

Underwear—heavy blue cotton with wool mixture, well suited for winter wear.  
Footwear—boots laced and otherwise, heavy shoes of all types worn with and without leather leggings.

Blanket issues—one to each man, hardly enough for winter.

The uniformed appearance of the command in parade formation can best be expressed by the words "unclean and unsightly".

#### BARRACKS AND QUARTERS

The command occupied some monastery buildings. No attempt was made to obtain uniformity of arrangement of bedding, clothing and equipment. Articles were mostly dumped in individual piles on [the] floor near the walls. Total lack of camping expedients and the sanitary conditions can best be expressed by the word "horrible". The quarters of the officers were in former residences in the heart of the town. They were dirty, unsanitary and evidenced no attempt at tidiness.

The men were at rest and idle and would have welcomed I am sure, a real old time "post general fatigue day". If such an event had occurred, afterwards, in looking over their place policed, orderly and sanitary, I am sure that they would have had pride in their achievement, received a boost in morale and lifted their heads a bit higher in self respect and self esteem. Their leaders seemed to lack an appreciation of the far reaching effect of and sound benefits which accrue from close attention to policing personnel. The men in these units by their nature, temperament and experience readily adopt the idea that dirty bodies, hairy faces and tough looking exteriors give them a real "field soldier" appearance. However, when this type of personnel is led to the appreciation that "cleanliness is godliness" and that system and orderly arrangement are the essence of true soldierly qualities, they will follow the leader like the Spanish sheep follow the bell horned goat. These men of the International Brigades belong in the category often referred to in our army when we speak of a man as being "a good field soldier but rotten in garrison".

#### SOLDIERLY BEARING AND APPEARANCE

Seemed at a low ebb in and out of ranks. There was no evidence of results attained from closer order drills—men in ranks moved about at will and effort at exactness of execution and simultaneous movement seemed pitiful. There were few signs of either individual training or combined mass movements. The troops were paraded for the undersigned in a hollow square formation. No attempt was made to march by in review—a maneuver which in all probability could not have been executed without embarrassment to the leaders, a situation which they evidently foresaw and avoided.



### MORALE

Judged from the stories of individual and group action in combat and observing the men in training squads, at mess and at play, their fighting spirit is evidently high. This can well be understood knowing the soldier types in these International Brigade units—in which they come from the four corners of the earth actuated by those impulses of adventure, wanderlust, hate, political faith which make for the "to do or die" spirit in men.

### TRAINING

What little individual and group training this command has had has been inspired by our training regulations which are in the hands of the American instructors, who control the instruction. However, these teachers are handicapped in not having the power to impose a discipline requisite and essential in the school of training the student types that come and go with such disrupting frequency in these International Brigade Centers. At best, these soldiers receive only a few basic training principles, a bit of field service instruction, a touch of first aid and personal hygiene and not more than an introduction to their weapons with little or no target practice. Their group training is just as amended with the consequence that their movements lack cohesion and cooperation—uniformity and exactness of execution being unknown to them. What battle successes these men have attained seemingly have come to them through their strong conviction of the rightness of their cause, of their physical courage, of their personal bravery and through their indomitable spirit to win. Their failures, in most cases, were plainly caused by lack of efficient leadership in the lower grades and almost the total absence of proper field training.

### ARMAMENT

*The Infantry Cannon.* The brigade has a group composed of three sections—each of which is armed with a 45 mm. infantry cannon. The cannon and ammunition—examined personally—are Russian manufactured judging from the Russian language markings. The officer who showed me the gun had been the section commander for several months, but knew nothing of the ballistic properties or characteristics of the piece. However, the following mental notes were made by the undersigned at the time of the observation: The carriage, split trail, barrel and mountings seem almost identical in design with our 37m. gun, increased, however, in size and weight to meet the greater caliber (34). No unusual or novel devices, in the construction of the piece, were noted. The marked comparative differences between the two pieces lay in the increased weight of the gun and carriage, but it had an oil



compression recoil system, that it was not constructed with a view to dismounting in the field for man handling, that it was sighted in ranges up to 10,000 meters, that the wheel tires were heavy solid rubber tires and that it had unusually large gripping spades on the split trails. The tires showed little wearing as the piece is entrucked for all movements except for short distances, in the presence of the enemy, when it is rope hauled. The piece observed had fired in one day at Belchite some 1100 rounds over a period of about ten hours. There was no log kept for the gun, so the total number of rounds it had fired since it came into service last February was unknown; however, it has been operated in all the campaigns since last February in which the brigade has participated. There are three guns assigned to the brigade—each being operated by a crew of 8 men.

