

Waiting For The Firing Squad

(Continued from Page 9.)

Moros, we had defended it for 11 hours against a counter-attack. Then Jacinto, "terricento" of Moros, had said that we must evacuate it and go further down the road to another house. These houses, old farms, with walls six or seven feet thick, were standing like sentinels among the red trenches which honeycombed the district. We filed on to our car—a Buick—roughly armoured, three of us and five Moros, all that remained of the little garrison.

Out on the road amid the barrage from our own forces we felt more secure, felt we could dodge the shells and machine-gun fire. We had a machine-gun, too, and the crew to work it.

I swung the car out of the farm on to the road and down it—the cracking whine of machine-guns louder than the roar of the hard-pressed engine in low gear. Then, for a moment, oblivion—the crash and the light from the high explosive came often. Jacinto, who had been lying on the footboard and front wing, dragged Roberto over to where I lay, then, with the help of the one uninjured Moros, he dragged us to the shelter of a wall.

Dazed still, we got up and tried to run from the Reds who covered us. The hazy details of the lightmarish hour that followed were but faintly imprinted on my mind. The dragging, weary, stumbling journey (led by the wrists to an ammunition lorry) into Boadilla—the chafed, raw wrists—the wrenched shoulders, as you fell and were dragged.

The curt sentence of death at dawn. The cold, stifling fuz of the freezing garage.

MY thoughts came back with a jerk to the moment. The door was being opened. I heard and sensed the file of waiting soldiers—I stumbled out with the others, Jacinto and Robert, and I in the lead, Moros behind with the other Regulars. We formed roughly into the gap left for us by the lines of soldiers. No cords, no dragging lorry now. I swung my arms and got warm, but in a few hundred yards we had to halt. The barrage was deafening, day was breaking—the fifth day of the battle of Boadilla. We heard the hum of motors, the drone of aeroplanes, then all of us crouching in the shadow of the wall, prisoners and guard, we saw them, three of them, saw the first bombers drop bombs over Boadilla de Monte.

For us they spelt reprieve. For the Reds they spelt defeat.

We were marched a short way to the church, flung in with the others, and left wondering what was to be our fate. Here, locked in this prison, guarded from the outside, we stayed. Dawn lightened into daylight, and, with the fullness of the morning the awe-full rain of leader death ceased. Only sporadic bursts of firing rent the stillness.

We forced the door—the guards had fled, and there, rising like ghosts, tall and unearthly in the morning mists, was the first band of Moros who entered Boadilla, climbing wearily out of the Red trenches, which for so long had withstood the battering of artillery and machine-gun, but which, in the faint morning light, had fallen to the bayonet and Spanish "navaja"—the knife.

JONES SEWING MACHINES

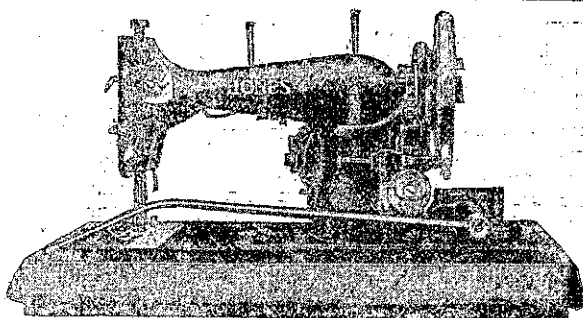
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