Spanish democracy." It is one of the many gifts expressing solidarity and sympathy, one of the symbols of our common fight on all fronts. I hear a voice in the ambulance saying: "Did you see the inscription? The English workers sent this for us!" — And another tired voice answers: "The Paris metal workers sent the shower-bath truck. We all got a warm shower behind the lines. Two hundred men in two and a half hours."

"Ready ", asks Dick Lopez.

The dresser has brought fresh lemonade and has filled his knapsack with the necessary medicaments. He has taken a last look at the wounded to see if they are comfortable. The ambulance starts. Dick looks angrily at the moon which is getting brighter and brighter. Our road is still in the shadow. Dick is driving at full speed without lights. He keeps a sharp look out for all irregularities in the road and listens for planes. He is a haggard little man with tightly pressed lips. It is impossible to guess his age. People living through this time and taking part in these fights have no age. The nights without sleep, the strain of the daily fight with death, the emotional tension, have wiped away the difference of years and have made the young older and the old younger. Dick Lopez was born in Spain and spent seventeen years in America. But his country, his people, and the ideals of human justice are in danger and he has come home to fight. He takes this for granted in a completely matter of





*100 yards behind the firing line the ambulances are waiting.*



*Ambulances.*

fact way. He has been driving since yesterday evening and has brought hundreds of wounded over the shelled roads from the front to the hospitals. His strength of will overcomes his tiredness.

“Are you going to sleep to-night, Dick?”

“For a couple of hours, maybe. I don’t know yet. Listen! It’s starting again. A night attack most likely. Our boys are advancing. There’ll be more wounded.”

We hear the great thuds of the bombs and the roar of the artillery. On our right the hills are aflame — the woods are on fire. Sparks are falling into the valley and a field of corn is beginning to burn. Our road is now lighted both by the moon and the blaze. Overhead we hear planes, but we are unable to see them. The enemy is in the dark — we are in the light. “They like chasing ambulances at night”, says Dick, “It’s one of their favorite sports.”

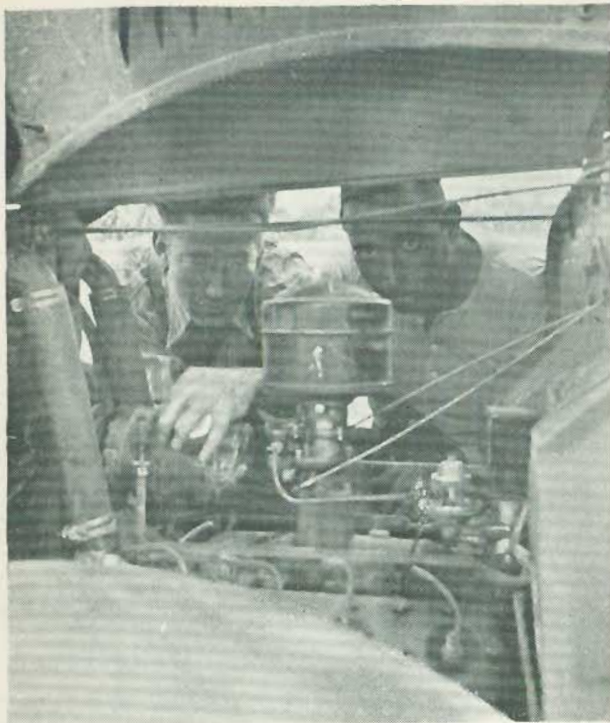
Another crash. The earth seems to burst — the bombs fall just behind us. I have shut my eyes in a sort of daze. I glance at Dick: he and his steering wheel seem to be one. His eyes are wide open and the ambulance is racing along like a hunted animal. His hands are steady. The wounded are moaning in the ambulance. The dresser, who is an Austrian, is walking between the stretchers with his lemonade. He lights the cigarettes for the wounded and calls over to us: “In Austria they wouldn’t allow people to be disturbed like this at night!”

When we take the next turn we find an ambulance at the side of the road. Something has happened. We pull up and get out. This ambulance has been badly damaged. There are two holes in its side, and the tyres have been ripped to shreds. The driver comes over to us:

“I’m stuck. The engine’s been hit as well. A plane came down very low after us, machine-gunned us and smashed the bus up.”

In the grass by the roadside is a stretcher. A body is lying on it, rigid. One of the wounded died from a heart attack during the





*Two of our drivers carrying out repairs*



*A surgical wagon camouflaged behind the front.*

firing. Inside the ambulance the wounded soldiers are moaning and complaining.

"They don't want to stay in the ambulance", says the driver, "They're very excited. The first aid man is anxious. One of the cases is very serious and should have an operation at once. Could you take just that one comrade with you?"

