

Fighters from Other Lands Look to Ohio Man for Food

Abraham Lewis, as Quartermaster in Spain, Also Attends to Clothing and Recreational Needs.

Ninth of a series of weekly articles written exclusively for the AFRO-AMERICAN newspapers on Spain, and colored people in Spain, sent with photographs directly from the Spanish front.

By LANGSTON HUGHES

VALENCIA

He was about to start out with two trucks, several helpers, and several thousand pesetas on a food purchasing tour for the various kitchens at the Anglo-American Training Base of the International Brigades in the heart of Spain. He was a heavy-set, dark brownskin fellow of perhaps 35, snappy and efficient-looking in his well-kept officer's uniform.

He had little time to talk to me as the trucks were about to get under way, but while the chauffeurs were getting their gas for the journey, he told me something of himself and his work in Spain.

Abraham Lewis is his name. He comes from Cleveland, Ohio, where he was one of the most active workers in the Future Outlook League, a leading colored organization there. He has been in Spain almost a year. At first he was attached to a transport regiment and after two months of service he was made a sergeant.

Has Big Job Now

Now he is a lieutenant, and the quartermaster in charge at the English-speaking training base with a large staff of various nationalities under him, American, English, and Spanish. His responsibilities include the feeding, clothing, sanitary, and recreational facilities of the entire base. No small job for one man.

Abraham Lewis, however, is not without experience in such work. He was formerly a steward on an American government boat and there acquired the knowledge of handling food and preparing menus. Here in Spain, though, the feeding of Internationals is no simple problem. In the first place, the Spaniards cook with olive oil, a procedure not agreeable to the pallet of most foreigners.

Lewis had to find various available substitutes for this oil, substitutes that would appeal to the International mouths at his tables in a land where lard and butter are not easily to be gotten. Then there was the problem of cooks. Very few of the International Brigaders who came to Spain wanted to serve as cooks. They wanted to fight.

So Lewis had to train Spanish cooks in American ways of cooking, stressing as well sanitation and efficiency, especially in the matter of time — having food ready exactly at the hour when it should be served.

Double Task

For Lewis, who speaks little Spanish, this has been a double task. He has, of course, an interpreter. But because many of his Spanish kitchen workers could neither read nor write, written orders and listed menus were at first impossible.

Taught the Three R's

Out of twenty-seven cooks and helpers, only seven were literate. So Lewis organized classes for them. Now, after five months,

Spain and the Spanish people. His answer was an enthusiastic one, and a very racial one. He said, "Here nobody sneers at a colored person because he has a position of authority. Everybody tries to help him. Everybody salutes him."

"A colored person has a chance to develop here. Spain is all right! And in the International Brigades, people of all races, even if they can't speak your language, help you and work with you. That's the kind of comradeship that gets things done!"

Helpers White

The trucks came, and he was notified that they were waiting. Lewis shook my hand warmly and went away. It was midnight. At dawn they would be in the distant city where the wholesale houses and supply bases were. With him on the first truck were two white helpers. On the second truck also, his co-workers were white.

Will We Learn?

When will we learn to work together like that in America? I wondered. In Spain now the Internationals of all races stand against Fascism and its barbarous theories of white supremacy and working-class oppression. When the black and white workers of America learn to stand together in the same fashion, no oppressive forces in the world can hurt them.

When Abraham Lewis comes home, he can no doubt help America achieve that unity. That is what I thought as I watched his trucks drive away through the Spanish night across La Mancha where centuries ago Don Quixote wandered with his lance.

seventeen have learned to read their own language, Spanish. For this achievement the U. G. T. Trade Unions, to which the kitchen employees belong, have complimented Lewis in an official letter.

But Lewis's job includes much more than food. As Quartermaster, he is in charge of all distribution of clothing and bedding at the camp, and has installed a modern American filing system to keep track of things. He has set up a tailoring repair service, employing women of the village. He has modernized greatly the camp laundry.

He has set up a shoe-repair shop which was badly needed, but lacking before Lewis came. At present, through the various services of which Lewis is in charge, more than a hundred thousand pesetas a month pass through his hands for purchases and expenses.

Abraham Lewis is deeply interested in and proud of his job. He is proud of the opportunity which the International Brigades have given him to make use of his full capacities for organizational and administrative work. He knows that in America such opportunities come too seldom to members of the darker race. Here he has done well in the responsible position which he occupies.

Nobody Sneers

Just before the trucks returned to staff headquarters to pick him up for their buying expedition, I asked Lewis what he thought of