The breach block is practically the same as on our 37mm. gun, opens vertically downward and ejects [the] shell after firing. Although the piece is sighted up to 10,000 meters, it is generally employed at its best ranges, 1500-2000 meters, in which distances protective cover is generally found. The barrel is susceptible to an elevation of 45°. The officer commanding has high praise for its accuracy of fire as he expressed it, "at 2000 meters I can pump shells through an ordinary window of a building". The gun is reported "tough". The piece observed—all parts painted olive drab—showed little or no signs of the hard usage to which the gun had been put. No part had been replaced except one small screw in the breech block handle mechanism and the firing pin examined showed practically no wear.

The shells used in this gun are of two conventional types both of which are about 18 inches long. One type is employed against tanks and although it does not contain a delayed fuse—it breaks only after great resistance. The other is used for firing against fortified buildings, ground machine-gun nests and "strong points" and is detonated on impact.

While this gun has played an important role in the fighting in which this brigade has been engaged, to the undersigned it has functioned more as an "accompanying gun" and perhaps this type of cannon may be of the type to fill the infantry's long cry for an "accompanying gun" approaching artillery caliber. The fact that this cannon cannot be readily dismounted and man handled makes it, in the opinion of the undersigned, unsuited as an organic arm for the infantry. Judging from the part it has played in battle, it has been more in the role of artillery. Certainly, on most of the occasions of its employment, an artillery piece of 75 mm. could have been used and to greater advantage, while the infantry has been deprived of a weapon that could really follow its lines into action.

*The Rifle.* The brigade is armed with a conventional type of rifle of Russian design manufactured in the United States about 1924. Caliber 30.



*The Infantry Mortar.* No mortars have been issued to the brigade—probably as this weapon is not desired. The brigade being most employed in offensive action and the type of mortars available in Spain being designed for trench warfare, will account for the absence of this weapon.

*Hand Grenade.* Every form of hand grenade on the military market is probably in use in Spain. The so-called "potato masher", the model issued to our infantry and a very small grenade, about the dimensions of an ordinary apple, seem to be the prevailing types.

*Smoke and Gas.* None are employed.

*Pistols.* No uniformity. Probably all standard makes on the market can be found in the brigade.

### American Volunteers

#### AMERICANS IN SPANISH ARMY

The following well thought out estimate of the strength of the American volunteers in Spain was prepared for the undersigned by the Chief of Staff of the brigade:

Original strength	2,500
Losses—All causes, deaths, discharges and desertions and missing in action	500
Present strength 10/21/37	2,000

This figure can be broken down as follows:

With combat troops	900
In hospitals and rest areas	300
With non-combatant services, mostly Motor and Hospital units	500
	<hr/> 1,700

The figure above with combat troops 900 may be broken down as follows:

Lincoln-Washington Battalion	225
Mackenzie-Papinau Battalion	200
With other combat units: Artillery, Cavalry, Communications (mostly with Artillery)	475
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*The Lincoln-Washington Battalion*

The Lincoln Battalion was organized in the Madrid area in January 1937 and the organization of the Washington Battalion followed in April. The two were merged in May into what is now known as the Lincoln-Washington Battalion due to the reduction in the strength of both organizations occasioned by their great battle losses. The battalion is truly a "rainbow unit" for within its ranks may be found representatives from the 48 states of the Union and Hawaii and Puerto Rico. The representation from New York predominates with those of California and Ohio a distant second. In the unit may be found some ten negroes and a similar number of men of the Jewish faith.

The present battalion commander is Captain Philip Detto, a journalist from Houston, Texas, and a former member of the National Guard of Texas. Captain Detto is about 30 years of age, medium height, slim and of the "raw bone" type. He is reported to be "a good fighter of the true Texan brand". He could not be classified as a dominant leader and does not belong to the "fire brand" class. He is very modest in his manner and soft speaking in his voice. His ability to lead probably comes through these characteristics reinforced by strong convictions, initiative, courage and some military experience.

Mention will be made here of Captain Hans Amlie who organized the Washington Battalion and who commanded it during its short life. Captain Amlie is from Elkhorn, Wisconsin. Captain Amlie served in the U.S. Marine Corps 1916-1920 and in the 20th Infantry in 1921-1923. He was with the 2nd Division throughout its campaigns in France and was wounded twice in the Belleau Woods engagements. He was wounded in the July fighting in the Brunete campaign at Mosquito Ridge and again at Belchete where as he expressed it, "a bullet just parted my hair". I noted the hair "parted" in the middle to which he referred. During his service with the Marines he was at one time on the Marine Rifle Team which attended the National Competition at Camp Perry, Ohio. Captain Amlie's service in the American battalion in Spain has been marked with great distinction. He is the tall ungainly type, modest, phlegmatic, conscientious, courageous, possesses good judgment and lots of sound leadership qualities. With these characteristics, fortified by his six years' service with regular troops, two of which were in the World War, Captain Amlie has been an outstanding figure among the American Volunteers and probably can be included among the three leading Americans in the Spanish Volunteer forces. In this selected group the undersigned would include Major Merriman, Captain Amlie and Captain Johnson. The last named officer is here placed from hearsay remarks and praises given to him. He formerly



commanded the Lincoln Battalion and is now the head of an officers' training school. He is reported to be a graduate of West Point and an ex-regular army officer and seeks the background atmosphere avoiding publicity of any type. The undersigned expects to meet Captain Johnson shortly.

