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EVACUATED CIVILIANS LEAVING TERUEL.

Teruel has been taken by a surprise. Probably very seldom in all history has so important a battle been fought and won under such conditions of secrecy, or with so few casualties. It is to the eternal credit, both moral and military, of the Spanish High Command, that this is so.

Franco announced, not very long ago, that he would eat his Christmas Eve dinner in Valencia. His plan was to use Teruel as a base for a rapid descent to the coast, cutting the communications between Barcelona and Valencia, at Sagunto or Castellón de la Plana. Thus the victory which has been won is a double one.

Teruel, the capital of Lower Aragon, a city of about 15,000 inhabitants, was strongly garrisoned, principally with Civil Guards and regiments of the quinta, or draft. Colonel Aranda, of sad fame in connection with the siege of Oviedo, was, according to some reports, the

commanding officer. Other accounts said that he commanded a strong column which would bring rescue from one of the towns to the north.

The Republican attack was not directed at any of the well-known weak spots in the city's defences. Knowing that these would make up in man-power what they lacked in natural strength, the attacking forces avoided them, striking instead at the places where nature was relied upon to make the attack difficult. A formidable storm of snow, in addition, gave cover to the Republican army, instead of stopping their advance.

The keynote of the attack was: "Prisoners, take prisoners!!" A truce was offered, during which non-combatants might leave the city, and fascist soldiers, who so desired, might surrender. Large numbers took advantage of this opportunity.

Of those who remained, most did so because their retreat was prevented by the stubborn commanding clique. The cellars of Teruel were full of women and children, who spent almost a week without light or running water, and with food growing every moment scarcer. They fled from the city as opportunity offered, carrying with them the blankets which had eventually become their most prized possessions.

By Wednesday, December 22nd, the city, with the exception of the Seminary, the Provincial Government, and the Headquarters of the Civil Guard, was in Republican hands. Refugees poured out, terrified of the conquering "reds" of whom they had heard hideous tales, but still more frightened to remain in the emptying city. Extraordinary scenes took place. A soldier lover found his sweetheart among the refugee train. Two brothers, one fighting willingly for the Republic, the other drafted into service by the fascists, were reunited and went off together to the recruiting office.

The fact that, with the exception of the journalists invited by the Minister of Defence, Sr. Prieto, there was not a single foreigner in evidence, cheered the refugees, as well as the prisoners, immensely. Hot food, which they had not tasted for days, also helped to raise their spirits, and the fact that they were allowed to keep all silver and copper money which they possessed, giving up only the fascist bank-notes, was a final touch.

Among the crowd evacuated from Teruel were five trembling nuns. Obviously afraid for their very lives, they were led to the office of the examining officer.

"What are your politics?"

"None; we are Christians; that is all."

"What were you doing in the city?"

"We nursed the wounded."

"Would you like to go on doing that?"

"Yes, we ask nothing better."

"Very well. The corporal will take you to the hospital, and you can keep on with your work."

Almost hysterical with relief, they followed the Republican soldier, and within the hour were back at the work they knew.

There was no looting in the city. At all houses and shops which seemed tempting, guards were set, and those carrying parcels out of the town were sternly interrogated, and obliged to prove that what they carried was purchased, and not stolen. Republican soldiers were to be seen standing patiently in long queues before shops which sold chocolate, a delicacy which for some time has been scarce in Government territory.

Christmas occasioned much festivity. Spaniards do not exchange gifts on this day, observing instead Epiphany, or Twelfth Night, for this custom, but the dinner on Christmas Eve is an old-established tradition. The turkey of other years was conspicuous by its absence, but the festival spirit was present in abundance, and there was food enough, of one sort or another, for everyone.

One of the strangest things noted by the Republican army, in its final conquest of the two or three stubborn strongholds of the rebels, was that bags of wheat had been used in place of the customary sand-bags to cover window and door openings. In view of the shortage of bread, of which the refugees one and all complained, this seems an incomprehensible action. This wheat is being ground into flour as fast as possible, for the use of the refugees and the army.

The fascists have initiated a series of air raids, chiefly upon villages behind the lines in which large numbers of refugees are concentrated. There is no apparent military advantage to be gained by these, so it is presumed that the theory of terrorising the civilian population has not yet lost its charm for the mutineers.

The new army of the Spanish Republic is an efficient one, and it is inspired by an ideal, which has translated itself into discipline. Optimism, without exaggeration, is in the air at Teruel.

THE NEW ARMY AT TERUEL.