The two dressers have a short conversation, then the Austrian goes back to the ambulance and calls out:

"Comrades! The Fascists have smashed up the other ambulance. Another one is expected from the next hospital. But one of the comrades is very seriously wounded—if he cannot have an operation tomorrow morning he will die. Which of those who are lightly wounded would give him his place?"

His words are being translated. And immediately a voice calls out:

"Moi, camarade!"

And a second:

"¡Yo, compañero!"

"Ich, Kamerad!"



Three have volunteered—the only ones who are lightly wounded. Among these the dresser chooses the least serious case—a light flesh wound. The comrade who is badly wounded is placed in our ambulance. He is a young Italian, very weak from loss of blood. The Dutch driver—his name is Jan and he comes from Amsterdam—looks quite happy now. He had been worried about the life which had been entrusted to him. Later on I was to meet him again in a quiet hour, when he came to the hospital with a big parcel under his arm. There were toys in it for his three children in Amsterdam, whom he had left when he came to fight in Spain. Jan is twenty-four and his wife is twenty-one. He misses his family badly. "But I want to stay till the finish", he said, "Only I want the kids to get these toys. I am sending them with a comrade who is ill and is going back to Holland".



III

## A WOUNDED DOCTOR

We are just about to start when a large car pulls up beside us. I see a face which I know well. It is Dr. Jansen, a Brigade doctor. He gets out of the car and asks what has happened. Then he takes a look at the wounded and gives orders for the transport of the dead man.

"You had better come with me", he says, "I am going to one of our hospitals".

He is leaning heavily on a stick and it is only now that I notice that he has a limp.

"It's a harmless little shot in the leg — not worth talking about."

We drive on.

"You will get treatment in the hospital?" I ask. Jansen laughs:

"Not for this trifle! I have organised a meeting of all the doctors and nurses in the hospital to discuss ways in which we can improve our work. And tomorrow I'm going back to the front."

"But you would order anyone with a wound like yours into the hospital", I protest.

"Certainly. A man who is not a doctor can't tell if his wound is getting worse. It's time enough to get treatment if inflammation



*Battalion first aid post.*

sets in. For the present I can't leave the wounded. And I've got to train new stretcher-bearers while the offensive is going on. The old ones are either dead or wounded. Today we lost the driver of the water waggon. Our first aid men had to drag him away from the steering wheel of the waggon when he was wounded. The truck stood full in the line of the machine gun fire. You remember it, Carrié, don't you?"

The dresser, who is sitting next to the driver, turns his head:

"Oui, mon commandant!"

"The bullets riddled the wheels and body of the truck. The



driver was an Englishman. When we laid him on the stretcher with his hopeless wounds it was hard for us to keep back the tears. The boy was delirious. He was murmuring in a low monotonous voice: "They'll say I've been a good soldier... they'll say I've been a good comrade..." He was indeed!"

Jansen is silent for a moment. He has spent seven months at the front without a break, but he is still deeply moved by the death of a comrade.

When an attack is beginning he is in the front line. He has learnt to crawl with dressers and stretcher-bearers from one position to another. It is their duty to work where the fire is heaviest. Sometimes, when there is no one else at hand, the Doctor and Carrié take a stretcher together and creep along to find the wounded who have still been left lying between the lines. This is not a doctor's real work, and Jansen might be blamed for doing it. But there are moments when he feels he should lead the stretcher-bearers by his own example. And the stretcher-bearers, the most unknown of all the unknown soldiers who give their lives so that the wounded may live, follow his example like a banner. The comrades of the Medical Service have responded to such an extent that they could scarcely be held back from advancing, instead of remaining behind as was necessary.

I learned that and much besides while we were driving through this Spanish landscape, lit by the deadly blaze of artillery fire.

## IV

## THEY ACCUSE...

It is two o'clock in the morning when we arrive before a white house with a wide terrace, standing above the road, among trees and meadows which merge into an endless plain and a mountain range flashing with explosions. From time to time we hear the sighs and moans of the sleepless and those who are living through their experiences again in their dreams.

The cows are peacefully grazing near the house. We hear the tinkling of their bells between the bursting of the shells. A searchlight roves over the sky whenever a plane is heard. The nurses go noiselessly from room to room. The operation theatre is being cleaned, for they have just finished an operation. Carrié has brought some coffee and we make ourselves comfortable. He is very tired — he has had no sleep for two nights. Suddenly we start. A sound reaches us, unexpected and heart-rending — the crying of a child...

We stand up and follow the sound. At the end of the terrace we find a room with two beds. Two small shapes are outlined under the sheets and two tiny faces are staring into the moonlight. We wonder why the children are not asleep, why they are crying as if in great pain. A nurse has followed us in. She whispers:





*One of Franco's conscripts taken prisoner by our forces, and not sorry either!*

"Wounded yesterday — in the bombardment!"

