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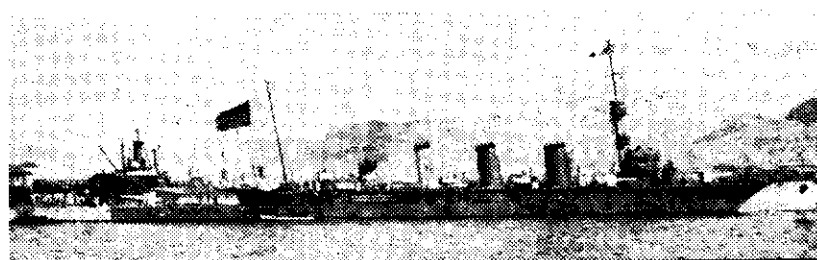


How would YOU treat
BURNS
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POISONING
WOUNDS
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DISLOCATIONS

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RUNNING THE SPANISH BLOCKADE

WHILE Fascist ships were patrolling the coasts of Spain when fighting was at its bitterest, when the streets of the seaports of Spain were full of homeless men, women and children, there were some British ships that ran the blockade, bringing food to starving Spain and bearing away as many refugees as the small deck space would allow. Here is an account of the experiences of one of the men who, first in one boat and then in others, set out again and again to support the cause which they believed to be just.



(Written for "The Listener" by
THOMAS E. DARBY)

BILBAO, the north Asturian seaport, was fighting for its very existence. From the east it was cut off, blockaded by armed trawlers, cruisers, and destroyers. Through this we had rushed for the shore with the noise of Franco's cruiser guns in our ears. The Stanbrook, on which I was engine-room rating, arrived first in port, with "Potato" Jones on the Marie Llewellyn just behind and the Seven Seas Spray and others following after. Once more we could land at a Spanish port and hear the cheerful "Coma Esta amigos y camarados?" (How are you, comrades and friends?) of the Spanish militiamen who greeted us. They crowded round our ships, armed with any and every weapon they could raise, shot guns, single and double-barrelled rifles picked up anywhere—one had a 1914 French Martini, but there were no Tommy-guns and very few machine-guns in the town. Small hungry children crowded round the boat and we let them come on board and gave them food. And the toughest old salts turned away when they saw the hunger and the joy with which the children held out their hands for something to eat.

First Air Raid

That night I experienced my first air raid. Some of us were in a little café in the town discussing politics over Spanish wine when the alarm sounded. We wanted to stay to see the fun but we were marshalled by the Republican guard to the dug-outs. With great foresight the Republican Government had spared no expense in building a fine system of underground shelters deep into the hills and under the city. Large notices "Al Refugios" (to the shelters) were posted at the street corners and this is where we were led. All the same, we came up to watch the fight.

Fifteen German Heinkels and Italian Capronis were flying over, dodging five little Republican fighters that were dipping and circling in their attempts to bring down the big bombers. One was brought down but the others released their heavy cargo of bombs and made off.

It was clear that Bilbao would not stand up to the battering she was receiving very much longer. We unloaded our cargo of potatoes and then took on our



Top: The Spanish Republican cruiser Mendez Nunez at dock in Cartagena

Bottom: Spanish sailors give the Republican salute

human cargo of refugees, one thousand five hundred girls, women and old men, clinging to their few possessions as they filed past the guard with their identity cards. The majority came from good Asturian families, though some were street girls from Madrid. They crowded the decks, the holds, even the engine-room and the stokehold. One thousand five hundred people on a ship of one thousand five hundred tons! Before we could get out the destroyer Almirante Cervera and the cruiser Canarias began a bombardment of the town so we were delayed, but under the cover of a dark night we crept silently but without lights between the enemy ships, and so up the coast to Bordeaux where our refugees passed quietly down the gangways to the French camps where they would have a temporary security at least.

We loaded up with grain and food-stuffs at Avonmouth and then went back. Bilbao had fallen, so our skipper, "Toughie" Prance, headed us for Santander, the next Asturian port to Bilbao. Our old friends the Canarias and the Cervera were there with lights full on. At the command from the Scottish engineer "Give her all you've got," the engines were opened full out, and we raced for our lives between the brightly lighted Franco warships for Santander and arrived just as dawn was breaking. Santander was in confusion as the Franco forces were advancing on the town and the Asturian miners were dynamiting

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