Captain Amlie was my escort during the trip of the Eastern front.

#### ENGAGEMENTS

The American battalions and the American-Canadian units have participated in the following major engagements:

- The defense of Madrid
- The Jarama actions—defensive and offensive
- The Brunete campaign—Villanueva de la Canada column
- The Quinto-Belchite campaign
- The Fuentes de Ebro campaign (the October Offensive).

Under the heading of engagements may be mentioned some notes on the Quinto-Belchite campaign and the recent battle for the Fuentes de Ebro, particularly as these were actions carried out almost solely by the XV Brigade and that these engagements have been mentioned by the high command as "an outstanding tribute to the fighting efficiency of the American Volunteers".

#### *Quinto*

The movement against Belchite was subordinated to the attack on Quinto, the success of which made possible the Belchite envelopment movement. The Quinto advance was made from the south with an artillery barrage laid on the strong isolated fortified ridge to the south of the town. While this artillery battle was in progress, a two brigade column circled well west of the town with Hill 161 as its objective; however, when nearly west of the town, the XV Brigade was told off to take the town from that flank, which it did after a two day fight, the second day being devoted to street fighting and the taking of the town citadel—the customary church on the hill. Hill 161 fell thus cutting off Quinto from Fuentes de Ebro and reinforcements from the north. The detached ridge south of the town fell by negotiations—the garrison of some 200 men surrendering. The success of this combined movement made it possible to push a force at once towards Medina, some 14 kms west of Quinto, which took the town almost in one onslaught. This victory cut the road between Fuentes and Belchite and permitted the latter town



to be attacked from the north. The Chief of Staff of the XV Brigade informed me that the Quinto campaign was well organized and coordinated and that it was by far the best conducted offensive in which the brigade had participated. In fact, he added, it is the only one where there prevailed combined movement controlled by a central authority in the field with a definite purpose and fixed objectives.

### *Belchite*

The advance on Belchite was made from the west and south fronts, the south column finally swinging westward through Ermita, thus cutting the road to Fuentodos. The XV Brigade later was moved from the Quinto position to Codo just northeast of Belchite. Thus Belchite was completely surrounded and, in which situation, it so remained for 14 days. During this time, the isolated garrison was supplied from the air; almost daily rebel planes would drop sacks of food, ammunition and medical supplies. The reception field for the landing of the sacks was a sunken spot near the Cathedral and was well protected from hostile ground fire. (The spot was visited by the undersigned.) Throughout this fortnight, the town was hammered by some 50 pieces of artillery, from the nearby heights, of all calibers, during which time the village was literally battered to pieces. During a thorough inspection of the town not one single house was observed unhit and probably no place of this size has been so completely wiped out as was Belchite. However, during this period of bombardment the garrison hugged their dugouts, manned their posts and peppered the enemy's lines whenever exposed with a grilling machine-gun fire refusing to a man to quit their positions. This situation being so prolonged, and none of the troops advancing, the high command decided on the 14th day of the siege "to drive the rats out of their holes" and for this task the XV Brigade was selected. The troops left the vicinity of Codo for the cross road just north of Belchite and on September 1st launched the assault from that position with the road to Mediana as the axis of the advance. In the assault the houses were not entered until the 4th and during that day and the 5th the fight was "street to street, house to house and at times room to room". The town finally fell on the morning of the 6th after the garrison had been "shot out of their dugouts and hand grenaded from their house fortresses".

Belchite was a religious center and possessed four churches and several monasteries, all of which afforded the defenders strong "centers of resistance" which from the attackers' statements were held unto the last. Many stories are told by those participating of how "hard the fascists fought at Belchite", and of the many incidents occurring in the "house to house" hand to hand fights where the enemy



died fighting and the cases of suicide "rather than be taken alive". The XV Brigade in this attack had 175 wounded and 50 killed.