She uncovers them and we see a boy of ten — with one leg: the other had to be amputated yesterday...

The second child, a girl, is only lightly wounded, but she cries and cries. Her face is drawn with terror... Why? Why?... That is all it says.

We spent an hour with the children until at last they slept. Then we took a walk in the night. We had lost all desire to sleep...



*This 10 year old boy had to have his leg amputated after being wounded in a bombardment.*



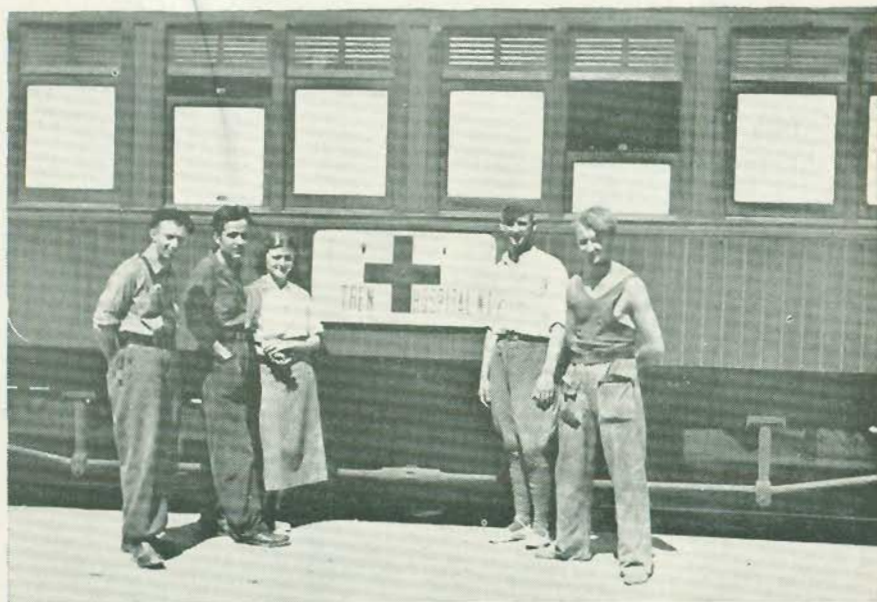
## V

### A FIGHT FOR A LIFE

In the grey morning light we drive to the hospital of the Division. We enter a hall where the wounded are examined when they arrive and where the decisions are taken as to where they shall be sent. At this moment I notice a stretcher being carried out of the X ray room. On it lies the young Italian who was brought in by our ambulance. He is taken into the operation theatre. Dr. Jolly, the English surgeon, will operate on him. It is Dr. Jolly's second operation since four o'clock in the morning — the first was a trepanning of the skull and it saved the life of a Fascist prisoner.

The young Italian's name is Bolo. The X ray shows his injuries: — the bullet went through his left thigh, breaking the femur, and entered the stomach where it exploded. The photograph reveals many fragments of metal and the face of the still-living victim shows how in a few hours a boy of 21 can become the very emblem of human misery. Nevertheless his eyes look brighter than they did the previous night. Bolo has everything that medical science can give him. They are fighting for him and defending him against death. Camphor, insulin, anti-tetanus and anti-gangrene injections — those were their first weapons. After them there came a blood transfusion, and now

he is lying on the operation table. The kind, grey face of a white haired woman is leaning over him—Anne-Marie, the nurse, is talking to him while the ether mask comes down over his face. The English surgeon, the English anaesthetist, the Rumanian assistant doctor, and the Croatian nurse are all working together like a perfect machine. The wound in the abdomen has uncovered a piece of



*The hospital train which takes the wounded to the rear.*

intestine which has been perforated in twelve places. The surgeon cuts and sews. The wounded man is sleeping. The operation goes on. The surgeon finds two metal splinters, each 5 centimetres long. There are innumerable tiny splinters scattered about the abdomen which cannot be removed. If nature is kind, they will become stationary and will do no harm. Another piece of hopelessly torn



intestine is being cut away. The nurse's eyes are wet. Maybe she is thinking of her own son who is also at the front and is exposed to the same fate. But she works quietly on, like a wheel in the machine.

Now it is the turn of the broken femur. Dr. Hart, a specialist in fractures, has arrived, together with Dr. Cochran. The thigh and leg are being stretched and fixed in position. The wounded man sleeps peacefully on.

"We ought to make another blood transfusion", says Dr. Jolly. "Call the comrade from the blood transfusion service!"

