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pg. 1

HUGHES BOMBED IN SPAIN

Tells of Terror of Fascist Raid

Women, Children Huddled
in Fear as Bombs Explode

First 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

MADRID, Spain—I came down from Paris by train. We reached Barcelona at night. The day before there had been a terrific air raid in the city, killing almost a hundred persons in their houses and wounding a great many more. We read about it in the papers at the border: AIR RAID OVER BARCELONA.

"Last night!" I thought, "Well, tonight I'll be there."

There's a tunnel between France and Spain, a long stretch of darkness through which the trains pass. Then you come out into the sunlight again directly into the village of Port Bou on the Spanish side of the mountain, with a shining blue bay below where children are swimming.

But as you leave the train, you notice that the windows of the station are almost all broken. Several nearby houses are in ruins, gutted by bombs. And in the winding streets of the village there are signs, REFUGIO, pointing to holes in the mountains in case of air-raids. That is wartime Spain. A little town by the blue Mediterranean where travellers change trains.

Working in the Fields

In the country they were harvesting the wheat and, as we

rode southward, we saw men and women working with their scythes in the fields. The Barcelona train was very crowded. I was travelling with Nicolas Guillen, the colored poet from Havana, and a Mexican writer and his wife.

Rapid-Fire Talk

They kept up a rapid fire of Spanish in various accents all around me. Guillen and I were the only colored on the train, so I thought, until at one of the stations when we got out to buy fruit, we noticed a dark face leaning from the window of the coach ahead of us. When the train started again, we went forward to investigate.

He was a young brown-skin boy from the Canary Islands. He wore a red shirt and a blue beret. He had escaped from the fascists who now control his island by the simple expedient of getting into his fishing boat with

Continued on page 2, col. 6

Tells of Terror of Fascist Raid

(Continued from Page 1)

the rest of her crew and sailing toward Africa.

The Canary Islands belong to Spain, but the fishermen do not like the fascists who have usurped power there, and so many of them sail their boats away and come to fight on the mainland with the Spanish government. This young man had come to fight.

Spoke Dialect

He spoke a strange Spanish dialect which was hard for us to understand, but he made it clear to us that he did not like fascism with its crushing of the labor unions and the rights of working people like himself. He told us that a great many folks who live in the Canary Islands are colored, mixed with African and Spanish blood.

It was almost midnight when we got to Barcelona. There were no lights in the town, and we came out of the station into pitch darkness. A bus took us to the hotel. It was a large hotel several stories high which, before the Civil War, had been a fashionable stopping place for tourists.

We had rooms on an upper floor. The desk clerk said that in case of air-raids we might come down into the lobby, but that a few floors more or less wouldn't make much difference. The raids were announced by a siren, but guests would be warned by telephone as well. That night there was no bombing, so we slept in peace.

The next day Guillen and I were sitting in a side-walk cafe on the tree-lined boulevard called Las Ramblas, when a dark young colored man came by.

Remembered Meeting

He looked at us, then turned and spoke. He recognized me, he said, because he had heard me speak in New York. He was a Puerto Rican who had come from Harlem to serve as interpreter in Spain. His name was Roldan. He invited us to go with him to the Mella Club where Cubans and West Indians gather in Barcelona.

The Mella Club, named after Julio Antonio Mella, famous Cuban student leader assassinated in Mexico, occupies the whole second floor of a large building near the center of the town. It has a beautiful courtyard for games and dancing, and a little bar where Cuban drinks are mixed. We were invited to a dance that afternoon given in honor of the soldiers on leave, and here we met a number of Cubans, both colored and white, and a colored Portuguese, all taking an active part in the Spanish struggle against the fascists.

Find New Freedom

And all of them finding in loyalist Spain more freedom than they had known at home—for most of the West Indian Islands are burdened by colonial or semi-fascistic types of dictatorships such as Batista's in Cuba, and Vincent's in Haiti. And all of them draw the color-line between colored and whites.

In Spain, as one could see at the dance that afternoon, there is no color line, and Catalonian girls and their escorts mingled gaily with the colored guests.

That night, back at the hotel, one knew that it was war-time

because, in the luxurious dining room with its tuxedoed waiters, there was only one fixed dinner menu, no choice of food. It was a good dinner of soup, fish, meat, one vegetable, and fruit, but nothing elaborate. Later, as one often does in Europe, we went to a sidewalk cafe for coffee.

No Lights

Until midnight, we sat at our table watching the crowd strolling up and down the broad Ramblas. The fact that Barcelona was lightless did not seem to keep people home on a warm evening. A few wan bulbs from the interior of the cafes cast a dull glow on the sidewalks, but that was the only visible light, save for the stars shining brightly above.

The buildings were great grey shadows towering in the night, with windows shuttered and curtains drawn. There must be no light on any upper floors to guide enemy aviators.

Hears Sirens Wail

At midnight, the public radios began to blare forth the war-news, and people gathered in large groups on corners to hear it. Then the cafe closed and we went to the hotel. I had just barely gotten to my room and had begun to undress when the low extended wail of the siren began, letting us know that the fascist planes were coming. (They come from Mallorca across the sea at a terrific speed, drop their bombs, and circle away into the night again.)

Quickly, I put on my shirt, passed Guillen's room, and together we started downstairs. Suddenly all the lights went out in the hotel, but we heard people rushing down the halls and stairways in the dark. A few had flashlights with them to find the way. Some were visibly frightened. In the lobby two candles were burning, casting weird, giant-like shadows on the walls.

In an ever increasing wail the siren sounded louder and louder, droning its deathly warning. Suddenly it stopped. By then the lobby was full of people, men, women, and children, speaking in Spanish, English, and French. In the distance we heard a series of quick explosions.

Anti-Aircraft Guns

"Bombs?" I asked. "No, anti-aircraft gun," a man explained.

Everyone was very quiet. Then we heard the guns go off again. "Come here," the man called, leading the way. Several of us went out on the balcony where, in the dark, we could see the searchlights playing across the sky. Little round puffs of smoke from the anti-aircraft shells floated against the stars. In the street a few women hurried along to public bomb-proof cellars.

Planes Driven Away

Then for a long while nothing happened. After about an hour, the lights suddenly came on in the hotel again as a signal that the danger had ended. Evidently, the enemy planes had been driven away without having dropped any bombs. Everyone went back upstairs to bed. The night was quiet again. I put out my light, opened the window, and went to sleep.

Being very tired, I slept soundly without dreaming. The next thing I knew, the telephone was ringing violently in the dark, the siren screaming its long blood-curdling cry again, and the walls of the building shaking.

BOOM! Then the dull roar of a dying vibration. And another BOOM! Through my window I saw a flash of light. I didn't stay to look again. Down the hall I went, clothes in my arms, sensing my way toward the staircase in the dark.

No Foolin' This Time

This time the air-raid was on for sure. When I got to the lobby, the same people as before were gathered there in various stages of dress and undress. Children crying, women talking hysterically, men very quiet. Nobody went out on the balcony now.

In the street an ambulance passed, its bell ringing in the distance. The anti-aircraft guns kept up their rapid fire. The last BOOM of the enemy bombs was a long way off. The planes, with their cargo of death partially emptied, were driven away. But for a long time nobody left the lobby.

When I went back to bed, dawn was coming in at my open window. Below, in the cool light, the rooftops of Barcelona were grey and lonely. Soon a little breeze blew in from the sea and the red of the rising sun stained the sky. I covered up my head to keep out the light, but I couldn't go to sleep for a long time.