

A young Wellington man, the son of a well-known city doctor, added last year to a remarkable career as film producer, scenarist, broadcaster and one-time apprentice to the Spanish bull-ring, the experience of fighting for Franco on the Catalan front. The Catalans captured him and condemned him to death by shooting—"a Fascist traitor" and "tool of the Dictatorships."

But, when dawn comes on the morning of one's execution day, the face of Death seems the same to Bolshevik and Fascist alike. For both are men, differing only in paltry political viewpoint. In this remarkable article written exclusively for the "Record," Franco's soldier tells what it feels like to wait for the firing squad. . . .

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by

PHILIP CROSS

WE stood huddled together for warmth, listening to the movements of assembling troops outside. It was too dark to shoot as yet. And we knew that the "Reds" were busy counter-attacking in Russian style—led by Russians against Yague and his forces of legionares and regulares. We were prisoners, sixteen of us, captured during the afternoon's offensive.

My head ached, my teeth chattered with cold and fear—although both feelings were so intense that one almost drove out the other. I had seen men die—had seen men executed, had fought, hot blood and excitement giving me courage—but now, at night in pitch black, cold darkness, dazed and sore from a shell burst, all my courage was gone, leaving only a desperate fear—fear of death in the abstract and a more living, real fear—a nearer, closer fear—of being hurt. I thought of bullets; how they ripped and tore, how small the hole where they entered, and how enormous the hole where they came out!

To be shot standing in the half-light, trying to be grave and defiant, numb with cold, and the awful fear of coming bullets. . . . They did it by machine-gun burst sometimes—often the man who fired aimed too high, then another burst would come, lower this time—waist high—then the revolver shots at close quarters to end it.

Que passa Felipe?

ROBERTO NADA! Roberto sidled closer, his voice high and cracked with emotion; he spoke quickly in pure Castilian—his cradle teachings at the last moment washed out the assumed patois of the soldier and the camp. He was an aristocrat, finely bred, intelligent, sensitive, and had the cold, desperate valour of the Castilian. He knew—as all his forbears did—how to die. For a little while we talked, the Moors and regulares with us were silent, or spoke softly to each other. They, like us, knew what was to come.

We knew that in a little while now—at once almost—we would be led out and shot. In the cold December dawn we'd be soon grotesquely limp, bloody and torn; then, in a few days, our stinking, swollen bodies would be hauled in



In the trenches before Madrid.

large graves dug by Franco's men as they advanced, defeating and driving back the "Reds," clearing the dead as they came.

The two sentries outside were changed; we heard them challenge each other. In guttural Catalan they gave instructions. We saw a faint glint of light under the door. Then nothing.

Thoughts racing madly through my fuddled head prompted laughter—it suddenly seemed so funny that I, who had many times alone, on the golden sands of the bull-rings of the South, played with death—invited it each time I sighted the bull, and at the last second evaded death with the swirling folds of the scarlet cloth. . . . Now I was a coward, frightened to die.

"Que tal rino"—softly. Jacinto Guerrora spoke.

I pressed his hand laid on my arm; I could see him smiling—I knew his face so well that in the gloom and blackness I felt the sight rather than saw it with my eyes. He, too, was an "aristo," a scholar—thoughtful, ever patient (unusual in a Spaniard), one of the new Spaniards—the aristocrats—who thought of other things than money and themselves. He was older than Roberto and I—nearly forty.

The time dragged on. Always I tried to see if it got lighter. Vainly I hoped for reprieve; for someone to help me—someone to let me go. I found myself trying to listen for an English voice, for some Englishman, authoritative and determined, who would, in crisp tones, order the door opened and my release. No one came. My thoughts went back to the day before.

FOR four days we had been trying to capture Boadilla—the "Reds" had defended it with an unparalleled bravery—beating back our attacks. I had, with Jacinto and Roberto, driven an armoured car to a strong farm we had captured between Boadilla and Poguelo. There, with a detachment of

(Continued on page 41.)

... I Listened for the Firing Squad