Unfortunately the blood from the patient's own blood group, which he had been given before, is no longer available. It can only be obtained from Madrid and will take a few hours to arrive.

"I can give the blood", says Dr. Cochran.

"Will you be able to work for twenty-four hours after that?" asks Hart. "We are sure to get many wounded today!"

Cochran only smiles — the thing is settled.

The same afternoon I see the young Italian in the ward. Dr. Jolly comes to have a look at him.

"Will he live?" I ask.

"A 50 % chance", says the surgeon.



*The English Dr. Sollenberger, who was killed at a first aid post in the execution of his duty.*



## VI

### BIRTH AND DEATH

Every day from 120 to 150 wounded pass through the Division Hospital. Four surgical teams are working day and night, most of the time in danger from enemy planes, and within sound of exploding shells. The doctors and nurses have become used to this music:

"They're at it again today", they say, or: "Today they seem to have forgotten us."

The great machine—the hospital—begins its work in the "salle de triage". In this room the fate of the wounded is decided. The room is divided into three sections. In the first are the wounded on whom the doctor wants to operate at once. In the second are those who must have an X ray photograph taken first, as the operation is still in doubt. The third section contains those who are to be moved at once to another hospital, together with those who will remain in this hospital a few days for observation.

In the evening a Rumanian comrade was brought into this "salle de triage". His name was Georg. He was a handsome young fellow, and a first-rate horseman. He had lived like a brave Anti-Fascist—a stormy life, but ruled by patience and steady determination. He had been wounded in the attack in the morning. His stomach and liver were full of shrapnel. The doctors and nurses lowered their eyes when they passed his stretcher. They knew they could do nothing to help—or only one thing—they could make death less painful.

Georg got the very best room. His comrades came and were allowed to see him. Never before did I realise so clearly what brotherhood among our soldiers means. Every man at that bedside would have given his own life to save the dying comrade. Everyone thought: the cause needs him more than me.

Georg died. His body lay in state; and on the following morning he was buried. He had been wrapped in his soldier's coat and a white shroud.

Two Spanish comrades lifted him and stepped into the grave with him to lay him gently down. And then we sang the International. In eight different languages we sang our song, and in all the languages of our hearts: love and hatred, readiness to fight and readiness to die, and unshakable conviction. Then we had to take our last farewell. Among all those men who were used to scenes of blood and death there was not one who could make up his mind to throw earth on the face of the comrade whose form was outlined beneath the shroud. They stood by as helpless as children. Then the Captain took the banner, stepped down into the grave and layed it softly over Georg's face. And only then did he venture to place a handful of earth gently on it.

"¡Salud!" called one of us, and from every throat: "¡Salud, camarada!" Then the soldiers, doctors and nurses went back to their work...

On the same morning, only much earlier, the following had happened.

There was a loud banging on the door of the room which the nurse and myself shared. She got up quickly, being accustomed to overcome sleep at a moment's notice. Standing at the door was an ambulance driver, an American called Bill. "Come at once!" he said. He looked very upset and we thought that he must have brought in some very badly wounded cases. We hurried down the stairs behind him.



"How many?" we asked.

"How many?" stammered Bill, "There isn't one yet. But do you think it will be twins?"

It was only then that we learned that a young Spanish peasant woman who was expecting a baby had been brought into the hospital in our ambulance. Bill had passed the little house in which she lived alone. Her husband was at the front. "Take me along with you, Bill!" she called to him, "It's my first baby and I feel quite miserable."

The whole Spanish population knows and loves our ambulance drivers.

It was a strange picture we saw. The young woman was standing before the operation theatre, and round her, shy and very respectful, were some wounded comrades who had crept from their beds and stolen out of their ward. One of them was holding a piece of chocolate in his hand, another had a glass of lemonade, and a third had two handkerchieves:

"You'll be needing a swaddling cloth", he said.

The nurse chased the wounded back to bed and called the Doctor. And then they went to look for a room for the mother and child in this hospital which was full of wounded men.

An hour later a little Fernando was born. His first cry coincided with the noise of the explosions which threatened his life at its very beginning. The nurse made a little bed out a box and padded it with cotton wool. As the mother could not feed the baby herself, they sent a first aid man to find a feeding bottle. He told us afterwards that this had been his most difficult task during the whole of the civil war. But in the end little Fernando had his first meal.

The mother saw, half laughingly and half angrily, how her baby was wandering from one arm to another; and of course she could scarcely forbid the wounded comrades to admire it.