From an official army publication, we translate the following significant paragraphs:

"Apparently, at Salamanca, they were at first unwilling to believe that Teruel was in danger. Perhaps they clung to the idea of carrying out their original plan, disregarding the fluctuations of the difficult Lower Aragón front. But by the second day they were forced to realise the gravity of the situation. They mobilised their troops, ordered forced marches, and in both cases were compelled to do so by the will of the Republic. Thus they saw that the initiative had changed sides.

The fascist relief column which faced us in the Teruel sector consisted of some 20,000 men. They were all selected shock troops, principally Moors and white foreigners, interspersed with some units of the Foreign Legion. These shock troops, which were certainly intended to be the entering wedge of the offensive being prepared by Franco, was shattered against a wall of Republican breasts at Celadas, Campillo, and Concul. Their losses were enormous. They were completely disorganised. And if the genuine Spanish soldiers who filled their places were not their equal, still less so were the requetes and falangists. On the other hand, in our camp, everything is truly national, beginning with the airplanes, as was pointed out by an expert in this newest style of weapon, General Armengaud, of the French Army, in his sensational article in "La Depeche", of Toulouse. The number of internationals in our army is infinitesimal in comparison with the total number of combatants. Nor are these foreign mercenaries, sent by the direct orders of a power, but volunteers fighting for an ideal.

Spain, eternal Spain, is fighting for her independence and her liberty, and it is she who is fighting in the mountains and valleys of Lower Aragón, as she before fought in the Guadarramas, in Extremadura, in the streets of Madrid, and in the North.

Even before the siege of Teruel had come to a triumphant close which filled all true Spaniards with joy, we had achieved one victory of which no one could rob us, that of having disorganised and postponed Franco's great offensive, so trumpeted abroad, so prepared, so advertised as being about to end the war before the close of the year.

From the simple fact of having surprised the enemy, and forced him to fight willy-nilly, we gained a great strategic advantage. But the capture of Teruel and of the entire system of fortifications to which it was the key, opens to us a long perspective which is already being well studied by our Staff. In the first place, we have proved our theory that at last, the Republic possesses an Army, and that with this Army it may fearlessly attempt the most difficult enterprises. Secondly, we have proved to other countries that we were speaking the truth when we attributed the rebel successes in the North to geographical conditions, combined with the one-sided operations of the "non-intervention" policy. And finally, we have captured the natural gateway of the levantine road, which the enemy held until now. They could have opened the gate, whenever they wished, letting their invading columns flow down the road to Sagunto. Now the gateway is ours, and we are in a position to open it in the other direction. The rich lands of the littoral are no longer in danger. That menace now hangs over the central part of Aragon, the upper Alcarria, and the pasture-lands of Soria. If, as is thought, the rebels were preparing an enveloping movement towards Guadalajara, possibly in combination with another at Arganda, the loss of Teruel will give them food for thought, probably discouraging them from attempting such an extension of their forces, since they now will have on their flank, and almost within their rearguard, so important an enemy base.

And there are some additional possibilities. The operations in Lower Aragon lasted six days. We now have available -- our losses having been, proportionally, very light -- a manoeuvrable Army which has proved its agility, its steadiness, its discipline, and the high quality of its morale. Nor must it be forgotten that the test was a severe one. The attack was made during a furious snowstorm, over extremely rough country, and it was necessary to endure a temperature which went as low as twenty degrees below zero, by Centigrade thermometer, which is 4° below zero, Fahrenheit. Also, the Army found itself, on the second day, attacked at the rear, and was from then on obliged to fight on two fronts, one facing the besieged garrison and the other the relieving column.

Aided by the aviation, which added fresh laurels to its already brilliant record, the Army overcame every obstacle. All gave way before its discipline, its calm courage, the skill of its leaders, and the perfection of its auxiliary services. The co-operation of its several arms was perfect. The military machine functioned with effortless regularity. Brunete and Belchite had been magnificent preparations for the clear and brilliant triumph of Teruel.

How will the enemy react? He will be forced to admit defeat. His foreign prestige must have considerably diminished. He intended to attack, and instead was attacked. He planned a decisive victory, and received a serious defeat. Naturally he will strike back, although it is highly probable that his counter-attack will take the form of further assassinations of civilians in the rearguard, as happened in Barcelona on the night of the 19th-20th.

In any case, the year is ending well for the Republic. It has emerged from its military infancy, without serious losses. And it knows that it has now an Army, which within the year 1938 must certainly bring it a complete victory."

THE ENGLISH EDITION OF THE BULLETIN WISHES TO ALL ITS READERS A HAPPY NEW YEAR, AND HOPES SINCERELY THAT 1938 MAY BRING VICTORY TO THE REPUBLIC OF SPAIN, AND PEACE TO ALL NATIONS.

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