

RADIO and the SPANISH WAR

by THOMAS E. GOOTEÉ

The author, recently returned from war-torn Spain, tells graphically of the use of radio in many war and propaganda activities there.



A radio operator at work in a field station.

To The Editor,
Radio News,
Chicago.

Dear Sir:

I AM writing in answer to your recent query in RADIO NEWS regarding my whereabouts and (mis) adventures in the Spanish War. I have been back in the United States for quite a few months, and am now employed by the National Broadcasting Co. as a Field Engineer. During the time I was in Spain and Morocco I received more than my normal share of the real horrors of war, and therefore have had little inclination to write or discuss the matter previously. Sherman was quite right about war.

Over a year ago RADIO NEWS published a short account of my war reactions which I succeeded in mailing back to the United States at that time without the customary

editorial censorship. I was then located and working in the International City of Tangier, Morocco. Shortly after that I returned to southern Spain, and resumed work in the ranks of the Rebellion. There followed a kaleidoscopic series of nightmarish experiences which I have little hope of forgetting soon. I advanced with the Insurgent forces as they pushed northward through Sevilla, and later through Badajoz into the Guadarrama Mountains far west of Madrid. Lack of co-operation in supplying parts coupled with political differences eventually caused me to leave the battle-scarred land of Spain for safer places, the events climaxing my actual departure reading now like an Oppenheim spy mystery. The fact that I am alive today is due to my being more of a diplomat than a radio engineer.

Before proceeding I should like to emphasize that this letter should *not* be construed as being propaganda for either side; I hold no dear feelings for the Rebels or the Loyalists. The original cause of the war has been lost in the hopeless confusion of a mad slaughter; foreign intervention has transformed a revolution into an International War.

Since the early fall of last year the war has practically been a stalemate; activity has been confined to an occasional advance, by one side or the other, followed by a retreat within a few days or weeks. Naturally much blood has been shed. Both sides are guilty of much wholesale destruction of life and property. Practically all of my work was with the Rebels, but I gained a deep insight into the Loyalist

(Continued on page 71)

After a heavy bombardment in Madrid the populace emerges from their shelters to listen to further propaganda broadcasts over radio-actuated public address systems.



Radio—Spanish War

(Continued from page 29)

principles and motives through contact with the Spanish people. Most of the people on both sides do not have the slightest idea of what they are fighting for. They are spurred on to fight by their leaders who are masters in the art of applied mass-psychology. These political leaders employ various means of convincing the people that their side is right, using one of the newest methods for the dissemination of war propaganda: *radio*.

Within a few days after the war broke out in July 1936 all major radio broadcasting stations in Spain and Morocco were seized by either the Rebels or the Loyalists, and almost immediately propaganda belched forth from these stations. This flow has not stopped yet. Although confined mainly to the broadcasting stations on the long waves, all short wave broadcasts have a burdening share of this propaganda. American listeners can pick up many of these short wave stations and get a distant idea as to the scope and use of radio in modern warfare.

Entertainment has been put into the background on almost all short wave programs, and does not exist on the regular programs emanating from stations on the long waves. From morning until night there is an unceasing flow of chatter from both the Rebel and Loyalist transmitters, each claiming the same military victories, each spurring the people onward to defeat the other side, and each with its ample share of talkative under-generals who make our own filibustering politicians sound like amateur public speakers. The Rebel operated station at Sevilla is probably the strongest station held by the Insurgents; the Loyalists still operate the key Madrid station and those in Valencia and the capital: Barcelona.

There are four stations somewhere in western Russia, each having a power of at least 100 kilowatts, which employ directive antennas radiating Communistic propaganda on the long waves in the general direction of Spain. These stations are heard quite clearly throughout most of Spain; programs were in Spanish. There is some Rebel propaganda emanating from Italian and German stations also.

Thus from every direction the Spaniards are bombarded with a ceaseless flow of biased, long-winded orations by political gas bags. Many of the stations operate on a twenty and twenty-one hour schedule; and at any hour of the day or night one has little difficulty in picking up these programs, even with the cheapest receivers. News reports are so heavily censored that they resemble verbal sieves; they also represent the height of ambiguity. Only when the speakers run out of breath (and that is very seldom) is there any music or non-political radio entertainment. I once heard a Rebel general orate for three hours without a single stop. It can truthfully be said that the publicity and propaganda departments of both sides certainly "talk a good war."

The Insurgents were not slow to realize the possibilities offered by such high-

powered amplifiers, and many were constructed behind the lines and soon put into operation.

On some days when the fighting was dull it was not uncommon to hear the huge loud-speakers blasting forth recorded music. Although it added an ironic touch to the military scene, it probably had some entertainment value. American made records predominated, most of them having been shipped to the front by the broadcasting stations behind the lines.

Working as a radio operator for either the Loyalist or the Rebel army is accomplished under such dangerous and exacting conditions that there are comparatively few radio engineers employed by either side. Such work is, of course, confined to only the necessary army inter-communication, between the front and "key" towns and cities, and between adjacent battalions on the front lines. Most of the radio men in the employ of the Rebel government are either German or Italian; there are probably not more than forty such positions. All types of radio equipments are in use for this communication purpose, including many composite and ancient transmitters. There is a great deficiency of replacement parts and necessary tubes.

There are a number of mobile field stations which advance with the regular army. I was in charge of such a unit. These portable units usually consist of a low-power radiotelegraph transmitter and a long-range receiver, both mounted in a closed six-wheel army truck having tractor treads for travel over rough terrain. Living quarters for the engineer and two assistants (sometimes three) are also in the interior of the truck. These camouflaged units advance or retreat with the front lines, advising the district army headquarters (located at focal points) as to the progress of the division. A secret cipher is used employing morse as a means of transmission; a different frequency is used every three hours which required a great deal of careful retuning.

Probably my greatest thrill during the war was when my unit was attacked by two small French pursuit planes. Fortunately little damage was done, due to a thin steel plate covering which enclosed the truck body. However that same unit survived only to meet with a worse fate at the hands of a huge German Heinkel which dropped a high-explosive bomb squarely on the truck. The unmarked mobile unit had been mistaken for a Loyalist surveying truck, but fortunately I was not in the truck when it was struck.

There were many other episodes, too numerous to mention. I worked under great difficulties and under considerable strain. Following the demolishing of my mobile field unit I was successively in charge of three radiotelephony transmitters, and a low-powered broadcast station. I saw a great deal of actual fighting, but even though I carried a gun at all times I was never called into actual fighting service in the trenches.

Ship radio operating is confined to only a few Spanish ships, of both sides, in the Mediterranean. Since there is quite a bit of open water warfare, and consequently much resulting traffic, listeners along the

Mediterranean with sets covering the long-wave marine channels are offered a ring-side seat at each naval combat.

With the advent of the war, amateur radio met an untimely and unfortunate death. By official decree both sides confiscated all radio transmitting or communication devices within a few days after the start of the war. In almost every instance the "hams" co-operated with the controlling government. Many of the "hams" became operators in the employ of the government. There can be little doubt but what the "hams" gave a great deal of assistance wherever they could. Many of the larger amateur stations were completely taken over, and then operated as a military station.

Although radio is one of the greatest educational mediums—thereby promoting peace—ironically, by the same token, it has also become as deadly and dangerous as any type of munition or article of war, causing destruction of the same civilization that created it.

Thank you for asking about me.

Yours for peace,

Thomas E. Gooteé.

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