*After a fracture: gymnastics in bed, at University Hospital, Murcia.*





## VII

### WITH THE HOSPITAL TRAIN TO THE REAR

It is dark. The hospital train draws up in the station. The station employees have been standing in silence waiting for the train, which is always received with reverence and quietness. No one gets out, for it has not yet reached its destination. A carriage door opens and I get in. Inside there is perfect quiet. Most of the wounded are sleeping in their beds, but from one corner cigarette smoke is rising. Two wide-awake eyes look in my direction. I recognise Carrié's pale face.

"What are you doing here, Carrié?" I ask, "Didn't you go back to the front?" And then I notice that he is wounded and has his arm in a sling.

"Two fingers less", he says with a rather wan smile.

"How did it happen?"

"As it always does. Two of my comrades who were stretcher-bearers have been killed. As for me, I've been lucky."

He stops. A doctor and a nurse are making their night inspection through the train. They pause before every bed. We overhear a conversation.

"You're still reading?" asks the Doctor, surprised.

The young German to whom this question is addressed excuses himself:

"I slept a lot during the day, and I'm learning Spanish now and can't afford to waste time".



**MAJOR Dr. BUSCH**

*American Medical Bureau.*



The Doctor shakes his head and goes on. They look at Carrié's dressing. When they have left the carriage Carrié continues with his story:

"We had a tough job yesterday. We were at it from morning till night, always keeping with our Battalion. A comrade called me when it was dusk, and told me that there was a wounded man lying near the cemetery wall who should be brought in. I was alone. The stretcher-bearers had gone with the wounded to the ambulances. The whole place was still being shelled. I ran forward, thirty yards at a time. That is how we always do it under fire. At the end of each run I fell flat on the ground, and then went forward again. A shell exploded fifteen yards away, and another one followed and covered me with earth. I crept out and at last I got to the cemetery wall where I found the wounded man — or rather the dead man. His body was torn down the middle. All the same, I didn't want to leave him lying there. I lifted him on to my back. It was a longish uphill journey to the ambulance, and I was nearly tempted to leave the body, but all at once I heard a faint moaning. I looked over my shoulder and saw the living, open eyes of the "dead" man. That gave me new strength and I had only a few minutes to go to get to the ambulance. Suddenly I felt a blow and fell to the ground with my load. That was the shot which cost me my two fingers. We were soon found. The "dead" man is still living."

The hospital train arrives at its destination. Two doctors and many stretcher-bearers are waiting on the station. The wounded are being taken out with great care and carried into the waiting ambulances. They look around with wondering eyes. They are driving into the streets of the town between tall palms and giant cacti. It is a long time since they have been in a town which is not shaken by the bursting of shells, but full of the music of guitars. The children are waving to the wounded. They raise their little fists in the salute and sing "The Young Guard".



*Surgeons at work.*



## VIII

### THE TOWN OF THE WOUNDED

Here there are four International Brigade hospitals under the direction of doctors from all countries. In these hospitals are tended the wounded Spanish soldiers and the Volunteers who have come from all over Europe, America, and other parts of the world. First of all a big high school was turned into a hospital, thanks to the help of the Spanish authorities. It was given the name of "Pasionaria". The hospital has accommodation for over four hundred wounded. Soon after this, our woman doctor, Susanne Heck, discovered the University with its splendid building, its vast sunny rooms and its garden surrounded by arcades.

The Governor of Murcia and the Spanish Government put the University at the disposal of the Medical Service of the International Brigades. Such a well-equipped hospital for the wounded has never been seen in any previous war... It contains several operation theatres; a big sterilising room, with sterilisers constructed from the plans of Suzanne Heck; a large X ray laboratory, directed by German X-ray specialists; orthoepedic rooms, organised by the surgeon, Dr. Langer, for the treatment of cases of fracture; a special hall for massage and gymnastics; a workshop for making artificial



*Dressings.  
University Hospital, Murcia.*



limbs; a very large scale refrigerator; lining rooms, libraries; canteens; and a swimming pool. The hospital caters for 500 people including the staff.

The Spanish Socorro Rojo has also placed a luxurious hotel at the disposal of the wounded. It has 200 beds. The less serious cases are being treated there. This hospital is equipped with all the latest achievements of war surgery. It has very comfortable lounges and a large roof garden. A fourth hospital is devoted entirely to internal diseases. At present chemical and dental laboratories are being installed.

I call this place the "Town of the Wounded", not because the wounded constitute the majority of the population — but because the wounded volunteers of the International Brigades have set on this little provincial town the seal of a great epoch in human history, the seal of human suffering for a great idea. In this town a new kind of life has been developing; the wounded, the doctors and the nurses are building it together.

One among many is an Italian dinamitero, whose example and firmness of purpose raises the morale of the wounded and hastens their recovery. The will of the patient and the science of the doctor must work together. The dinamitero has blown up three tanks and he has lost two arms and a leg. His eyes have been injured as well; they are covered with a slight film, and he is in danger of losing his sight.

