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Rendezvous

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Rendezvous

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"He scrambled up the side of the steep, rocky hill, reached the summit and stopped. His breath came in hoarse sobs. His cheap blue coveralls, except for the pocket flaps, were completely sweat-soaked. Realizing he was skylined to his pursuers, if pursuers there were, he stumbled down the far slope, his heels pounding jarringly into the rocks. Sweeney had been running a long time now. It was almost twelve hours of steady trotting across the Spanish plain, north to the Pyrenees and France."

Cover Page Footnote

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RENDEZVOUS

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At school, Bowdoin, it seemed like such a great idea: Spain and the civil war, fighting for the working man against fascism. A Spanish major, he had little trouble in joining the International Brigade in New York. Of course, in 1938 no one would have had trouble. Casualties were running over fifty per cent in every action.

A two week boat trip, a train ride across France and then training in Spain; training that lasted all of two weeks before being posted to front line position with the Lincoln Washington Brigade. He knew little but learned fast. He lived through his first action, a minor attack, and became a veteran. He was a good soldier who had a feel for terrain and a flair for leadership.

Willi Kuch cracked the cockpit of the Stuka a hair, pulled a package of cigarettes from his coveralls, lit up, and passed the pack back over his shoulder to his gunner.

Kuch slouched further down in his seat and relaxed. "No danger of Red fighters," he mused, and thought about the day's raid. It was just a village that the Loyalists had taken the day before. They really worked it over. Kuch knew he had only a few rounds left for his MGS. The Stuka flew nicely without the extra load of a bomb. He had neatly put it in the Railroad station. It was a good raid.

His engine had acted up a bit and he had fallen behind the others. It still wasn't right but it sounded good enough to get him back to the strip. He was thinking about that now; the strip, a bath and a cold beer before supper. All in all, it had been a good day for Lt. Kuch. A milkrun of a raid, a direct hit on the station, good weather and things were fine.

Sweeney still ran, the setting sun, red and purple on his left. It was the same sun last night that had witnessed the occupation of the town. It was his first occupation in Spain. He had never seen an enemy town before. It was sudden, the townspeople had no time to flee. The mayor and his council were brought before the company commander. Sweeney knew they shot fascists when they captured them, but he hadn't heard what went on before the execution.

The scream ripped through him; shrill, keen shrieks of terror and agony. They were audible over the central area of the village. He had duty outside of the mayor's casa where the prisoners were being questioned. He couldn't leave. Nausea and chilly shudders rocked him. Vomiting, he stumbled to the wall and leaned against it. Suddenly, rough hands jerked him upright and pushed him away. "Look out Sweeney, unless you wanna' take a dive with them," snarled Sgt. Zepke. The five prisoners were pushed against the wall, they fell on their knees and started to pray. Before they finished the Sign of the Cross, two troopers had cut them in half with Thompson guns. Sweeney vomited again and again. He staggered out of the square, toward a barn. He fell into a pile of hay that smelled about five years old.

He fumbled to get the brandy out of his pocket, uncorked it. He drank deeply and it stayed down. He gulped again and again on the brandy, trying to drown the screams. Sleep overcame him finally and he tossed and mumbled. The cold woke him, sober, an hour before dawn. Sitting thinking, he made up his mind. Home—that's where he was going, away from this lousy, cruddy war. His rifle was placed next to the sleeping guard near the casa. He filled his canteen at the fountain and started across the cobblestone and brick. It wasn't too difficult to skirt the others and soon he was in open country, heading north at a steady easy trot.

Willi Kuch leaned forward to check his oil pressure gauge. As he did, a speck moved on the hill a few miles in front of him. Alert now, he adjusted his sun glasses and looked again. It was a man. On the plane droned. Closer, Kuch could see the blue coveralls against the yellow rocks. Thumbing the safety off his gun switch, he nosed down and throttled back. The vulture-like Stuka floated quietly towards the ground. A gentle caress of the gun button and it was finished. The right hand gun had three rounds left and the left had two. That's all that were needed.

Sweeney never knew what happened. With the wind in his face he didn't hear the Stuka behind him. The blood stained, sweat-darkened uniform of Sweeney rolled a few feet down the hill. He rested against a rock, the blood trickled a bit further, then it stopped and began to dry.

Kuch grinned, lit another cigarette and thought of the good story that this would make back at the mess. He had never stalked a man before. This was was getting more interesting every day.

Brian Fallon