### *Fuentes de Ebro*

After Belchite the brigade was more or less out of the lines or remained in the quiet sectors until October 12th when it was ordered to the trenches facing Fuentes de Ebro, under orders to initiate an attack against that town. The Brigade entered the line the night of October 12-13 and launched the attack at noon of the 13th. The Brigade was disposed in the line on a two kilometer front—the left of the Mackenzie-Papinau Battalion resting on the Quinto-Fuentes road, the American Battalion in the center and the English Battalion on the right. The line extended northeast and at right angles to the road, the direction of attack being northwest against the enemy's front line trenches just south of the town and northeast of the main road. The axis of the advance was about 1500 yards in depth. The "jump off" was made from an interior sector, the left sector of the trench line being occupied by the 143d Catalan Brigade and the right by the 120th Catalan Brigade. The Spanish battalion of the XV Brigade was assigned to accompany the 45 tanks which preceded the attack on three separate lines of advance—one group of 15 moving south of the road on the left flank, a second group of 15 on the right flank and the third group of 15 along the axis of the advance. The center group was to pick up enemy machine-gun positions and destroy them, the flank groups were to cover with machine-gun fire the flanks of the advancing infantry line, penetrate the enemy's position and strike it from the rear and finally aid the infantry in entering the town. Each tank transported five infantry soldiers—in a prone position back of the turret—with the plan that these small groups would drop off on reaching the enemy's line and with their hand grenades storm and take the enemy's first positions. The machine-gun companies were assigned as reserves to occupy a position for firing, holding same until the infantry objectives had been taken or to cover the withdrawal or resist a counter attack.

The artillery was to lay a thirty minute barrage on the enemy's front line in preparation for the advance. The brigades on the right and left of the XV were to advance to a rolling ridge some 500 yards to the front, and there pound the enemy's line, particularly in front of the attacking brigade, with a devastating fire. What happened to this plan, as told [to] the undersigned by the Chief of Staff of the Brigade, follows:

The passage of the tanks across the trench line occupied by the brigade was the zero hour signal for the initiation of the infantry attack. However, the tanks were an hour late on their schedule. The right and left tank groups drove forward

without relation to the town where forward movement that the enemy was able. The second upon the second mishap occurred XV, advanced

Notwithstanding about 500 yards partial screen in under cover losses in this to which the line of about

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without relation to their infantry flank protection mission and entered the edge of the town where they were stopped by "ditches and barricades". The force of their forward movement having been spent, they became an easy prey, in fact, so easy that the enemy captured 22 without the necessity of rendering them unserviceable. The second phase of this fiasco battle was that the artillery barrage was laid upon the second instead of the first line of enemy trenches. The third and telling mishap occurred when neither of the Catalan brigades, on the right and left of the XV, advanced. In fact, these troops did not leave their trench positions.

Notwithstanding these deterring factors, the XV Brigade advanced to within about 500 yards of the enemy's line where it secured sufficient ground cover and partial screen to enable it to hold on, without being annihilated, until darkness set in under cover of which the elements withdrew to their original trench line. The losses in this engagement were exceedingly small—considering the grave danger to which the troops were exposed, 20 killed and 102 wounded out of an attacking line of about 1,000 men.

Thus ended the "battle" of Fuentes de Ebro which in the government communiqués at the time heralded not so much as a victory but "a success which will make possible the encircling of the town". The lines are now stabilized—the rebels just south of the town 500 yards and the government troops some 2,000 yards away—the line crossing the main road at kilometer 28 which means that distance from Zaragoza. Although the officers who described this action to me did not mention outright of "treason in the ranks", it was evident that they strongly suspected such. The Catalan explanation given for not advancing was that their brigades were not equipped nor prepared for offensive action as they had been assured in this trench assignment that their mission was "purely defensive". One of the officers remarked on commenting on this incident: "The Catalans are dug in for the winter".

As Quinto—as expressed above by the brigade Chief of Staff—was the best coordinated attack in which the XV Brigade had participated, so Fuentes was by far the worst.

#### Spirit of the Enemy

The "fighting efficiency" of the rebels based upon their performances at Belchite and Quinto was not only high but well in the category of heroic. Under the most adverse circumstances, they fought, cut off on all sides, to the very last, engaging in hand to hand mêlées and frequently committing suicide as a last resort to prevent capture.



### Closing Comments

Herein, the undersigned desires to make of record the usual courtesies of the Spanish War Department in authorizing his trip to this front, particularly as it was closed at the time to all visitors. The visit to the American units was the consummation of a long felt desire as well as the result of an effort initiated some months ago.

The undersigned feels that he would be remiss in not emphasizing the fact that the Americans are held in high esteem in the Spanish army and at the War Department for their "courage and fighting efficiency" evidenced not only in extolling words but in the historical fact that in this war, where the shells have burst loudest and the bullets fallen thickest there the American volunteers could be found. These comments are embodied in this report with a sense of national pride regardless of the fact and with the knowledge of the status of the American volunteer in Spain in the home country as a law violator.

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