"How do you feel today?" I ask.

"All right", he says, "I must take my constitutional".

His "constitutional" has a special purpose. He visits those comrades who are depressed by their sufferings. He sits on their beds, and looks at them encouragingly with his dim eyes.

"There's no reason for despair", he says, "We shall soon be working again, each in his own way. We've not stopped living yet".

The comrades look aside—they do not want to look at the stumps

of the dinamitero's arms. But he understands perfectly well what their silence means.

"I shall fight with words", he says, "I shall dictate and others will lend me their hands. So long as I've still got a head the fight goes on".

The dinamitero is one of the doctor's greatest helps. He makes it his constant concern to see that the will to struggle does not burn out. His comrade, the young Austrian, Franz Luda, who has lost both his legs, has a humour all his own which puts the faint-hearted to shame. He entertains the comrades with songs and music on the guitar, and his saying: "If they dare to cut anything else off me, I'll run away", has become famous.

Milica, a Croatian nurse, is dressing the wounds. And she is trying to calm a French comrade who is very excited. He has been shot in the lungs and his wound is serious. He also has a very slight wound on a finger of his right hand. But he insists on having the trivial wound dressed first.

"Why are you so anxious about your hand?" asks Milica, "The wound in your chest is much more serious."

"The hand is more important", says the young Frenchman, "It's the hand which holds the rifle."

Sometimes the doctors have to circumvent the tricks and dodges to which the wounded resort in order to get back to the front before they are really cured. Juan Hernández, a Spanish soldier in the International Brigades, has been brought from the Guadarrama front with a wound in the leg. Juan looks so young that the doctors and nurses put all kinds of questions to him to try and find out his age. At last they discover that he is only sixteen and has managed to conceal his real age until now.

"A boy of sixteen is not allowed to go to the front", remarks the Doctor.

Juan winks behind the Doctor's back: "Let them talk!" He





*Gymnastics for a comrade who has had both legs  
amputated.*

*University Hospital, Murcia.*

shows his wound — an unimportant fiesh wound above the ankle. It is certainly not serious.

“You’ll be all right in a week”, says the Doctor.

Juan nods. In a week’s time — you can read it in his eyes — he will run away, back to the front.

“Pull up your trouser leg”, says the Doctor. “The leg is rather swollen. That’s strange...”

Juan’s face reddens. The Doctor pulls away the boy’s hands which are desperately holding on to his trousers, and pulls up the trouser leg. We see a big superating wound from which the dressing has been removed, probably just before the examination, so as to escape hospital treatment — “That’s put the tin hat on the front”, says the Doctor. And the man Juan, who has suffered courageously, suddenly becomes the sixteen year old boy and bursts into tears...

A great friendship grows up between the doctors and the wounded. This is proved by many letters of which the following, which was written by a German, is an example:

Murcia, 22nd July, 1937.

Dear Doctor,

The “undisciplined” patient wants to thank you for the work you did for him. He also wants to tell you how glad he is to have known so true an Anti-Fascist fighter as yourself. I know that most of my comrades think I am not fit for the front any more, but I hope to be able to prove to you and to the other comrades that I can do my duty at the front better than before. I don’t deserve to be called an Anti-Fascist if I do not prove myself one until the end. I think that I have found the real meaning of life: it is to risk your life for the aim which you have set yourself, and for the people you love — I love those who are down-trodden and oppressed. — And no one shall hinder me from defending what I love. Small troubles and





*Cured!*



*The swimming pool,  
University Hospital, Murcia.*



Pains cannot hold back a fighter from living for the rights of humanity and from dying for them if need be.

Thanks once again to you and Anka and both the Annies, for having sewn me together so quickly,

With Anti-Fascist greetings, I remain,

Your ever grateful and devoted,

MANFRED CONSTANTIN

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The comrade who wrote this letter had lost his right eye from an explosive bullet. He had served in the German Reichswehr, and luckily, as he says, he had already learnt how to take aim with his left eye. The letter was addressed to Dr. Angelushev, who is not only a great surgeon — his speciality is head and face wounds — but also the best of comrades. On my way through the Medical Service of the Brigades I have met many doctors who give their whole being, their whole life to their work. But the work of Comrade Angelushev is especially moving: he himself is one of the victims of that cruelty against which we are fighting. He is a Bulgarian Anti-Fascist, and as such he was so cruelly tortured in a German prison in 1933 that he nearly died from a fracture in the base of the skull. He is cured to the extent that by summoning up all his energy he is able to put his great medical knowledge at the service of our cause. But after every operation he must lie down with an ice bag at the back of his neck in order to be fit for the next. He has to fight two battles at the same time — one for the lives of the wounded and the other against his own physical weakness. On July 17th, the anniversary of the beginning of the Anti-Fascist fight in Spain Dr. Angelushev, together with Anka, the Croatian woman doctor, and his two nurses were received by their patients with great bunches of flowers when they went round the wards.



*Music is an international language.*





*A French nurse, an American patient.*



*In the Kindergarten.*



## IX

### THE "FATHERS"

The Botanical Gardens lie behind a high wall. They were the most beautiful of all the famous gardens of Murcia. Over the entrance you now read: "Campo de Niños General Lukacz." This is the new kindergarten named after the great Hungarian Anti-Fascist fighter who was killed on June 12th on the Huesca front.

We hear bright voices and children's laughter. There are 250 boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 12. They spend their afternoons in this kindergarten where they are surrounded by every care and attention — and they really need it, for they are emigrants from all the different parts of Spain, children who have lost their fathers and mothers.

We wonder who has given so much love and care to this kindergarten. There are swings and toys of every kind, and a puppet theatre, a swimming pool, a refreshment stall with coffee, fruit, milk and cake. There are teachers for gymnastics, drawing and music, and there is a children's library. There are several shower baths to make sure that the children go home clean. Three times a month they are examined by International Brigade doctors. Spanish girl students and wounded comrades from the International Brigades



*In the swimming pool.*





are there to take care of the children. The wounded call themselves the "fathers" of these children whose real fathers have been killed by the Fascists. Every one of the "fathers" gives three days' pay each month to provide the kindergarten with everything which it needs. Every afternoon you can see the comrades on their crutches, limping, pale, walking with difficulty, but fully occupied with their paternal duties, and happy. The Spanish teachers and students have great discussions with the doctors and the wounded of the International Brigades about educational problems. From time to time the children go and visit those of their "fathers" in the hospital who are not yet well enough to come into the garden.

This kindergarten was opened on July 18th, the anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain.

The children are divided into six age groups which bear the following names: Hans Beimler (killed before Madrid in the early fighting); General Miaja; García Lorca (the great Spanish poet murdered by the Fascists); André Brougère (killed in January near Morata); Captain Picelly (killed at Guadalajara on January 3rd); and Ate Kokhanek (killed on January 2nd at Guadalajara).



*Friends.*



X

## OUR WOMEN COMRADES

In one of the hospitals of Murcia I met a young nurse who had come from Switzerland. She was a quiet little thing who worked in passionate earnest and was always ready to undertake both the most important and the smallest of duties. When she smiled to the wounded there was a hidden sorrow in the smile. Everyone thought her very cheerful. But a woman's eyes are sharp where other women are concerned and I noticed that she was suffering. I learned that her husband had been killed not long before on the Jarama front. A shell had torn away the upper part of his skull. When the girl showed me his photograph the tears streamed down her face. She wiped them away at once and said: "I musn't let the wounded see me crying".

The women of the International Brigades' Medical Service who, in their own sphere, help and fight, have learned a good deal in the school of civil war. They have learned the most difficult thing of all: how to be hard to themselves and gentle to the wounded. They have



*Evelyn, the American girl driver.*



disciplined their physical weakness and their nerves are under strict control. They know how much is at stake and they have made up their minds.

Anka, Rachel, Evelyn and Anne — you and all the others who are serving the cause with a warm heart and a cool head — you have added a new chapter to woman's history: the chapter of the women comrades in the Civil War.

Susanne Heck, the woman doctor who organises a hospital for 500 wounded, which thanks to her own plans has become a model hospital, unequalled in any war; energetic little Rachel, the Belgian chemist, and her assistant Renée, in the Central Pharmacy which equips all the Brigades and Battalions, as well as the hospitals of the front and rear, with dressings, medicine and instruments; Anka, the Croatian doctor, modest and untiring; Ruth, who spends many nights on the station directing the evacuation of the wounded; Anjuta, a Czechoslovakian girl, who types at the Brigade first aid post during attacks, making lists of the wounded and their diagnoses, as calmly as if she were in an office — they and all the others throw their whole strength into their work and often risk their lives.

"I'm bringing coal, food and ice for two hospitals", says Evelyn, the American ambulance driver. Evelyn has had no accident so far in spite of having to steer heavy loads along roads congested with traffic. She is twenty-six, cool-headed, always ready to work and always cheerful.

One word more about the Croatian nurse, Anne-Marie, who is called "Mother" by all the wounded. She works in the operation theatre. For eight months she has been doing her work at the front in hospitals which have been heavily bombarded. Her hair is white, but she has the strength and fibre of a young woman. Every day she sees dead and mutilated bodies and hears all the sounds of human suffering. But her determination to help makes her strong.

Her husband and her eighteen year old son are at the front. Once after seven months her son came to visit her in the hospital. He had a leave to see his mother. It was only for one day — a happy day, but all too short. "My Mother has not worried me and fussed about me", the boy said, when he was back again at the front — "I am proud of her — she is a good comrade".





*A villa at the Convalescent Centre of the International Brigades.*



*Cured.*



*From the Convalescent Centre of the International Brigades.*



*Benicasim, the Convalescent Centre of the International Brigades.*

## XI

### INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Rachel, the chemist, had to equip a surgical wagon with instruments and a steriliser to be used in conjunction with the mobile hospitals. At the front they were waiting very impatiently for this. But that time the most necessary things were lacking — especially modern surgical instruments of which there are never enough. Rachel and the whole phar̄macy staff were rather gloomy. It was already 8 o'clock and at 12 o'clock at the latest the wagon had to leave. Suddenly — as in a fairy tale — a loaded truck stood before the doorway. It was bringing gifts from France — precious gifts — among other things the badly needed surgical instruments!

“While we unpacked”, said Rachel, “Our joy and excitement were so great that we suddenly shouted in chorus: Vive la France!”

Magnificent help has come to us from America, especially from the International Workers' Order and from the Artists' Union of New York. The British people, too, have given invaluable assistance and thousands of Spanish soldiers and International volunteers owe their health and sometimes their lives to the splendid work of the British hospitals.

We are not alone. The best minds and the most honest hearts are





*At a rest home of the International Brigades.*

with us. Every day trains and ships bring precious gifts for our wounded comrades. We all feel daily that the growing comradeship of all Anti-Fascist fighters has created powerful support in all countries. With us are the working people, all those who want to serve in the liberation of men's minds, all who are against war and for a happy future for our children.

The fight is not over yet. Thanks to the untiring aid of international solidarity our wounded have not only the most necessary things, but also things which soldiers in the World War never saw: the best medicines, stimulants and antiseptics. Thanks to international solidarity the morale of our wounded soldiers is always sustained, because they feel the comradeship from far away growing stronger and stronger, because they feel that our fronts extend all over the whole world.

The International Brigades' Medical Service, which is a part of the Medical Service of the Spanish Army, has grown up together with the latter during the year of fighting. Stretcher-bearers and nurses are heroes in their own sphere. They also fight and risk their lives to the full. While this is being written the news reaches us that three of our doctors: Dr. Solenberger, an Englishman, Dr. Robbins, an American, and Dr. Grosev, a Bulgarian, have been killed while working at a Brigade first aid post. The Fascist pilots had taken the medical post as their target, and the bomb killed fourteen people, besides the doctors, several stretcher-bearers and first aid men — men whose only business it was to save human life. Before these new victims of the barbarous murderers who never even spare the wounded and those who aid them, who kill the helpless, the women and children, we give a pledge to fight with redoubled strength for the life of every wounded comrade. And with redoubled strength our friends in all countries will help us against the common enemy.

**Every wounded comrade we heal is one more guarantee for victory.**



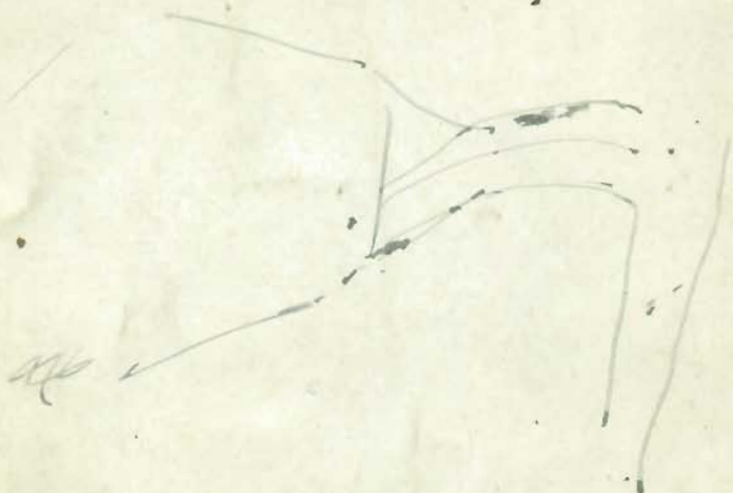


**MAJOR Dr. FRANEK**

*Who together with Major Dr. Telge, leads the International Medical Service.*







||| SUCESORES  
DE  
**RIVADENEYRA. S. A.**  
ARTES GRAFICAS  
**INTERVENIDA**  
**POR EL ESTADO**  
PASEO SAN VICENTE, 28  
M A D R I D